

Don Renegade

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

CHAPTER XXI

A DISH OF DOVES

MARCOS ZAPPA spent the next two days loitering in the inn and resting. Occasionally he strolled around the plaza at the hour of promenade and received the nods of men and the flirtatious glances of the *señoritas*.

News of his encounter with Don Miguel had spread through the town and the countryside, and there were several versions of it. But all agreed that there would be a duel as soon as Don Marcos Zappa was mended enough.

On the third morning, Don Juan de Vasquez came to town with the *señorita*. Meanwhile, Marcos Zappa had received a package from Don Pedro Garcia, and in it he had found documents which amazed and amused him. But he knew they would be sufficient to impress the Vasquez.

He called at the *casa* at the proper time after the siesta hour, and Don Juan greeted him gravely and perused the docu-

ments Pedro Garcia had provided. As they sipped wine, they talked.

"I have heard about Miguel," Don Juan said.

"I regret that very much," Marcos Zappa was quick to say.

"I have talked to the boy, and his father has talked to him. He was not really in love with Manuela. But he had looked forward to marriage with her, and his pride was hurt when he learned she had given her heart to you."

"I can understand that," Zappa replied.

"I have explained to him that people will guess your trouble was over her. The boy realizes he has made an error. But his stubborn pride will not let him admit it. He went wild, drank too much wine, forgot himself utterly."



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"We may find a solution to the situation with honor to us both," Zappa said.

Don Juan clapped his hands for a native servant, and sent for the *señorita*. She came down the staircase smiling, her *dueña* behind her. Don Juan took her hand and placed it in that of Marcos Zappa.

"We will have the banns announced at the chapel at San Gabriel on Sunday," Don Juan said. "And we will have the betrothal feast Monday. Make out your list of invitations, my daughter, and I'll send servants riding with the word."

Marcos Zappa and Manuela had a few minutes together, sitting some six feet apart on stiff chairs while the *dueña* watched from the near distance, smiling but vigilant.

"I imagine my arms around you and my lips on yours," Marcos Zappa whispered.

"It is the same with me, Marcos." Then, smiling impishly, she said: "Fray José begged me to tell you not to eat too much until your arm is mended."

"That reminds me. I shall require quantities of food when we are married."

"I'll see to it personally, *señor*. Meanwhile, I shall strive to think of new dishes to tempt you."

"In all the world, *señorita*, there is nothing as lovely as you!"

"You flatter me, *señor*."

"'Tis impossible to flatter you. There are not enough words even to tell the truth."

Their eyes sought each other, their lips trembled. But the stern *dueña* broke the spell at the moment she knew it should be broken. Marcos Zappa touched the *señorita's* hand an instant in farewell, and left the house.

BACK at the inn, Bardoso accompanied him to his chamber. "So it is now all arranged, *amigo*," Bardoso said. "You have the feast of betrothal on Monday, at which time Don Pedro Garcia will denounce you in front of the company for a renegade, and break the *señorita's* heart. After that,

you will be a proper pirate again. Be sure you get your gold from him in advance."

"I'll complete my dealings with him," Zappa said.

"I have sent word for the schooner to put into the hidden cove. The men will land and work their way here from the coast carefully. Monday night, we strike. By daylight, we'll be in hiding half way back to the coast, and on the night following we will reach it with our loot."

"You have planned well," Zappa said.

"Attend me, *amigo*! I can see your heart is heavy. Let me abduct the *señorita* and put her aboard the schooner for you. You will both be glad afterward. If you insist, we can put in some place and get a *padre* to mumble his words for you."

"It cannot be that way," Marcos Zappa said. "But I thank you for being willing to do it."

"This affair of young Don Miguel—surely you can handle him when the time comes. Let him wave his blade through the air for a time, take a few steps here and there, then run him through the arm or thigh. So honor will be satisfied, and the lad not much hurt."

"Don Pedro has engaged me to slay him," Zappa said. "That was part of our bargain."

"Ha! 'Tis a pity. But what is a life, more or less? I presume I must leave you now. Should anybody question why a common merchant has so much of your time and conversation, I'll mention that I am contracting to obtain for you certain presents you wish to give your bride."

Bardoso departed. The dusk came, and a servant entered the chamber to light the candles. Carlos appeared to help Marcos Zappa change his attire for dinner. The landlord had promised something special.

"Carlos, what was your work before Don Pedro sent you to serve me?" Marcos Zappa asked.

"I was a house servant, *señor*."

"Do you care to remain in my service after I am married?"

Carlos glanced up and grinned. "Per-

haps, *señor*—if you get married.”

“So you think I may not? That remark was a mistake, rogue! It shows you know too much.”

Fright came into the man’s face. “I—I meant nothing, *señor*.”

