

A ROMANCE OF THE LOST COLONY

BY WILLIAM THOMAS WILSON

THE CAVE

CHAPTER V.

I had been on the island three months, and as yet had found no clue as to why I was kept there...

Somewhat discouraged I was, as I wanted my home, this February evening. The air was fresh and balmy...

But I was low spirited and downcast. Would I ever see England again and Margaret? At the thought I groaned aloud...

What had become of Steele and the lovely Spanish maiden? Were they safe in Spain...

Descending a steep hillock, overgrown with brush and undergrowth, I saw far below me...

Fitting together, facing each other a candle between them, were Herrick and the old priest...

"It is a shame," the priest went on, "to keep so gallant a gentleman here in this hole...

"You are wrong," I said, "I am not a gentleman, but a man who has done his duty..."

"I will keep silent," the priest answered, "but only upon one condition, which I will tell thee in a moment..."

Francis hesitated, then he answered, "Did I not see him walk the floor in agony only a few days ago..."

and fends fly away with them both to perdition, the priest continued, "between them I am between the devil and the deep blue sea..."

"The count swear that he will burn me alive, if I so much as intimate to this fellow what I know about his imprisonment..."

"What wouldst thou have?" Father Francis cried, "the fool had me fuddled with wine..."

"I started in my hiding place, and a lump of dirt dislodged itself and rolled down to where the villains sat..."

"His companion kept his seat unmoved. 'Art thou a fool,' he said, 'to be scared out of thy wits by a clod of dirt falling...'"

"But what foolishness is this. The count speaking for some fair lady. Dost thou take me for a school boy..."

"All this time I was craning my neck to catch every word that was uttered, my mind in a tumult..."

"Yes, it was like him. He would exult in such a thing. 'I would exult in such a thing,' he said, 'I would exult in such a thing...'"

"I bent forward again; they had resumed their conversation. 'And now,' said Herrick, 'I will tell thee the question of the task and the grave shall be no more silent than I, refuse and I will go to De Nortier immediately upon his arrival...'"

through the bushes and rush down the hill outside, as though the gates were after him. The sound died away in the distance...

But the other rogue was of sterner mould. With an oath, he whipped out his cutlass, and was upon me as I was rising from the ground...

"I have against thee a goddy account to settle, Master Herrick," I said. "The night wanes and we must to business..."

"'Ay,' he cried, 'I will rid the world of one rascal, and he pressed upon me, thrusting, cutting, striking with such fury...'"

"So I held my own and let him exhaust himself with his fruitless efforts. But he came upon me, striking down blow for blow with his blade..."

"Another little trick he tried, but I read what was coming in his eyes. He bent over me, thrusting, cutting, striking with such fury..."

"It was a grim wild scene. The white bare walls of the cave, lit up by the gleam of one little candle, the shadows coming and going upon the sides as they moved about the neck of the candle..."

"Strange thoughts crossed my mind, as I flung and thrust at the grim pliers. I thought of my mother, who had looked twenty years older than I was in state..."

"I pressed the sea cover back nearer the wall, and I saw him strike me with the point of his blade. I was struck on the forehead, and I felt a sharp pain..."

for an instant. It was enough. Recovering myself, I made one good lunge. He and I were in a struggle, blade striking him right in the breast, right above the heart, passed clear through his body and stood out a foot behind his back...

"A slight shudder passed over his face, and he fell back, his eyes staring, his hands outstretched. He was dead, and he lay motionless. That figure which but a short moment before had been animated with hatred and thirst for my life, was now powerless to help or hurt me..."

"Picking up what remained of the candle from the floor, I walked back further into the cave. It seemed to me to be the work of nature, and at the further end a long, dark passage led deeper into the earth..."

"When I stopped, two paths diverged before me. One led to the right, the other to the left, both yawning dark and gloomy and mysterious before me. I had long since passed out of the natural part of the cave..."

"I tossed the coin into the air and bent over it as I fell. It had fallen upon its face, and turning to the left, I passed on down the path about one hundred and fifty feet more..."

"Ascending the steps, I stood in the bedchamber of De Nortier. I had never been in it before. It was the only room in the house, so far as I knew, that I had never entered, but which I had always feared to enter..."

"I thought struck me, I had best leave the trap door open, it might be that those who had left it open might wish to go through it again. I would arouse suspicion were it hung closed..."

"I had already stepped into the room, thinking to let myself out of the door and into the great hall, when the soft thud of approaching footsteps caused me to lodge back behind the friendly tapestry..."

"Only one man with the count, who had just now entered the room, he took the proffered seat. A man of rank, too, evidently, for De Nortier had said 'my lord.' What did a noble in this part of the world? I wiped, too, by his voice, I had as soon expected to see an elephant here as an English lord..."

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"I wiped, too, by his voice, I had as soon expected to see an elephant here as an English lord. The stranger spoke: 'Where is our prisoner?' he said in a low, clear voice..."

