

# THE SECRET OF DON FELIPE

By WILBORNE HARRELL and HEYWOOD ZIEGLER, JR.

Note: The solution of The Lost Colony mystery offered in this story is presented as fiction only, and tries merely to tell an interesting story which gives full rein to the imagination. The writers have no theory of what actually became of Sir Walter Raleigh's ill-fated colony.

Don Felipe Jose Maria Jesus de Toledo y Saville sat in the sun and gazed with brooding eyes out over the water. On the breast of the shimmering bay rode at anchor a gayly colored galleon and several craft of divers description. The colors of Don Felipe flew from the galleon's mast-head and caught the meagre breeze that came from seaward. In the distance the red tile roofs and white-washed walls of Panama drowsed somnolently in the mid-day heat, and faintly the soft sound of the cathedral bell drifted on the breeze.

It was siesta time and all Panama sought the cool of indoors; not a soul stirred abroad, for at no point could be seen in the square the gay serapes and mantillas of the populace that were usually in evidence. Nature held her breath and all life lay suspended beneath the fiery dome of the tropical sky.

Don Felipe's eyes from beneath shaggy gray eyebrows, still piercingly clear and alert despite his age, continued to hold the distance. But they were not seeing the scene spread before him; they were back in the gallant and adventurous days of his youth, when as a young man he had fought the indomitable and terrible "El Draque" and sailed against England with the Armada. His eyes clouded as he recalled the tragic defeat and dispersment of this invincible fleet which King Philip of Spain had futilely expected to invade and conquer the English. His eyes probed into the past and he lived again the terrible sea fight in which Drake had sunk his galleon, and how he, Don Felipe, wounded and half-drowned had barely escaped with his life.

Once again the doleful toll of the cathedral bell came faintly, and as though thus brought to an awareness of his surroundings Don Felipe stirred and turned to the patiently waiting figure before him. The good Padre Luis passed his hand over his moist tanned head and fingered his rosary as he waited for Don Felipe to speak.

"Your pardon, Padre, for my rude inattention," he said. "I was—day-dreaming."

"You need not apologize, my son. Every man lives in two worlds—the past and the present."

Don Felipe gave a short laugh. "But the past is dead and done with and I have very little of the present left to me . . . So I'd better get on with the business for which I summoned you."

After a pause Don Felipe continued: "What I have to say to you, Padre, is both a confession and a supplication. I have a strange tale to unfold, and I also seek your help. I haven't very long to live and I must unburden my soul and right, as well as I may at this late day, a great wrong . . ."

"In my early days, as you well know, I was entrusted by the Spanish Admiralty with many important missions, and I bore at all times a stand-

ing commission to seek out and destroy El Draque where-ever I may find him.

"I was a headstrong and adventurous youth, imbued with the glory and youth, imbued with the glory and grandeur of Spain and in her final and irrevocable mastery of the New World, as was our right by permission of Pope and by right of conquest. But I am an old man now—maybe it was not to be . . . I don't know . . ."

Don Felipe paused and sighed and Padre Luis stirred but did not speak. Finally Don Felipe continued, "England was our greatest enemy and our greatest rival for this rich new land of America. I hated all English and especially El Draque with a burning and consuming hatred that would know no quenching."

"Finally, and to hasten my story, Padre, so as not to lengthen your stay in this hot weather, I found myself at sea at the head of a squadron of six war galleons, sailing under sealed orders."

Don Felipe again paused and gazed into the far reaches of the horizon, even as he searched his mind and soul for courage to continue.

Padre Luis said, "If what you must speak proves too painful, my son, I relieve you of the responsibility of confession. You need not tell me if you do not wish to do so."

"But I must speak, Padre; I must tell you, and you must help me!" "If you insist," murmured Padre Luis.