“Suppose I tell Don Pedro you are not discreet?”

“Do not, *señor*, I beg of you. He can be terrible.”

“And so can I,” Marcos Zappa said. “I once had a man beside me who conspired with some enemies of mine. It was even planned to kill me. I discovered the plot in time. It would make you shudder to hear what I did to him.”

Carlos looked uncomfortable. He spent considerable time with his back toward Marcos Zappa as he fussed around the packing cases, trying to regain his composure. And Zappa knew from his manner that Juan’s wild tale had been the truth.

“I will need you no more tonight, if you wish to prowl around some adobe hut and sing for a girl,” Marcos Zappa said, when Carlos was done.

“Thank you, *señor*.”

The man hurried away. Marcos Zappa had given him the chance to meet the other conspirators if he wished, and hoped possibly Juan would be watching and learn details.

HE WENT to the big main room and sat at the end of the table, with one of the native servants behind his chair instead of Carlos. The landlord hurried up to him.

“I understand, Don Marcos, that it will not be my pleasure to serve you much longer,” he said. “There are whispers of coming marriage, and no doubt you will dine at the Vasquez *casa* afterward.”

“I’ll always remember your dinners, *señor*. What have you for me tonight?”

“A dish of doves, boiled and the bones removed, the meat laced with pepper strips and baked in a pasty.”

“It should be delicious.”

“A melon filled with the pulp of oranges in which cherries nestle.”

“Excellent!”

“A baked fish stuffed with ground olives and nuts—”

“My mouth waters, *señor*. Have the food brought immediately. And your best wine to wash it down.”

Marcos Zappa spent considerable time over his meal, for he was thinking, and that made him eat slowly. The big room was filling with the nightly roisterers by the time he was done. He wandered around the gambling tables, watching the play, but took no part in it.

The vision of Manuela was before him again. His heart ached for her when he remembered what Don Pedro Garcia intended to do. And rage flamed within him at the thought that Don Pedro planned to have him murdered after he had served his purpose.

Bardoso came in out of the night, bellying in greeting as was his custom. He greeted Marcos Zappa humbly and was invited to have a glass of wine.

“Don Marcos, it has been a pleasure to know a real *caballero* like you,” he said, loud enough for all to hear. “Perhaps this is the last I shall see of you.”

“How is this, *señor*?”

“In the morning I leave Reina de Los Angeles, my business here being finished.”

“May you be prosperous wherever you go,” Marcos Zappa said.

He understood this scene. Bardoso was giving an excuse for disappearing to meet his men. If he was missing tomorrow, it would cause no comment. As he lifted his glass, Marcos Zappa whispered to him:

“Get into the patio and come to my chamber secretly a short time after I go there. I have word for you. Somebody may have betrayed your plans.”

“What is this?” Bardoso looked alarmed.

“Careful, *amigo*. Others are watching. Perhaps you noticed Capitán Cervera greet me in the plaza during the hour of promenade today, and talk with me for some time?”

“That I did, *señor*, and it made me nervous. I always grow nervous when I

see that *capitán*. He appears to be giving me more attention than should be given an honest merchant. I'll slip to your chamber when it is safe."

After Bardoso had left the table, Marcos Zappa finished his goblet of wine, arose and yawned and stretched, then went into the patio and to his quarters.

The candles were burning, the brazier glowing and sending out its warmth, and on the couch beneath the coverings a human form was stretched.

"Ho, little bed-warmer!" Marcos Zappa greeted her. "It is time for you to get along home."

There was no answer from the couch, and Marcos Zappa chuckled to think that Rosa had fallen asleep. He strode across the room and pulled the covers off her head.

Two shining eyes regarded him, but they did not belong to Rosa. It was Anita Gonzales who smiled up at him.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LADY AND THE PIRATE

MARCOS ZAPPA sprang backward a step. For an instant he stared in amazement, and then he spoke, his voice hoarse with anger.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Warming your bed, *señor*."

"Are you mad, girl? What trick is this?"

"You told my father you would not enter his house again, so I came to you."

"Get out!" Zappa thundered.

"Will you promise to take me with you when you go away?" she asked. "I know your plans, *señor*. I listened behind the door while you were talking to Don Pedro and that pirate. So I know you are not going to be married and remain here."

"You dared listen?" he cried. "And you dare speak of it? Don Pedro shall know of this. He will see that your father punishes you."

"Will you promise to take me with you, *señor*?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then here I remain. If you try to put me out, I'll start screaming, and people will come running. I'll say that I am here at your invitation, but that you turned cruel and began beating me. Then all your fine plans will be ruined because of the scandal, and Don Pedro's also, and he will settle with you for it."

"Have you no shame, girl? Do you not realize that such an act would make common talk of you?"

