

CHAPTER TWO

One night I was riding alone towards Horton Pen. A large moon hung itself up above me like an enormous white plate. Finally the sloping roof of the Ferry Inn, with one dishevelled palm tree drooping over it, rose into the disk. The window lights were reflected like shaken torches in the river. A mass of objects, picked out with white globes, loomed in the high shadow of the inn, standing motionless. They resolved themselves into a barouche, with four horses steaming a great deal, and an army of negresses with bandboxes on their heads. A great lady was on the road; her querulous voice was calling to someone within the open door that let down a soft yellow light from the top of the precipitous steps. A nondescript object, with apparently two horns and a wheel, rested inert at the foot of the signpost; two negroes were wiping their foreheads beside it. That resolved itself into a man slumbering in a wheelbarrow, his white face turned up to the moon. A sort of buzz of voices came from above; then a man in European clothes was silhouetted against the light in the doorway. He held a full glass very carefully and started to descend. Suddenly he stopped emotionally. Then he turned half-right and called back, "Sir Charles! Sir Charles! Here's the very man! I protest, the very man!" There was an interrogative roar from within. It was like being outside a lion's cage.

People appeared and disappeared in front of the lighted door; windows stood open, with heads craning out all along the inn face. I was hurrying off the back of my horse when the admiral came out on to the steps. Someone lit a torch, and the admiral became a dark, solid figure, with the flash of the gold lace on his coat. He stood very high in the leg; had small white whiskers, and a large nose that threw a vast shadow on to his forehead in the upward light; his high collar was open, and a mass of white appeared under his chin; his head was uncovered. A third male face, very white, bobbed up and down beside his shining left shoulder. He kept on saying:

"What? what? what? Hey, what?... That man?" He appeared to be halfway between supreme content and violent anger. At last he delivered himself. "Let's duck him... hey?... Let's duck him!" He spoke with a sort of benevolent chuckle, then raised his voice and called, "Tinsley! Tinsley! Where the deuce is Tinsley?"

A high nasal sound came from the carriage window. "Sir Charles! Sir Charles! Let there be no scene in my presence, I beg."

I suddenly saw, halfway up, laboriously ascending the steps, a black figure, indistinguishable at first on account of deformities. It was David Macdonald.

Since his last, really terrible comments on the failure of the boat-attack, he had been lying hidden somewhere. It came upon me in a flash that he was making his way from one hiding place to another. In making his escape from Spanish Town, either to Kingston or the Vale, he had run against the admiral and his party returning from the Topnambos' ball. It was hardly a coincidence: everyone on the road met at the Ferry Inn. But that hardly made the thing more pleasant.

Sir Charles continued to clamour for Tinsley, his flag lieutenant, who, as a matter of fact, was the man drunk in the wheelbarrow. When this was explained by the shouts of the negroes, he grunted, "Umph!" turned on the man at his side, and said, "Here, Oldham; you lend a hand to duck the little toad." It was the sort of thing that the thirsty climate of Jamaica rendered frequent enough. Oldham dropped his glass and protested. Macdonald continued silently and enigmatically to climb the steps; now he was in for it he showed plenty of pluck. No doubt he recognized that, if the admiral made a fool of himself, he would be afraid to issue warrants in soberness. I could not stand by and see them bully the wretched little creature. At the same time I didn't, most decidedly, want to identify myself with him.

I called out impulsively, "Sir Charles, surely you would not use violence to a cripple."

Then, very suddenly, they all got to action, David Macdonald reaching the top of the steps. Shrieks came from the interior of the carriage, and from the waiting négresses. I saw three men were falling upon a little thing like a damaged cat. I couldn't stand that, come what might of it.

I ran hastily up the steps, hoping to be able to make them recover their senses, a force of purely conventional emotion impelling me. It was no business of mine; I didn't want to interfere, and I felt like a man hastening to separate half a dozen fighting dogs too large to be pleasant.

