In that black list were two murders—one of a rival by the knife and one of a mistress by poison. And there were other things even worse, too shameful indeed to be written.

"Doubtless there is more that has not come beneath my notice," said Fonseca coolly, "but these things I know for truth, and one of the murders could be proved against him were he captured. Stay, give me ink. I must add to the record."

And he wrote in his cipher: "In May, 1517, the said De Garcia sailed to England on a trading voyage, and there in the parish of Ditchingham, in the county of Norfolk, he murdered Luisa Wingfield, spoken of above as Luisa de Garcia, his cousin, to whom he was once betrothed. In September of the same year or previously, under cover of a false marriage, he decoyed and deserted one Donna Isabella of the noble family of Siguenza, a nun in a religious house in this city."

"What," I exclaimed, "is the girl who came to seek your help two nights since the same that De Garcia deserted?"

"The very same, nephew. It was she whom you heard pleading with him last night. Had I known two days ago what I know today, by now this villain had been safe in prison. But perhaps it is not yet too late. I am ill, but I will rise and see to it. Leave it to me, nephew. Go, nurse yourself and leave it to me. If anything may be done, I can do it. Stay, bid a messenger be ready. This evening I shall know whatever there is to be known."

That night Fonseca sent for me again.

"I have made inquiries," he said. "I have even warned the officers of justice for the first time for many years, and they are hunting De Garcia as bloodhounds hunt a slave. But nothing can be heard of him. He has vanished and left no trace. Tonight I write to Cadiz, for he may have fled there down the river. One thing I have discovered, however. The Senora Isabella was caught by the watch, and being recognized as having escaped from a convent she was handed over to the executories of the holy office, that her case may be investigated, or, in other words, should her fault be proved, to death."

"Can she be rescued?"

"Impossible. Had she followed my counsel she would never have been taken."

"Can she be communicated with?"

"No. Twenty years ago it might have been managed. Now the office is stricter and purer. Gold has no power there. We shall never see or hear of her again unless indeed it is at the hour of her death, when, should she choose to speak with me, the indulgence may possibly be granted to her, though I doubt it. But it is not likely that she will wish to do so. Should she succeed in hiding her disgrace, she may escape, but it is not probable. Do not look so sad, nephew; religion must have its sacrifices. Perchance it is better for her to die thus than to live for many years dead in life. She can die but once. May her blood lie heavy on De Garcia's head!"

"Amen!" I answered.

CHAPTER VIII.

THOMAS BECOMES RICH.

For many months we heard no more of De Garcia or of Isabella de Siguenza. Both had vanished, leaving no sign, and we searched for them in vain. As for me, I fell back into my former way of life of assistant to Fonseca, posing before the world as his nephew. But it came about that from the night of my duel with the murderer my master's health declined steadily through the action of a wasting disease of the liver which baffled all skill, so that within eight months of that time he lay almost bedridden and at the point of death. His mind indeed remained quite clear, and on occasions he would even receive those who came to consult him, reclining on a chair and wrapped in his embroidered robe. But the hand of death lay on him, and he knew that it was so. As the weeks went by he grew more and more attached to me till at length, had I been his son, he could not have treated me with greater affection, while for my part I did what lay in my power to lessen his sufferings, for he would let no other physician near him.

At length when he had grown very feeble he expressed a desire to see a notary. The man he named was sent for and remained closeted with him for an hour or more, when he left for awhile to return with several of his clerks, who accompanied him to my master's room, from whence I was excluded. Presently they all went away, bearing some parchments with them.

That evening Fonseca sent for me. I found him very weak, but cheerful and full of talk.

"Come here, nephew," he said. "I have had a busy day. I have been busy all my life through, and it would not be well to grow idle at the last. Do you know what I have been doing this day?"

I shook my head.

"I will tell you. I have been making my will—there is something to leave—not so very much, but still something."

"Do not talk of wills," I said. "I trust that you may live for many years."