"And of you, *señor*—do not forget that."

Marcos Zappa wondered how he could handle this situation. He did not doubt that this mad girl would do as she threatened. And that certainly would wreck his plans. For if she screamed men would come running from the main room of the inn. They would hear her ranting, see her there unclothed in his chamber, and the story would sweep the town.

Marcos Zappa did not doubt for a moment that she could scream loudly enough to attract everybody in the place, before he could prevent her. She seemed on the verge of it. He always had outwitted this girl before in her tricks, but she seemed to hold the upper hand now.

"How much gold do you want?" he asked.

"I have not asked you for gold, *señor*."

"How much? No doubt your father told you how much to ask."

"My father knows nothing of this. He thinks I am in my room at home. I said I had a headache and would retire."

"Get you gone! We'll speak of this tomorrow."

"But it is a thing to be decided now, *señor*," she said. "Give me your word that you will take me with you, and I'll get up and leave."

"Why should you wish to go with me knowing that I care nothing for you?"

"I can make you care, *señor*."

"*Señorita*, I have had quite enough of your madness," Marcos Zappa said. "Since you will not leave my chamber willingly, I shall throw you out of it exactly as you are. My plans may be ruined, but you will

be ruined also. And your precious father will be ruined, too, for Don Pedro will no longer furnish him protection and support."

The expression in his face as he approached the couch no doubt frightened her. Perhaps she thought he would do as he had said. Her mouth opened, and she screamed.

THAT scream seemed to cut through the night. It rang in Marcos Zappa's ears and echoed back from the walls, and he knew it had gone through the open barred window to sound along the patio and into the inn.

He recoiled, dumbfounded. But at that instant the door was hurled open, and Bardoso charged into the room.

"I heard," he said. "I'll handle this, *amigo*. Do you stand aside."

The *señorita* screamed again as Bardoso grasped her arm and jerked her from the bed, and half hurled her to the chair in a semi-dark corner of the room, where she had put her clothes.

"Get dressed!" Bardoso snarled at her. "Quickly! Men are coming."

Half crazed with fright, her bravado gone, she got quickly into a loose garment and clutched another. Bardoso gripped her wrist and pulled her to the door. Men were running along the patio beneath the arches, shouting to know what was happening. As Marcos Zappa stood back against the wall, Bardoso jerked the girl out of the room, and began a gust of wild laughter.

"Brainless girl!" he shouted, as his laughter stopped and some of the men rushed up to them. "Can you do nothing right? Now our little affair is known."

"What is this?" the landlord demanded, coming up to them.

"This girl was to come to my room, *señor*, to spend a part of the evening," Bardoso said. "And the silly little fool got into Don Marcos Zappa's room by mistake. How she screamed when Don Marcos entered and she saw it was not the man she expected! Out with you, baggage! Get

along home! I want none of you. You have exposed yourself and made me a laughing-stock."

"It is a lie!" she screeched.

But the laughter of the men who had rushed into the patio drowned what she said. She saw their knowing grins. And she turned and fled to the patio gate and out into the night.

The landlord went to the door of the chamber, and Marcos Zappa stepped out.

"It is nothing," Zappa said. "It startled me for a moment, that is all. Hereafter, the honest merchant should give his girls better directions as how to go to his room."

The laughing men turned to stroll back into the main room and resume their roistering. Bardoso pretended to go angrily to his own room. Marcos Zappa entered his chamber and sank weakly into a chair, chuckling now that the ordeal was over.

He heard a soft sob, and glanced up quickly to see Rosa in the doorway.

"Oh, *señor!*" she cried. "She came here and drove me out. She told me that you had invited her. But I could not believe that, so I waited outside the wall."

"There's no harm done, little one. Get you along home," Zappa said.

"Juan said to tell you, *señor*, that he has been listening to those men again, and may have news for you soon."

"Have him let me know at once if he learns anything. My life may depend on his report."

She darted away, and Marcos Zappa closed the door. Laboriously, he got out of his boots and slipped off his jacket and put his arm back into the sling again. He would wait for Bardoso to return, he decided, before retiring.

It was some time before Bardoso returned.

"I got to the Gonzales house ahead of the girl," he reported, "and told her father everything that happened here. Don Pedro was there, and he was furious. He said the fool girl might ruin all our plans, and ordered Gonzales to lock her in her room and keep her there until our business is

over. So we have nothing to fear from that one."

"Something has gone amiss," Marcos Zappa said. "Possibly the Gonzales girl has let out a hint. From the questions the *capitán* asked me today, I know he thinks pirates are in the vicinity. He suspects everybody who is not well known to him."

"Possibly even you, *amigo*?"

