

Afoul of Villa's Men

By Capt. George B. Rodney

Nolan, looking north under the sharp of his hand through the partially opened back door, was following long-toned curses.

"I beg pardon, sir, but I couldn't help it. There go our horses, sir." He pointed to two little brown spots that showed momentarily against the brown of the hillside. The two Americans' horses were loose and had taken the chance to return to their own camp—five miles away.

"It's a good thing we saw it in time—look out! Low bridge for all this scum!"

"Whoo-ee!" A bullet whizzed past Upton and buried itself in the heavy door post. It came straight from the hill where Kynaston and Nolan had secreted themselves an hour before, saw up in the rear of the house.

"I wonder what in the world that means," said Mrs. Fane loudly, oblivious to the fact that Kynaston had taken and kept hold of her hand.

"It means," said Upton working feverishly to close the shutters of the windows on the north side, "that I've got men on that side of us—Kynaston, you said that you could signal your servants to come to help us. What was your signal?"

"We must use every other means we've got to do that," he said eagerly. "If our men cross the line an armed body it means intervention and war."

"We haven't got a whole lot of men," commented Upton sardoniously. "You see that they've got us surrounded on all sides! There comes their line, moving out of the woods to the attack now. Get your loopholes, men!"

And Kynaston, peering through the narrow loophole that Upton had cut in the shutter, saw a thin line of men moving forward across the open land in widely extended order.

The attack was on.

CHAPTER V.

Water!

Kynaston watched carefully the line of men which was working out of the clump of outcropped rocks to the south. He noted that they came forward very slowly, as if they were carefully and that they were good natured hundred yards away.

At that range he saw that the line of Nolan was the only two that could be counted upon for serious action, the ordinary fighting this way being sighted for over three hundred yards.

There were five other men in the house—Mr. Upton, John Wilson, an old miner about sixty-five years old, an American mine surveyor named Wilson, and two Mexican servants, one of whom was the cook. In addition to these there were Upton and Nolan, Mrs. Fane and Mrs. Upton, and an old Mexican woman who had lived at the place for twenty years.

"First of all," Upton said, "I'll have to ask about it now if arrangements have not already been made—but how is your water supply?"

Upton looked at him, frankly surprised for a moment.

"Heaven knows! Miraculous things—indicating the old woman—generally gets the water that we drink from the spring in a bucket, but we pump water to the bathroom from the windmill, yonder. He pointed down the slope to a windmill flanked by a crenelated tower at the top of the grassy alfalfa patch.

"That'll be the first point of attack," growled Kynaston. "Nolan, set your sights for one hundred and fifty yards and cut loose at the first person you see going for the windmill. They'll be trying to disconnect it!"

"Too late, sir," said Nolan, pointing out. "They've got it already."

"Worse luck," snapped Kynaston. "He turned again to Upton.

"How much water in the house?" Upton ran quickly back into the kitchen, whence he came back with a bucket in his hand, a look of chagrin upon his face.

"There is only this one bucket and it isn't full by a long shot. What'll we do, Kynaston?"

"Do like Erv's Terragon did when the cornfield was set on fire. He got and took it if you remember your Uncle Remus," said Kynaston grimly. "Put that bucket somewhere where it can't be upset. Upton, if all we've got, and the Lord knows when we'll get any more."

"Make the ladies sit down on the floor, Upton, below the line of the loopholes, so that no stray shot can hit them."

"There they come! And by Jove, it looks as if they mean business at last! Sending a flag of truce forward. The nerve of the beast!"

"Will you see the flag of truce, Upton? I can't go. You see, I'm in a uniform and it must not get out that a United States officer is near here on Mexican soil. Take your revolver with you and don't let them come within ten yards of you. I'll cover you from the house."

So Upton, laying aside his rifle, went down the hill to meet the pseudo-officer, who, with an orderly behind him, was signaling for an interview. When they met, Upton left no doubt in the officer's mind that the miner was angry.

"Well, what is it you pirates want?" he asked truculently. "Are you tryin' to make a livin' by your own wadded efforts?"

"You must use every other means we've got to do that," he said eagerly. "If our men cross the line an armed body it means intervention and war."

"We haven't got a whole lot of men," commented Upton sardoniously. "You see that they've got us surrounded on all sides! There comes their line, moving out of the woods to the attack now. Get your loopholes, men!"

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