He laughed. "You must think badly of my case, nephew, when you think that I can be deceived thus. I am about to die, as you know well, and I do not fear death. My life has been prosperous, but not happy, for it was blighted in its spring—no matter how. The story is an old one and not worth telling. Moreover, whichever way it had read, it had all been one now in the hour of death. Nephew, listen. Except certain sums that I have given to be spent in charities—not in masses, mind you—I have left you all I possess."

"You have left it to me!" I said, astonished.

"Yes, nephew, to you. Why not? I have no relations living, and I have learned to love you, I who thought that I could never again care for any man or woman or child. I am grateful to you, who have proved to me that my heart is not dead. Take what I give you as a mark of my gratitude."

Now I began to stammer my thanks, but he stopped me. "The sum that you will inherit, nephew, amounts in all to about 5,000 gold pesos, or perhaps 12,000 of your English pounds, enough for a young man to begin life on, even with a wife. Indeed there in England it may well be held a great fortune, and I think that your betrothed's father will make no more objection to you as a son-in-law; also there is this house and all that it contains. The library and the silver are valuable, and you will do well to keep them. And now one word more. If your conscience will let you, abandon the pursuit of De Garcia. Take your fortune and go with it to England, wed that maid whom you desire, and follow after happiness in whatever way seems best to you. Who are you that you should mete out vengeance on this knave De Garcia? Let him be, and he will avenge himself upon himself. Otherwise you may undergo much toil and danger and in the end lose love and life and fortune at a blow."

"But I have sworn to kill him," I answered, "and how can I break so solemn an oath? How could I sit at home in peace beneath the burden of such shame?"

"I do not know. It is not for me to judge. You must do as you wish, but in the doing of it it may happen that you will fall into greater shames than this. You have fought the man, and he has escaped you. Let him go if you are wise. Now bend down and kiss me and bid me farewell. I do not desire that you should see me die, and my death is near. I cannot tell if we shall meet again when in your turn you have laid as I lie now, or if we shape our course for different stars. If so, farewell forever."

Then I leaned down and kissed him on the forehead, and as I did so I wept, for not till this hour did I learn how truly I had come to love him, so truly that it seemed to me as though my father lay there dying.

"Weep not," he said, "for all our life is but a parting. Once I had a son like you, and ours was the bitterest of farewells. Now I go to seek for him again who could not come back to me, so weep not because I die. Goodby, Thomas Wingfield! May God prosper and protect you! Now go!"

So I went weeping, and that night, before the dawn, all was over.

I buried Andres de Fonseca, but with no pomp, for he had said that he wished as little money as possible spent upon his dead body, and returned to the house to meet the notaries. Then the seals were broken and the parchments read, and I was put in full possession of the dead man's wealth, and having deducted such sums as were payable for dues, legacies and fees the notaries left me, bowing humbly, for was I not rich? Yes, I was rich. Wealth had come to me without effort, and I had reason to desire it, yet this was the saddest night that I had passed since I set foot in Spain, for my mind was filled with doubts and sorrow, and, moreover, my loneliness got a hold of me. But sad as it might be it was destined to seem yet more sorrowful before the morning, for as I sat making a pretense to eat, a servant came to me, saying that a woman waited in the outer room who had asked to see his late master. Guessing that this was some client who had not heard of Fonseca's death, I was about to order that she should be dismissed, then bethought me that I might be of service to her or at the least forget some of my own trouble in listening to hers. So I bade them bring her in. Presently she came, a tall woman wrapped in a dark cloak that hid her face. I bowed and motioned to her to be seated, when suddenly she started and spoke.

"I asked to see Don Andres de Fonseca," she said in a low, quick voice. "You are not he, senor."

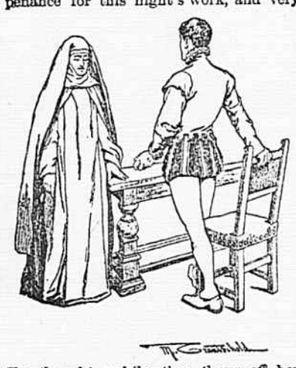
"Andres de Fonseca was buried today," I answered. "I was his assistant in his business and am his heir. If I can serve you in any way, I am at your disposal."