"Even that is possible. I'll cultivate the *capitán* and get him to talk freely. What I learn, I'll let you know. Perhaps it would be well, Bardoso, for you to meet me late Sunday night."

"I'll do that, *señor*. I'll slip into town after dark and watch for a chance to meet you here."

Bardoso left the chamber, and Marcos Zappa barred the door and prepared for bed.

CHAPTER XXIII

SMALL MATTER OF REVENGE

LOCKED in her own room on the upper floor of the house of pleasure, Anita Gonzales beat her fists against the walls in futile rage. Don Pedro and her father had berated her for the better part of an hour, and she smarted yet from their words.

Particularly was she enraged at some of the things Don Pedro Garcia had said. Now she sat on the edge of her couch and recalled them, and her anger grew. She began thinking.

Revenge would be easy for her. She could destroy Don Pedro, whom she now hated. She could destroy Marcos Zappa who had spurned her and Bardoso who had outwitted her. And her father, she was keen enough to see, could be connected with nothing except the operation of the house of pleasure, which was not outside the law. The few men who had been swindled by means of the drugged wine certainly would not talk.

She listened at the door, which her father had barred on the outside, and heard a din below. She knew that her

father would not visit her room again during the night. He would think she had gone to sleep.

Señorita Anita snuffed the candles and thrust back the draperies at a window. Beside the window was a heavy vine. Clinging to it, she had made her descent to the ground once before this night, but her father did not know that. He had believed she had slipped down the rear staircase and left the house by the back door.

Swiftly, the *señorita* removed her night robe and put on a dress of dark material. She brushed and arranged her hair, touched it with perfume, and put perfume on her ears and lips. Then she let herself through the window and climbed swiftly down to the ground.

There was nobody in the rear patio. Keeping to the deep shadows, she dodged to the gate and got through it. Then, as silently as a shadow, she drifted away from the house and to the corner of the plaza.

It was some minutes later when she appeared suddenly before the half-asleep guard at the door of the *presidio*. He straightened and his eyes bulged when he saw his visitor.

"I must see the *capitán* at once," she said.

The guard came to life rapidly, bowed in admiration.

"*Si, señorita!* Be kind enough to wait here."

Capitán Cervera had retired, but he dressed quickly and went to his office room. The guard conducted the *señorita* there, then resumed his post.

"Is it something important, Señorita Gonzales?" Cervera asked.

"Can we be overheard, *Señor el Capitán*?"

"No. You may speak freely."

"I bring you intelligence which you may use to gain you promotion and reward, *capitán*," she said. "I ask but one thing—that you will do all in your power to save my father from trouble. He really is guilty of nothing."

"I'll do all I can, *señorita*, in the light of my duty."

SHE bent toward him and spoke rapidly in low tones, telling what she knew of the affairs of Don Pedro Garcia, Marcos Zappa and Bardoso. She explained details of the proposed pirate raid, told how Señorita de Vasquez was to be shamed. The *capitán* listened with an inscrutable face.

"It is almost beyond belief," he said.

"I have told you where you may obtain proof, *capitán*."

"Wait a moment."

Capitán Cervera drew a sheet of paper toward him, dipped quill in inkpot, and wrote swiftly, covering several pages with his scrawl.

"Read this, *señorita*," he said, when he had finished. "Is it substantially correct?"

"Sí, *mia capitán*," she replied, after she had read.

"Sign it, please."

"But I do not wish to become involved," she protested.

"You are already involved, *señorita*. You wish me to do all that I can for your father, do you not? Then, sign. And let me tell you something interesting—your statements merely confirm what I already know."

"You know, *señor*?" she asked, aghast.

"We soldiers are not entirely asleep, *señorita*. I know everything. We are only waiting for the proper moment before striking. Sign the statement, and I'll do everything I can to save your father. He has no part in the activities of the pirates, beyond a guilty knowledge, nor in the Marcos Zappa affair."

Señorita Anita signed.

"Thank you, *señorita*. Please remember that you are not to mention this to anyone else, or even to hint that you know anything. If you do, you may cause grave trouble for both your father and yourself. Now, may I assign a man to escort you home?"

"I prefer to go alone, *Señor el Capitán*. I can slip in as I slipped out."

"Would you care to tell me why you came to me with the story?"

"Perhaps it is a matter of revenge."

"Ha! I would dislike to have you at sword's point with me."

She smiled at him and arched her shoulder. "Perhaps I like you too well to ever fight with you, *mia capitán*," she said. "You look so distinguished in your uniform."

"You are wasting your blandishments on me, *señorita*," he told her, smiling also. "Why not save them for Bardoso, the pirate who apes the honest merchant? I have heard what happened at the inn earlier in the evening."