When I reached the top, there was a sort of undignified scuffle, and in the end I found myself standing above a ghastly white gentleman who, from a sitting posture, was gasping out, "I'll commit you!... I swear I'll commit you!..." I helped him to his feet rather apologetically, while the admiral behind me was asking insistently who the deuce I was. The man I had picked up retreated a little, and then turned back to look at me. The light was shining on my face, and he began to call out, "I know him. I know him perfectly well. He's John Kemp. I'll commit him at once. The papers are in the barouche." After that he seemed to take it into his head that I was going to assault him again. He bolted out of sight, and I was left facing the admiral. He stared at me contemptuously. I was streaming with perspiration and upbraiding him for assaulting a cripple.

The admiral said, "Oh, that's what you think? I will settle with you presently. This is rank mutiny." I looked at Oldham, who was the admiral's secretary. He was extremely dishevelled about his neck, much as if a monkey had been clawing him thereabouts. Half of his roll collar flapped on his heaving chest; his stock hung down behind like a cue. I had seen him kneeling on the ground with his head pinned down by the hunchback. I said loftily:

"What did you set him on a little beggar like that for? You were three to one. What did you expect?"

The admiral swore. Oldham began to mop with a lace handkerchief at a damaged upper lip from which a stream of blood was running; he even seemed to be weeping a little. Finally, he vanished in at the door, very much bent together. The undaunted David hopped in after him coolly.

The admiral said, "I know your kind. You're a treasonous dog, sir. This is mutiny. You shall be made an example of."

All the same he must have been ashamed of himself, for presently he and the two others went down the steps without even looking at me, and their carriage rolled away.

Inside the inn I found a couple of merchant captains, one asleep with his head on the table and little rings shining in his great red ears; the other very spick and span--of what they called the new school then. His name was Williams--Captain Williams of the Lion, which he part owned; a man of some note for the dinners he gave on board his ship. His eyes sparkled blue and very round in a round rosy face, and he clawed effusively at my arm.

"Well done!" he bubbled over. "You gave it them; strike me, you did! It did me good to see and hear. I wasn't going to poke my nose in, not I. But I admire you, my boy."

He was a quite guileless man with a strong dislike for the admiral's blundering--a dislike that all the seamen shared--and for people of the Topnambo kidney who affected to be above his dinners. He assured me that I had burst upon those gentry roaring... "like the Bull of Bashan. You should have seen!" and he drank my health in a glass of punch.

David Macdonald joined us, looming through wreaths of tobacco smoke. He was always very nice in his dress, and had washed himself into a state of enviable coolness.

"They won't touch me now," he said. "I wanted that assault and battery...." He suddenly turned vivid, sarcastic black eyes upon me. "But you," he said--"my dear Kemp! You're in a devil of a scrape! They'll have a warrant out against you under the Black Act. I know the gentry."

"Oh, he won't mind," Williams struck in, "I know him; he's a trump. Afraid of nothing."

David Macdonald made a movement of his head that did duty for an ominous shake:

"It's a devil of a mess," he said. "But I'll touch them up. Why did you hit Topnambo? He's the spitefullest beast in the island. They'll make it out high treason. They are capable of sending you home on this charge."

"Oh, never say die." Williams turned to me, "Come and dine with me on board at Kingston to-morrow night. If there's any fuss I'll see what I can do. Or you can take a trip with me to Havana till it blows over. My old woman's on board." His face fell. "But there, you'll get round her. I'll see you through."

They drank some sangaree and became noisy. I wasn't very happy; there was much truth in what David Macdonald had said. Topnambo would certainly do his best to have me in jail--to make an example of me as a Separationist to please the admiral and the Duke of Manchester. Under the spell of his liquor Williams became more and more pressing with his offers of help.

"It's the devil that my missus should be on board, just this trip. But hang it! come and dine with me. I'll get some of the Kingston men--the regular hot men--to stand up for you. They will when they hear the tale."

There was a certain amount of sense in what he said. If warrants were out against me, he or some of the Kingston merchants whom he knew, and who had no cause to love the admiral, might help me a good deal.

Accordingly, I did go down to Kingston. It happened to be the day when the seven pirates were hanged at Port Royal Point. I had never seen a hanging, and a man who hadn't was rare in those days. I wanted to keep out of the way, but it was impossible to get a boatman to row me off to the Lion. They were all dying to see the show, and, half curious, half reluctant, I let myself drift with the crowd.