"You are young—very young," she murmured confusedly, "and the matter is so terrible and urgent. How can I trust you?"

"It is for you to judge, senora."

She thought awhile, then drew off her cloak, displaying the robes of a nun.

"Listen," she said. "I must do many a penance for this night's work, and very



She thought awhile, then threw off her cloak.

hardly have I won leave to come hither upon an errand of mercy. Now, I cannot go back empty handed, so I must trust you. But first swear by the blessed Mother of God that you will not betray me."

"I give you my word," I answered. "If that is not enough, let us end this talk."

"Do not be angry with me," she pleaded. "I have not left my convent walls for many years, and I am distraught with grief. I seek a poison of the deadliest. I will pay well for it."

"I am not the tool of murderers," I answered. "For what purpose do you wish the poison?"

"Oh, I must tell you—yet how can I? In our convent there dies tonight a woman young and fair—almost a girl indeed—who has broken the vows she took. She dies tonight with her babe—thus, O God, thus!—by being built alive into the foundations of the house she has disgraced. It is the judgment that has been passed upon her—judgment without forgiveness or reprieve. I am the abbess of this convent—ask not its name or mine—and I love this sinner as though she were my daughter. I have obtained this much of mercy for her because of my faithful services to the church and by secret influence—that when I give her the cup of water before the work is done I may mix poison with it and touch the lips of the babe with poison, so that their end is swift. I may do this and yet have no sin upon my soul. I have my pardon under seal. Help me, then, to be an innocent murderess and to save this sinner from her last agonies on earth."

I cannot set down the feelings with which I listened to this tale of horror, for words could not carry them. I stood aghast, seeking an answer, and a dreadful thought entered my mind.

"Is this woman named Isabella de Siguenza?" I asked.

"That name was hers in the world," she answered, "though how you know it I cannot guess."

"We know many things in this house, mother. Say, now, can this Isabella be saved by money or by interest?"

"It is impossible. Her sentence has been confirmed by the tribunal of mercy. She must die and within two hours. Will you not give me the poison?"

"I cannot give it unless I know its purpose, mother. This may be a barren tale, and the medicine might be used in such a fashion that I should fall beneath the law. At one price only can I give it, and that is that I am there to see it used."

She thought awhile and answered: "It may be done, for as it chances the wording of my absolution will cover it. But you must come cowled as a priest, that those who carry out the sentence may know nothing. Still others will know, and I warn you that should you speak of the matter you yourself will meet with misfortune. The church avenges itself on those who betray its secrets, senor."

"As one day its secrets will avenge themselves upon the church," I answered bitterly. "And now let me seek a fitting drug—one that is swift, yet not too swift, lest your hounds should see themselves baffled of their prey before all their devilry is done. Here is something that will do the work," and I held up a vial that I drew from a case of such medicines. "Come, veil yourself, mother, and let us be gone upon this 'errand of mercy.'"

She obeyed, and presently we left the house and walked swiftly through the crowded streets till we came to the ancient part of the city along the river's edge. Here the woman led me to a wharf where a boat was in waiting for her. We entered it and were rowed for a mile or more up the stream till the boat halted at a landing place beneath a high wall. Leaving it, we came to a door in the wall on which my companion knocked thrice. Presently a shutter in the woodwork was drawn, and a white face peeped through the grating and spoke. My companion answered in a low voice, and after some delay the door was opened, and I found myself in a large walled garden planted with orange trees. Then the abbess spoke to me.

"I have led you to our house," she said. "If you know where you are and what its name may be, for our own sake, I pray you, forget it when you leave these doors."

I made no answer, but looked round in the dim and dewy garden.