"'Twas a lie!" she raged. "Do you not understand? I went there hoping to meet Marcos Zappa in the patio as though by accident, talk to him and perhaps learn more of their plotting. And this Bardoso thought I was trying to trick him into a compromising position to get gold, and told that tale. I could kill him for it! That was why I came here, *capitán*—to have revenge on them both."

"*Señorita*, when it comes to plotting, all the Garcias, Zappas and Bardosos are mere babes compared to you," Capitán Cervera said. "I'll see you now to the door."

She walked close beside him along the semi-dark corridor, brushing against him frequently, leaning toward him so he would sense the perfume in her hair. But Capitán Cervera did not succumb.

"If you fear for my safety, *capitán*, why not walk home with me yourself?" she asked.

"I'd fear for my own safety, if I did so," he replied. "The night holds many dangers, and you are one of them, *señorita*. Shall I send a guard with you?"

She tossed her head angrily. "I do not care to walk home with a common soldier," she said. "*Buenas noches, mia capitán*."

Cervera laughed softly as she disappeared among the shadows.

CHAPTER XXIV

A DAGGER FOR THE GROOM

EARLY Sunday morning, while the dew was still on the growing things, Marcos Zappa started for Mission San Gabriel,

riding his horse beside the Vasquez carriage.

The little señorita was smiling shyly as she sat between her father and her *dueña*, and her eye encountered that of Marcos Zappa often enough.

Fray José met them at the door of the chapel, and spoke privately with Marcos Zappa for a time. Zappa and Señorita Manuela attended the mass, sitting side by side under the eye of the *dueña*, and the banns were read.

Outside the chapel, there were congratulations, and then the carriage went on to the hacienda, with Marcos Zappa riding beside it again.

A special dinner had been prepared by the servants at the hacienda, and during the meal Marcos Zappa and the *señorita* smiled under the gentle banter of Don Juan. Then Marcos Zappa went alone into the patio with Don Juan, and they discussed details of the betrothal feast the day following, and of the wedding ceremony.

Marcos Zappa was to return to Reina de Los Angeles alone. The others were to come to the town in the morning early, and remain there until after the wedding. Plans for the honeymoon were to be made later.

Mounted again, Marcos Zappa went slowly along the highway to the mission, where Carlos was waiting on his mule to accompany him to town. There was a scattering of horsemen, vehicles and people afoot along the highway, and men and women saluted Marcos Zappa, and some called good wishes after him.

He rode in a dark mood, thinking of what was to come. He thought principally of the shock to the *señorita*, but he knew it could not be avoided. Abruptly he recalled that he had not seen Don Miguel de Gandara at the chapel.

At a bend in the road, Don Pedro Garcia rode from behind a hedge and pulled up beside him.

"A fair day to you, Don Marcos Zappa!" he said. "Word has reached me that your happiness has been published

to all the world."

"The banns were read," Marcos Zappa said.

Don Pedro Garcia urged his horse closer and continued to speak in low tones:

"I'll appear at the betrothal feast, and there denounce you according to our agreement. Despite the fact that I am not liked by the Vasquez, I received an invitation to the affair."

"Don Pedro, can I not urge you to stop this thing?" Marcos Zappa asked.

"I HAVE told you I will not. I have worked too long for my revenge. If I did not denounce you, would you proceed with this marriage?"

"Only after the *señorita* and her father knew the truth."

"Ha! If they knew, there would be small chance of a wedding," Don Pedro said. "Attend me! After the denunciation, you will want to escape the *casa*. It will be dark, for I shall delay until the feast has started. The way will be clear through the rear patio. A horse will be waiting for you just outside the patio gate."

Zappa's eyes narrowed. "And the gold, *señor*?" he asked.

"You have concluded only half our bargain. What of Don Miguel?"

"You know what happened at the inn. I have not seen nor heard of him since."

"Are you physically fit to slay him?"

"Strength has been returning to my body, but my left arm remains in a sling, as you see. That would bother me considerably. But no doubt I can hold a blade, and even win if I force the fighting and make an end of it quickly."

"Send word to him then that you call him to account for slapping your face at the inn."

"And when do I fight him, *señor*?" Marcos Zappa asked. "If I fight him before the feast of betrothal and your great moment when you denounce me, and kill him, the feast probably will not be held. You will lose your chance at revenge."

"If I wait until after you have denounced me, he will be in his rights if he

refuses to fight a renegade. Even did he insist on doing so, thinking to kill me for the wrong done the *señorita*, when and where would we fight, if I am to make my escape immediately?"

"Do not think to avoid the combat by ingenious reasoning," Don Pedro said. "It can be arranged that he slip away first from the feast and go to the pleasure house of Gonzales to await you there. As soon as he is gone, I'll denounce you. When you escape, go to Gonzales' place as if you had slipped away also, and fight him in the big room there. I'll see that Gonzales admits nobody tomorrow evening."