"I care not to meet him during my brief stay here. Where had I heard that voice? It sounded so familiar to me as my own. In London, surely, but I could not for my life remember whose it was..."

"Carefully, very carefully, I drew aside a fold of the arras and looked out. There facing me, and looking down at De Nortier, who sat opposite, a grin of pleasure upon his face, sat the viscount Henry Hampden..."

"The viscount stood staring at him as the count finished his cup and sat it upon the table. 'Yes,' said he finally, with a frown, 'May the bravest man win her...'"

"I had thought that I would finally have seen his sufferings with my own eyes. He was a great deal of a man, but he was a great deal of a man..."

"I believe that she loves this Sir Thomas Winchester, so I had thee to bring him here. My heart gave a great bound of joy as I heard this. It is possible that Lady Margaret Carroll, courted and admired, with the choice of England's nobility before her..."

"I cannot say that I shall not be rising to his feet, he began to pace the floor. The pirate's face wore a serious air, and fingering the goblet before him, he spoke to Lord Dunraven, as he tramped restlessly to and fro..."

"And what are thy plans?" De Nortier asked, his hands still fingering listlessly the massive goblet. The other looked at him keenly with his cold grey eyes..."

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CHAPTER VI.

The Plot Thickens.

The next day after the death of Herrick, I set out again for the cavern, determined to look up the matter, and if possible, whether Lord Dunraven still lurked in the dark recesses...

"The body of Herrick was gone, evidently some one had removed it since last night, and so I passed rapidly down the passage, until reaching the place where the two paths diverged. I took the one to the right; with my candle over my head, I made my way down it. There was nothing unusual about the tunnel, it looked about me, much as had the other. Its sides and floor were distiched stones, gleaming like the wings of a crow in the light..."

"I had probably gone about two hundred feet when there came a sudden gust of wind, which blew my candle out. Now I was at a loss to account for this, as it was quite a distance from any artificial gas than a natural one. More as if some one with a great fan had created a breeze. Krumbling about I found my flint and steel, which I always carried with me, and striking a spark, I relighted my candle. There was no one in sight, and so pausing an instant, I started on my way again..."

"I had barely taken a couple of steps when there came a sudden blast of wind, as sudden and unexpected as the first, and my candle was blown out again, as silently and quickly as it had been before. Exasperated by this re-occurrence, I angrily struck another light, and as I did so the candle was snatched from my hand, and I was left in darkness. The next moment a low wailing laugh rang through the tunnel; sinister and cold it sounded in my ears, and at the noise I shrank back..."

"I had heard in no earthly language, as was as though I had heard the voice of a God. A sudden dread fell upon my soul, as I stood there, and the craven fear, which I had never known before in all my life, on the fields of Ireland, or in great London, snatched me up, and I lay on my face, as though I were dead. My hands were my manhood and courage now, and I became as some old withered hag, crouched in the chimney by the fire. With a yell I turned and fled down that silent cavern, as though grim angels were watching my flight. Twice I dashed into the wall in the darkness and fell, screaming at the top of my voice, thinking that the fiends had me for sure, but I was up again in an instant, and with another yell I had resumed my march. My reason forsook me for the moment, and I was as though a mad man. I fancied I could see white figures, with outstretched hands and glaring eyes, awaiting me at every step. Screaming and yelling I rushed on, until I reached the slacken pace, until in front of me I saw the light streaming through the undergrowth of the entrance..."

"Dashing up the embankment, I tore through the bushes and out into the open air again, where I cast myself flat and groined. I ran on, and above me, and the fresh air beating upon my face. It must have been a ruse of De Nortier's to frighten me from the cave, fearing that I would discover some of the hidden treasures, and if it were a trick, it served its purpose well, for never from that day to this, have I put foot again in that cavern. Not for a barrel of gold would I tread again its dark recesses, and though I have buried treasure, and if it were a trick, it served its purpose well, for never from that day to this, have I put foot again in that cavern..."

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"I heard the sound of footsteps behind me and turning I saw one of the Indian attendants called Jose. 'What is it, Jose?' I asked him, speaking in his own tongue. 'The Señor wishes to talk with thee,' he answered. 'Even now he awaits in the great room, and so saying he disappeared into the house. And so the next move had come after all. I would be very cautious and silent, and so thinking, I passed into the hall and back to the great room, where De Nortier awaited me. He was seated there in one of the huge chairs, his feet on a stool, and his hands on his knees. He did not hear me as I entered..."

"What is it, Jose?" I asked. I had not seen him in several days, and the change in his appearance was striking. 'The Señor wishes to talk with thee,' he answered. 'Even now he awaits in the great room, and so saying he disappeared into the house. And so the next move had come after all. I would be very cautious and silent, and so thinking, I passed into the hall and back to the great room, where De Nortier awaited me. He was seated there in one of the huge chairs, his feet on a stool, and his hands on his knees. He did not hear me as I entered..."

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