Here it was doubtless that De Garcia had met this unfortunate who must die this night. A walk of a hundred paces brought us to another door in the wall of a long, low building of Moorish style. Here the knocking and the questioning were repeated at more length. Then the door was opened, and I found myself in a passage, lit lighted, long and narrow, in the depths of which I could see the figures of nuns flitting to and fro like bats in a tomb. The abbess walked down the passage till she came to a door on the right, which she opened. It led into a cell, and here she left me in the dark. For 10 minutes or more I staid there, a prey to thoughts that I had rather forget. At length the door opened again, and she came in, followed by a tall priest whose face I could not see, for he was dressed in the white robe and hood of the Dominicans, that left nothing visible except his eyes.

"Greeting, my son," he said when he had scanned me for awhile. "The mother abbess has told me of your errand. You are full young for such a task."

"Were I old I should not love it better, father. You know the case. I am asked to provide a deadly drug for a certain merciful purpose. I have provided that drug, but I must be there to see that it is put to proper use."

"You are very cautious, my son. The church is no murderess. This woman must die because her sin is flagrant, and of late such wickedness has become common. Therefore after much thought and prayer and many searchings to find a means of mercy she is condemned to death by those whose names are too high to be spoken. I, alas, am here to see the sentence carried out with a certain mitigation which has been allowed by the mercy of her chief judge. It seems that your presence is needful to this act of love; therefore I suffer it. The mother abbess has warned you that evil dogs the feet of those who reveal the secrets of the church. For your own sake I pray you to lay that warning to heart."

"I am no babbler, father, so the caution is not needed. One word more. This visit should be well feed; the medicine is costly."

"Fear not, physician," the monk answered, with a note of scorn in his voice. "Name your sum; it shall be paid to you."

"I ask no money, father. Indeed I would pay much to be far away tonight. I ask only that I may be allowed to speak with this girl before she dies."

"What!" he said, starting. "Surely you are not that wicked man? If so, you are bold indeed to risk the sharing of her fate."

"No, father, I am not that man. I never saw Isabella de Siguenza except once, and I have never spoken to her. I am not the man who tricked her, but I know him. He is named Juan de Garcia."

"Ah," he said quickly, "she would never tell his real name, even under threat of torture. Poor erring soul, she could be faithful in her unfaith. Of what would you speak to her?"

"I wish to ask her whither this man has gone. He is my enemy, and I would follow him as I have already followed him far. He has done worse by me and mine than by this poor girl even. Grant my request, father, that I may be able to work my vengeance on him, and with mine the church's also."

"'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord. 'I will repay.' Yet it may be, son, that the Lord will choose you as the instrument of his wrath. An opportunity shall be given you to speak with her. Now put on this dress"—and he handed me a white Dominican hood and robe—"and follow me."

"First," I said, "let me give this medicine to the abbess, for I will have no hand in its administering. Take it, mother, and when the time comes pour the contents of the vial into a cup of water. Then, having touched the mouth and tongue of the babe with the fluid, give it to the mother to drink, and be sure that she does drink it. Before the bricks are built up about them both will sleep sound, never to wake again."

"I will do it," murmured the abbess. "Having absolution, I will be bold and do it for love and mercy's sake!"

"Your heart is soo soft, sister. Justice is mercy," said the monk, with a sigh. "Alas, for the frailty of the flesh that wars against the spirit!"

Then I clothed myself in the ghastly looking dress, and they took lamps and motioned to me to follow them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PASSING OF ISABELLA DE SIGUENZA.

Silently we went down the long passage, and as we went I saw the eyes of the dwellers in this living tomb watch us pass through the gratings of their cell doors. Little wonder that the woman about to die had striven to escape from such a home back to the world of life and love! Yet for that crime she must perish. Surely God will remember the doings of such men as these priests and the nation that fosters them. And indeed he does remember, for where is the splendor of Spain today, and where are the cruel rites she gloried in? Here in England their fetters are broken forever, and in striving to bind them fast upon us free Englishmen she is broken also, never to be whole again.

At the far end of a passage we found a stair, down which we passed. At its foot was an iron bound door that the monk unlocked and locked again upon the farther side. Then came another passage hollowed in the thickness of the wall, and a second door, and we were in the place of death.