"Very well, Don Pedro," Marcos Zappa said. "Let it be that way."

"I'll give you the gold at Gonzales' house after you kill Don Miguel, and you can ride on and join your pirate friends. For I want to be there, *señor*, and watch him slain. Now, I'll ride on ahead. We must not be seen too much together. All is understood?"

"Everything," Marcos Zappa said.

Don Pedro Garcia galloped ahead, and Zappa rode leisurely the remainder of the way to the inn. Carlos took his horse.

"If it is in your mind to strum a guitar beneath some window again tonight, Carlos, I will have no need of you," Zappa told him.

"I thank you, *señor*."

"Nor shall I need you at all after tomorrow evening."

"I understand that, Don Marcos." A smile flitted over Carlos' face. "I'll help you dress for the betrothal feast, and then you are done with me."

"Perhaps," Marcos Zappa muttered, so Carlos did not hear as he went away.

HE DINED in state that evening, watched the gambling in the inn for a time, and then retired to his chamber. He had told Rosa that she need not come to warm his bed tonight, for he expected Bardoso to pay him the secret visit they had arranged.

Sprawled in an easy chair with a goblet

of good wine at his elbow, Marcos Zappa mused and waited. In time, there came a cautious tapping at the door, and he called permission to enter. Bardoso opened the door, darted inside, and put up the heavy bar.

"Ho, honest merchant!" Marcos Zappa said. "How are your business affairs?"

"Everything is in readiness, *amigo*. The schooner has landed our men, and they are drifting toward Reina de Los Angeles to meet at a certain place not far from the town. We will raid tomorrow night, first the hacienda of Don Juan de Vasquez—where there will be only servants, since the family will be here in town—and then that of the Gandaras."

"Your plans are complete?"

"Sí. We fall back upon the town, and as the soldiers are sent chasing shadows up in the hills, we do as we please here. Then we retreat to the sea with our loot, taking a couple of days to do it. But, what have you heard, *amigo*?"

"There is activity among the soldiery," Marcos Zappa said. "How much they know of your plans, I am not sure. At any rate, you are guilty of nothing until you commit a crime. They will not touch you before you strike. I have a plan."

"I am all ears, Marcos Zappa."

"My feast of betrothal is tomorrow evening at the Vasquez *casa* here. You will be there as a guest."

"I, *señor*?"

"There will be a jam of people, and if you do not thrust yourself forward too much, you will not be noticed. At the feast, you may learn the latest news. Perhaps I will be able to whisper a warning if all is not well. If everything is all right, you can go from the feast to meet the men."

"Ha! It will be something to talk about afterward," Bardoso declared.

"Be open, *señor*. Go in and engage a room, and say you have simply returned to transact more business."

"That is an excellent idea."

"I'll be looking for you in the throng tomorrow evening. I will slap my friend,

the honest merchant, on his back and whisper into his ear anything I think will interest him."

Bardoso nodded gravely.

"For the last time, *amigo*—do you not want me to abduct the *señorita* for you?"

Marcos Zappa laughed and shook his head. "That would not work out well," he said.

Bardoso departed. Marcos Zappa got off his jacket, adjusted his arm in the sling again, and with some difficulty took off his boots. As he was about to finish undressing, there came another tap on the door.

He expected no other visitor, and was wary. Slipping his blade from its scabbard, he advanced to the door and pulled it open cautiously. Rosa and her Juan stood there.

"It is important, *señor*, else we would not have bothered you," the girl said.

Zappa beckoned them inside and closed the door. "Well?" he asked.

"I watched your man Carlos again this evening, *señor*, and saw him meet with the fishermen," Juan reported. "I got close enough to listen to their talk. They were drinking and were careless."

"And what occurred?"

"It is all arranged, *señor*—how they will attack and slay you. The wealthy man who is hiring them to do the deed planned it all. They will be in the darkness outside the rear patio of the Vasquez house. Their employer has told them that he will see you leave the house in that direction."

"As I suspected," Marcos Zappa said. "Juan, here is a piece of gold for you—and another for Rosa. I have spoken to old Fray José about you, and he will see you married. Talk to him about it when you wish."

"Oh, *señor!*" the girl cried.

"But what of you, *señor*?" Juan asked. "Will you not take precautions?"

Marcos Zappa smiled at him. "Do not worry, my boy. I'll not walk blindly into a trap. Get you gone, now! I feel the need of rest."

MARCOS ZAPPA slept later than usual the next morning. Carlos was waiting outside when he awoke, and called a servant to bring warm water for a bath. Marcos Zappa dressed carefully, then went to the main room of the inn for his breakfast.