The gallows themselves stood high enough to be seen--a long very stout beam supported by posts at each end. There was a blazing sun, and the crowd pushed

and shouted and craned its thousands of heads every time one heard the cry of "Here they come," for an hour or so. There was a very limpid sky, a very limpid sea, a scattering of shipping gliding up and down, and the very silent hills a long way away. There was a large flavour of Spaniards among the crowd. I got into the middle of a knot of them, jammed against the wheels of one of the carriages, standing, hands down, on tiptoe, staring at the long scaffold. There were a great many false alarms, sudden outcries, hushing again rather slowly. In between I could hear someone behind me talk Spanish to the occupants of the carriage. I thought the voice was Ramon's, but I could not turn, and the people in the carriage answered in French, I thought. A man was shouting "Cool Drinks" on the other side of them.

Finally, there was a roar, an irresistible swaying, a rattle of musket ramrods, a rhythm of marching feet, and the grating of heavy iron-bound wheels. Seven men appeared in sight above the heads, clinging to each other for support, and being drawn slowly along. The little worsted balls on the infantry shakos bobbed all round their feet. They were a sorry-looking group, those pirates; very wild-eyed, very ragged, dust-stained, weather-beaten, begrimed till they had the colour of unpolished mahogany. Clinging still to each other as they stood beneath the dangling ropes of the long beam, they had the appearance of a group of statuary to forlorn misery. Festoons of chains completed the "composition."

One was a very old man with long yellow-white hair, one a negro whose skin had no lustre at all. The rest were very dark-skinned, peak-bearded, and had long hair falling round their necks. A soldier with a hammer and a small anvil climbed into the cart, and bent down out of sight. There was a ring of iron on iron, and the man next the very old man raised his arms and began to speak very slowly, very distinctly, and very mournfully. It was quite easy to understand him; he declared his perfect innocence. No one listened to him; his name was Pedro Nones. He ceased speaking, and someone on a horse, the High Sheriff, I think, galloped impatiently past the cart and shouted. Two men got into the cart, one pulled the rope, the other caught the pirate by the elbows. He jerked himself loose, and began to cry out; he seemed to be lost in amazement, and shrieked:

"Adonde está el padre?... Adonde está el padre?" No one answered; there wasn't a priest of any denomination; I don't know whether the omission was purposed. The man's face grew convulsed with agony, his eyeballs stared out very white and vivid, as he struggled with the two men. He began to curse us epileptically for compassing his damnation. A hoarse patter of Spanish imprecations came from the crowd immediately round me. The man with the voice like Ramon's groaned in a lamentable way; someone else said, "What infamy . . . what infamy!"

An aged voice said tremulously in the carriage, "This shall be a matter of official

remonstrance." Another said, "Ah, these English heretics!"

There was a forward rush of the crowd, which carried me away. Someone in front began to shout orders, and the crowd swayed back again. The infantry muskets rattled. The commotion lasted some time. When it ceased, I saw that the man about to die had been kissing the very old man; tears were streaming down the gray, parchment-coloured cheeks. Pedro Nones had the rope round his neck; it curved upwards loosely towards the beam, growing taut as the cart jolted away. He shouted:

"Adiós, viejo, para siempre adi-----"

My whole body seemed to go dead all over. I happened to look downwards at my hands; they were extraordinarily white, with the veins standing out all over them. They felt as if they had been sodden in water, and it was quite a long time before they recovered their natural colour. The rest of the men were hung after that, the cart jolting a little way backwards and forwards and growing less crowded after every journey. One man, who was very large framed and stout, had to go through it twice because the rope broke. He made a good deal of fuss. My head ached, and after the involuntary straining and craning to miss no details was over, I felt sick and dazed. The people talked a great deal as they streamed back, loosening over the broader stretch of pebbles; they seemed to wish to remind each other of details. I have an idea that one or two, in the sheer largeness of heart that seizes one after occasions of popular emotions, asked me in exulting voices if I had seen the nigger's tongue sticking out.