It was a vault low and damp, and the waters of the river washed its outer wall, for I could hear their murmurings in the silence. Perhaps the place may have measured 10 paces in length by 8 broad. For the rest its roof was supported by massive columns, and on one side there was a second door that led to a prison cell. At the farther end of this gloomy den that was dimly lighted by torches and lamps two men with hooded heads and draped in coarse black gowns were at work silently mixing lime that sent up a hot steam upon the stagnant air. By their sides were squares of dressed stone ranged neatly against the end of the vault, and before them was a niche cut in the thickness of the wall itself, shaped like a large coffin set upon its smaller end. In front of this niche was placed a massive chair of chestnut wood. I noticed also that two other such coffin shaped niches had been cut in this same wall and filled in with similar blocks of whitish stone. On the face of each was a date graved in deep letters. One had been sealed up some 30 years before and one hard upon a hundred.

These men were the only occupants of the vault when we entered it, but presently a sound of soft and solemn singing stole down the second passage. Then the door was opened, the mason monks ceased laboring at the heap of lime, and the sound of singing grew louder, so that I could catch the refrain. It was that of a Latin hymn for the dying. Next through the open door came the choir, eight veiled nuns walking two by two, and ranging themselves on either side of the vault they ceased their singing. After them followed the doomed woman, guarded by two more nuns, and last of all a priest bearing a crucifix. This man wore a black robe, and his thin, half frenzied face was uncovered. All these and other things I noticed and remembered, yet at the time it seemed to me that I saw nothing except the figure of the victim. I knew her again, although I had seen her but once in the moonlight. She was changed indeed; her lovely face was fuller, and the great, tormented eyes shone like stars against its waxen pallor, relieved by the carmine of her lips alone. Still it was the same face that some months before I had seen lifted in entreaty to her false lover. Now her tall shape was wrapped about with grave clothes, over which her black hair streamed, and in her arms she bore a sleeping babe that from time to time she pressed convulsively to her breast.

On the threshold of her tomb Isabella de Siguenza paused and looked round wildly as though for help, scanning each of the silent watchers to find a friend among them. Then her eye fell upon the niche, and the heap of smoking lime, and the men who guarded it, and she shuddered and would have fallen had not those who attended her led her to the chair and placed her in it—a living corpse.

Now the dreadful rites began. The Dominican father stood before her and recited her offense and the sentence which had been passed upon her, which doomed her "to be left alone with God and the child of your sin, that he may deal with you as he sees fit." [Lest such cruelty should seem impossible and unprecedented, the writer may mention that in the museum of the city of Mexico he has seen the desiccated body of a young woman which was found immured in the walls of a religious building. With it is the body of an infant. Although the exact cause of her execution remains a matter of conjecture, there can be no doubt as to the manner of her death, for in addition to other evidences the marks of the rope with which her limbs were bound in life are distinctly visible. Such in those days were the mercies of religion!]

To all of this she seemed to pay no heed nor to the exhortation that followed. At length he ceased, with a sigh, and turning to me said:

"Draw nearer to this sinner, brother, and speak with her before it is too late."

Then he bade all present gather themselves at the far end of the vault that our talk might not be overheard, and they did so without wonder, thinking doubtless that I was a monk sent to confess the doomed woman.

So I drew near, with a beating heart, and bending over her I spoke in her ear.

"Listen to me, Isabella de Siguenza!" I said, and as I uttered the name she started wildly. "Where is that De Garcia who deceived and deserted you?"

"How have you learned his true name?" she answered. "Not even torture would have wrung it from me, as you know."

"I am no monk, and I know nothing. I am that man who fought with De Garcia on the night when you were taken, and who would have killed him had you not seized me."

"At the least I saved him—that is my comfort now!"

"Isabella de Siguenza," I said, "I am your friend, the best you ever had and the last, as you shall learn presently. Tell me where this man is, for there is that between us which must be settled."