"So, Don Marcos, there is to be a feast tonight in your honor," the landlord said. "You are a fortunate man, *señor*. The little *señorita* is adored by all who know her. May I express the hope that you will live to a ripe old age in this vicinity, and that before I die I may have the honor of serving your sons?"

"You already have expressed it," Marcos Zappa said, smiling. "Since I am going to a feast today, I'll have only a light repast now."

"Whatever you desire, Don Marcos."

"Fry me a couple of large tender steaks from a cow, but not too well done."

"I have some excellent ones, Don Marcos."

"A tender dove on a toasted tortilla. A paste of fruits and nuts. One dozen eggs stirred with milk and baked in an earthen dish."

"Immediately, Don Marcos."

"If you have any cool milk hanging in the well, bring me a jug of that. I'll have wine enough tonight."

"Don Marcos, I have heard that some sage once said that a man in love lost his appetite. The sage lied," the landlord declared.

Marcos Zappa chuckled, and the landlord hurried away. Then his face sobered as he began thinking. Manuela—the thought that he would soon hurt her, was a sharp pain in his mind. But things had gone so far now that there could be no retreat.

Bardoso passed through the room and saluted him from a distance. Some of the townsmen who entered the place nodded to him. They were a friendly people here in Reina de Los Angeles, he thought. The man who could make a home in this fair land was fortunate.

He returned to his chamber, where the

servants had set things to rights, rested for a time, then had Carlos help him change attire. It was suitable that he should wear his blade; but also he slipped a dagger into his sash, and that was not usual. He gave Carlos a couple of gold coins.

"You have served faithfully, though I am not quite sure whom you have been serving," Marcos Zappa said.

IT WAS almost sunset when he left the inn to walk the short distance alone to the Vasquez *casa*. The plaza was full of people, and the guests were hurrying toward the house. They had come in from their ranchos and haciendas, some from a distance of fifty miles or more.

One side of the plaza was choked with vehicles and horses. None who could get there had refused the invitation of Don Juan de Vasquez. It was an event when a daughter of that house gave betrothal.

Many were curious, too, to see the man who had won Señorita Manuela's heart. So, Marcos Zappa found himself much observed as he walked toward the house.

He passed slowly through the front patio, and Don Juan met him at the door and escorted him inside. He was presented to the more distinguished guests, and during this his manner held the proper amount of aloof dignity. Did he not know how to do it? Had he not been born to this?

Then the *señorita* came slowly down the stairs with her *dueña* behind her. Marcos Zappa went swiftly with Don Juan to the lowest step and reached up his right hand; he escorted her to a corner of the great main room of the *casa*, and there they stood with Don Juan and received the guests.

More guests arrived, and the common folk choked the rear patio, where tables had been set for them. In the big room were long tables dressed with choice napery, upon which crystal and silver gleamed in the light from the huge *candelabra*.

Don Juan led Marcos Zappa and Manuela to seats at the head of the main

table. Fray José approached them and bowed, gave them his blessing, poured and blessed wine for them. And then the feasting began.

Often the hand of the *señorita* slipped into Marcos Zappa's beneath the cover of the draped tablecloth, and each time her touch sent a wave of happiness through him.

As the feasting proceeded, musicians played and voices were raised in love songs out in the patio. Good wishes were shouted from the plaza in front of the house, where peons and natives had gathered, knowing well that Don Juan would send out food and drink to them before the banquet was done.

Marcos Zappa watched the guests, the crowd moving around the front patio continually. He saw Bardoso, clearly uncomfortable, sitting in a corner and watching him. There was no sign of Don Pedro Garcia; perhaps, Zappa thought, Don Pedro was busy stationing his assassins behind the rear patio wall.

Capitán Cervera was there, sitting at the principal table as representative of His Excellency the Governor. But Don Miguel de Gandara was missing.

Then, a while afterward, Marcos Zappa saw him. He realized that Don Miguel had been at a small table in a corner, eating with Fray José, who had declined a seat of honor. Many of the guests began rising now, and, Don Miguel arose also. With Fray José a step behind him, he approached.

Marcos Zappa eyed him, not knowing what to expect. Surely Don Miguel would not make a scene at such a time as this.

DON MIGUEL stopped near the head of the table. Don Juan sprang up and gripped his hand, and asked after the boy's father, who was too infirm to come to town for the feast. And then Marcos Zappa stood suddenly beside the *señorita's* chair, for Don Miguel had come on to them.

It grew quiet in the big room; for most of the persons there knew it had been

expected that Don Miguel would wed the *señorita* some day. Too, the report had spread that he had quarreled with Marcos Zappa when he had learned of the betrothal.