Others thought that there wasn't very much to be exultant over. We had not really captured the pirates; they had been handed over to the admiral by the Havana authorities--as an international courtesy I suppose, or else because they were pirates of no account and short in funds, or because the admiral had been making a fuss in front of the Morro. It was even asserted by the anti-admiral faction that the seven weren't pirates at all, but merely Cuban *mauvais sujets*, hawkers of derogatory coplas, and known freethinkers. In any case, excited people cheered the High Sheriff and the returning infantry, because it was pleasant to hang any kind of Spaniard. I got nearly knocked down by the kettle-drummers, who came through the scattering crowd at a swinging quick-step. As I cannoned off the drums, a hand caught at my arm, and someone else began to speak to me. It was old Ramon, who was telling me that he had a special kind of Manchester goods at his store. He explained that they had arrived very lately, and that he had come from Spanish Town solely on their account. One made the eighth of a penny a yard more on them than on any other kind. If I would deign to have some of it offered to my inspection, he had his little curricule just off the road. He was drawing me gently towards it all the time, and I had not any idea of

resisting. He had been behind in the crowd, he said, beside the carriage of the commissioner and the judge of the Marine Court sent by the Havana authorities to deliver the pirates.

It was after that, that in Ramon's dusky store, I had my first sight of Seraphina and of her father, and then came my meeting with Carlos. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw him come out with extended hand. It was an extraordinary sensation, that of talking to Carlos again. He seemed to have worn badly. His face had lost its moist bloom, its hardly distinguishable subcutaneous flush. It had grown very, very pale. Dark blue circles took away from the blackness and sparkle of his eyes. And he coughed, and coughed.

He put his arm affectionately round my shoulders and said, "How splendid to see you again, my Juan." His eyes had affection in them, there was no doubt about that, but I felt vaguely suspicious of him. I remembered how we had parted on board the Thames. "We can talk here," he added; "it is very pleasant. You shall see my uncle, that great man, the star of Cuban law, and my cousin Seraphina, your kinsfolk. They love you; I have spoken well of you." He smiled gayly, and went on, "This is not a place befitting his greatness, nor my cousin's, nor, indeed, my own." He smiled again. "But I shall be very soon dead, and to me it matters little." He frowned a little, and then laughed. "But you should have seen the faces of your officers when my uncle refused to go to their governor's palace; there was to have been a fiesta, a 'reception'; is it not the word? It will cause a great scandal."

He smiled with a good deal of fine malice, and looked as if he expected me to be pleased. I said that I did not quite understand what had offended his uncle.

"Oh, it was because there was no priest," Carlos answered, "when those poor devils were hung. They were canaille. Yes; but one gives that much even to such. And my uncle was there in his official capacity as a plenipotentiary. He was very much distressed: we were all. You heard, my uncle himself had advised their being surrendered to your English. And when there was no priest he repented very bitterly. Why, after all, it was an infamy."

He paused again, and leant back against the counter. When his eyes were upon the ground and his face not animated by talking, there became lamentably insistent his pallor, the deep shadows under his eyes, and infinite sadness in the droop of his features, as if he were preoccupied by an all-pervading and hopeless grief. When he looked at me, he smiled, however.

"Well, at worst it is over, and my uncle is here in this dirty place instead of at your palace. We sail back to Cuba this very evening." He looked round him at

Ramon's calicos and sugar tubs in the dim light, as if he accepted almost incredulously the fact that they could be in such a place, and the manner of his voice indicated that he thought our governor's palace would have been hardly less barbarous. "But I am sorry," he said suddenly, "because I wanted you--you and all your countrymen--to make a good impression on him. You must do it yourself alone. And you will. You are not like these others. You are our kinsman, and I have praised you very much. You saved my life."

I began to say that I had done nothing at all, but he waved his hand with a little smile.

"You are very brave," he said, as if to silence me. "I am not ungrateful."

He began again to ask for news from home--from my home. I told him that Veronica had a baby, and he sighed.

"She married the excellent Rooksby?" he asked. "Ah, what a waste." He relapsed into silence again. "There was no woman in your land like her. She might have--- --- And to marry that--that excellent personage, my good cousin. It is a tragedy."

"It was a very good match," I answered.

He sighed again. "My uncle is asleep in there, now," he said, after a pause, pointing at the inner door. "We must not wake him; he is a very old man. You do not mind talking to me? You will wait to see them? Dona Seraphina is here, too."

"You have not married your cousin?" I asked.