"If you are my friend, weary me no more. I do not know where he is. Months ago he went, whither you will scarcely follow, to the farther Indies, but you will never find him there."

"It may be that I shall, and if it should so chance, say, have you any message for this man?"

"None—yes, this: Tell him how we died, his child and his wife. Tell him that I did my best to hide his name from the priests lest some like fate should befall him."

"Is that all?"

"Yes—no, it is not all. Tell him that I passed away loving and forgiving."

"My time is short," I said. "Awake and listen." For having spoken thus she seemed to be sinking into a lethargy. "I was the assistant of that Andres de Fonseca whose counsel you put aside to your ruin, and I have given a certain drug to the abbess yonder. When she offers you the cup of water, see that you drink and drink deep, you and the child. If so, none shall ever die more happily. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes," she gasped, "and may blessings rest upon you for the gift. Now I am no more afraid, for I have long desired to die—it was the way I feared."

"Then farewell, and God be with you, unhappy woman."

"Farewell," she answered softly, "but call me not unhappy who am about to die thus easily with that I love." And she glanced at the sleeping babe.

Then I drew back and stood with bent head, speaking no word. Now the Dominican motioned to all to take the places where they stood before and asked her, "Erring sister, have you aught to say before you are silent forever?"

"Yes," she answered in a clear, sweet voice that never even quavered, so bold had she become since she learned that her death would be swift and easy. "Yes, I

"Erring sister, have you aught to say before you are silent forever?"

have this to say—that I go to my end with a clean heart, for if I have sinned it is against custom and not against God. I broke the vows indeed, but I was forced to take those vows, and therefore they did not bind. I was a woman born for light and love, and yet I was thrust into the darkness of this cloister, there to wither dead in life. And so I broke the vows, and I am glad that I have broken them, though it has brought me to this. If I was deceived and my marriage is no marriage before the law, as they tell me now, I knew nothing of it; therefore to me it is still valid and holy, and on my soul there rests no sin. At the least I have lived, and for some few hours I have been wife and mother, and it is as well to die swiftly in this cell that your mercy has prepared as more slowly in those above. And now for you—I tell you that your wickedness shall find you out, you who dare to say to God's children, 'Ye shall not love,' and to work murder on them because they will not listen. It shall find you out, I say, and not only you, but the church you serve. Both priest and church shall be broken together and shall be a scorn in the mouths of men to come."

"She is distraught," said the Dominican as a sigh of fear and wonder went round the vault, "and blasphemes in her madness. Forget her words. Shrive her, brother, swiftly, ere she adds to them."

Then the black robed, keen eyed priest came to her, and holding the cross before her face began to mutter I know not what. But she arose from the chair and thrust the crucifix aside.

"Peace!" she said. "I will not be shriven by such as you. I take my sins to God and not to you—you who do murder in the name of Christ!"

The fanatic heard, and a fury took him. "Then go unshriven down to hell, you ——," and he named her by ill names and struck her in the face with the ivory crucifix.

The Dominican bade him cease his revilings angrily enough, but Isabella de Siguenza wiped her bruised brow and laughed aloud a dreadful laugh to hear.

"Now I see that you are a coward also," she said. "Priest, this is my last prayer, that you may also perish at the hands of fanatics and more terribly than I die tonight."

Then they hurried her into the place prepared for her, and she spoke again:

"Give me to drink, for we thirst, my babe and I!"

Now I saw the abbess enter that passage whence the victim had been led. Presently she came back bearing a cup of water in her hand and with it a loaf of bread, and I knew by her mien that my draft was in the water. But of what befell afterward I cannot say certainly, for I prayed the Dominican to open the door by which we had entered the vault, and passing through it I stood dazed with horror at some distance. Awhile went by, I do not know how long, till at length I saw the abbess standing before me, a lantern in her hand, and she was sobbing bitterly.

"All is done," she said. "Nay, have no fear, the draft worked well. Before ever a stone was laid mother and child slept sound. Alas for her soul who died unrepentant and unshriven!"

BE CONTINUED.]

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