Don Felipe hesitated a moment as he sought for words. "At the designated time and place," he went on, "I opened the sealed orders. As I read them, I knew I held in my hands the death warrant of a hardy band of English settlers who had the effrontery to flout the Spanish claim to the New World. In effect, the orders commanded me to proceed to Roanoke Island on the northern mainland with all haste and there completely destroy, kill or capture, every human being of Sir Walter Raleigh's little colony. It was to be a blow to the arrogance of England in such ferocity that it would forever discourage any further attempt of the English to settle and colonize in America." Then as though speaking to himself Don Felipe said, "How little we Spanish understood the English—"

He caught himself and continued: "Proceeding to Roanoke Island we attacked, but the colonists were so weakened with hardships they did not stand against us very strongly; so we landed and made captive the survivors of our assault. Only a few, however, were killed in the fray."

"Even in my zeal and allegiance to Spain I was not overly cruel or in-

flicted death and punishment unless merited. Instead of killing the survivors I took them aboard my ships, where I intended to convey them to the various Spanish outposts and there disperse them as slaves for servants and laborers on the plantations. And upon leaving Roanoke Island I carved with my sword the word "Croatan" upon a tree to foil searchers and cast the blame upon the natives. It would be thought that the colonists were massacred by these natives."

The voice of Don Felipe grew less strong, but he aroused himself and continued his narrative. "Among the colonists was one Ananias Dare, his wife, Eleanor, and their newly-born child, Virginia. Ananias Dare was killed in the fighting and I took the mother and her babe aboard my vessel."

"Padre Luis," said Don Felipe after another long pause, "I did a strange thing. The mother died on our return voyage to Cartagena, and I, a hard-bitten sailor, took full charge of the child, Virginia. I came to love her . . . so I later legally adopted her as my daughter."

Here Don Felipe struck a bell at his side and a servant appeared. "Tell the Senorita Mercedes, Juan, that I wish to see her, here, on the terrace."

The servant departed and a few minutes later the girl appeared.

"Did you ring for me, Father?" And she went to Don Felipe's chair and began to arrange the rug that lay across his knees. She greeted Padre Luis and turned again to the Don. "What did you want, Father?"

"Bring the good Padre a cooling drink, my dear."

When the girl had departed Padre Luis raised his eyebrows in query. "Virginia Dare?"

"Yes, Padre. All these years you and everyone else here have looked upon her as my daughter—which, in all truth, she is."

Don Felipe, seeming to sense that time grew short, leaned forward and spoke tensely to Padre Luis. "In this

you can help me, Padre. I have not long to live. I have left all my fortune to Mercedes. She believes I am her father—she loves me as a father. But I want her to know the truth, Padre—but not until I am dead, and I entrust to you my secret and the responsibility of overseeing her welfare after I am gone. She may wish to return to her people in England, or she may choose to remain here. After all, Padre, she is more Spanish than English, but the English are unpredictable and she may choose England. In any event, you are to aid and assist her in any course she may elect to take . . . Will you do that for me, Padre?"

"Yes, Don Felipe, that I will do—since it is your wish," answered Padre Luis, quietly.

"And now, Padre," said Don Felipe, "I am weary; will you leave an old man to his memories—and his conscience?"

Padre Luis rose. "All will be well. Go with God, my son." He walked the few paces to where his mule was tethered, mounted, and kicking the patient beast in the sides ambled off slowly down the trail that led to Panama.

Don Felipe left alone on the ter-

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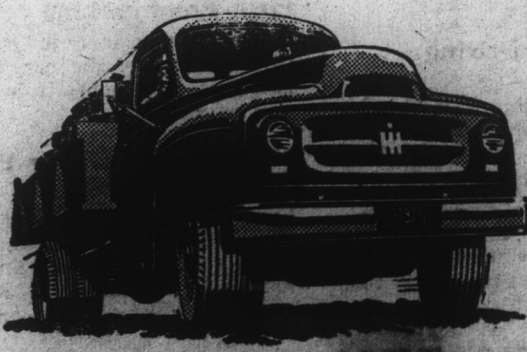
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