I wanted very much to see the young girl who had looked at me for a moment, and I certainly should have been distressed if Carlos had said she was married.

He answered, "What would you have?" and shrugged his shoulders gently. A smile came into his face. "She is very willful. I did not please her, I do not know why. Perhaps she has seen too many men like me."

He told me that, when he reached Cuba, after parting with me on the Thames, his uncle, "in spite of certain influences," had received him quite naturally as his heir, and the future head of the family. But Seraphina, whom by the laws of convenience he ought to have married, had quite calmly refused him.

"I did not impress her; she is romantic. She wanted a very bold man, a Cid, something that it is not easy to have."

He paused again, and looked at me with some sort of challenge in his eyes.

"She could have met no one better than you," I said.

He waved his hand a little. "Oh, for that-----" he said deprecatingly. "Besides, I am dying. I have never been well since I went into your cold sea, over there, after we left your sister. You remember how I coughed on board that miserable ship."

I did remember it very well.

He went to the inner door, looked in, and then came back to me.

"Seraphina needs a guide--a controller--someone very strong and gentle, and kind and brave. My uncle will never ask her to marry against her wish; he is too old and has too little will. And for any man who would marry her--except one--there would be great dangers, for her and for him. It would need a cool man, and a brave man, and a good one, too, to hazard, perhaps even life, for her sake. She will be very rich. All our lands, all our towns, all our gold." There was a suggestion of fabulousness in his dreamy voice. "They shall never be mine," he added. "Vaya."

He looked at me with his piercing eyes set to an expression that might have been gentle mockery. At any rate, it also contained intense scrutiny, and, perhaps, a little of appeal. I sighed myself.

"There is a man called O'Brien in there," he said. "He does us the honour to pretend to my cousin's hand."

I felt singularly angry. "Well, he's not a Spaniard," I said.

Carlos answered mockingly, "Oh, for Spaniard, no. He is a descendant of the Irish kings."

"He's an adventurer," I said. "You ought to be on your guard. You don't know these bog-trotting fortune-hunters. They're the laughter of Europe, kings and all."

Carlos smiled again. "He's a very dangerous man for all that," he said. "I should not advise any one to come to Rio Medio, my uncle's town, without making a friend of the Señor O'Brien."

He went once more to the inner door, and, after a moment's whispering with someone within, returned to me.

"My uncle still sleeps," he said. "I must keep you a little longer. Ah, yes, the Señor O'Brien. He shall marry my cousin, I think, when I am dead."

"You don't know these fellows," I said.

"Oh, I know them very well," Carlos smiled, "there are many of them at Havana. They came there after what they call the '98, when there was great rebellion in Ireland, and many good Catholics were killed and ruined."

"Then he's a rebel, and ought to be hung," I said.

Carlos laughed as of old. "It may be, but, my good Juan, we Christians do not see eye to eye with you. This man rebelled against your government, but, also, he suffered for the true faith. He is a good Catholic; he has suffered for it; and in the Ever Faithful Island, that is a passport. He has climbed very high; he is a judge of the Marine Court at Havana. That is why he is here to-day, attending my uncle in this affair of delivering up the pirates. My uncle loves him very much. O'Brien was at first my uncle's clerk, and my uncle made him a juez, and he is also the intendant of my uncle's estates, and he has a great influence in my uncle's town of Rio Medio. I tell you, if you come to visit us, it will be as well to be on good terms with the Señor Juez O'Brien. My uncle is a very old man, and if I die before him, this O'Brien, I think, will end by marrying my cousin, because my poor uncle is very much in his hands. There are other pretenders, but they have little chance, because it is so very dangerous to come to my uncle's town of Rio Medio, on account of this man's intrigues and of his power with the populace."

I looked at Carlos intently. The name of the town had seemed to be familiar to me. Now I suddenly remembered that it was where Nicolas el Demonio, the pirate who was so famous as to be almost mythical, had beaten off Admiral Rowley's boats.

"Come, you had better see this Irish hidalgo who wants to do us so much honour,"--he gave an inscrutable glance at me,--"but do not talk loudly till my uncle wakes."

He threw the door open. I followed him into the room, where the vision of the ancient Don and the charming apparition of the young girl had retreated only a few moments before.