Marcos Zappa bowed stiffly, and Don Miguel returned his bow, then took the *señorita's* hand and bent over it.

"May happiness ever be thine, Manuela," he said, so that all in the room could hear. "We have known each other since we were children, and you are like a sister to me. I even hoped once that I might marry you. But that would have been a mistake, of course. One should wed only when the heart burns with love. If I have ever hurt you, *señorita*, I ask your forgiveness."

Manuela's eyes were misty as she looked up at him. "I thank you, Miguel, my brother," she said. "You could not hurt me, ever."

Then Don Miguel straightened, bowed to Marcos Zappa again, and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Don Marcos, before these guests I want to crave your pardon," he said. "Some days since, I had a certain sickness of the brain, during which I did not know friends from foes. They say I struck you in public, at the inn. All my life, *señor*, I shall regret that blow. I ask your pardon for it now, and if you feel that your honor calls upon you to take me to task—"

"Don Miguel de Gandara, you err!" Marcos Zappa interrupted. "The blow never was struck."

He held out his hand, and Don Miguel grasped it. Beside them, the *señorita* whispered: "Now I am utterly happy."

It was at that moment the crowd parted, and Don Pedro Garcia, dressed resplendently, strode down the room.

CHAPTER XXV

THIS RENEGADE, SEÑORES . . .

MARCOS ZAPPA'S face was expressionless as he watched Don Pedro approach. But the latter did not look at

him then. He went straight toward Don Juan de Vasquez, who bowed and held out his hand.

Pedro Garcia's eyes were glowing strangely, and his nostrils were dilated. He touched Don Juan's hand an instant, then took a step backward and lifted his head.

"I regret, *señor*, that I could not arrive earlier," Garcia said. "But I was busy gathering needed information in your interest."

"In my interest, *señor*?" Don Juan raised his eyebrows.

"Perhaps it is none of my affair, Don Juan. But our families have known each other for years, and we are both men of blood. When I received an inkling of a certain perfidy, I deemed it my duty to investigate and make sure before consulting you."

"Clarify your words, *señor*, if you please," Don Juan said.

"You are announcing the betrothal of your daughter, the *Señorita* Manuela, to this man who calls himself Marcos Zappa."

"That is true."

"Have you satisfied yourself, *señor*, as to Marcos Zappa's lineage, position in life, his character and estate?"

"That is the duty of the girl's father," Don Juan said, stiffly. "If it is any of your concern, I have satisfied myself."

"Then I fear, *señor*, that you have been fooled."

Pedro Garcia's voice rang around the room. Don Juan drew himself up.

"What mean you, Don Pedro?" he asked.

"I heard rumors; I have made investigation, and have proof. This man's name is not Marcos Zappa."

"But I saw credentials, letters—"

"Forged, no doubt."

"Do you mean to say this gentleman is an impostor?" Don Juan cried.

"I do not even admit he is a gentleman."

"Are you mad, *señor*? Don Marcos—"

"Let him speak on," Marcos Zappa said, his face as hard as stone.

Pedro Garcia drew in his breath deeply. His eyes were glittering as he looked at Don Juan and the *señorita*.

"THIS man's name is Felipe Hernandez. He once was close to the Viceroy. But he forgot his heritage, became enamored of a native wench, conspired with her people against the government—"

"You accuse him of being that man?" Don Juan demanded.

"I do, *señor*. Nor is that all. He was branded a renegade and exiled. He threw in his lot with pirates. He is a member of a pirate crew now, I understand. And this is the man to whom you have given the hand of your daughter, Don Juan de Vasquez."

There was silence in the big room, save for the sounds of heavy breathing. The *señorita* whimpered and clasped Don Marcos' hand with her own.

"Do not even answer such an absurd accusation," she said. "Don Pedro must be mad."

"You heard what he said, *señorita*," Marcos Zappa replied. "If it were true—?"

"It could not be true, *señor*. I trust my own heart. I know you for an honorable gentleman. But, even if this terrible thing were true, Marcos Zappa, I still would love you. Were you proved a scoundrel, I'd love you. For I could not help myself."

Marcos Zappa's face glowed an instant. "I thank you for your trust, *señorita*," he said.

She turned to face her father. "Have your servants whip this man Garcia from our house," she said. "He has come here in the hope that he can disturb us—"

"Your pardon, *señorita*," Garcia interrupted. "I dislike to be the bearer of such news. But would it not be better to know the truth now than after marriage? I thought I was doing a great favor to your house in unmasking this man."

"Your word is not proof enough, *señor*!" Don Juan cried.

"You want proof, Don Juan? Why does

this man wear his hair so long and in such a fashion? Why does he fasten it so with a band around his head? I'll tell you, *señor*. To conceal the brand of the renegade on his forehead!"

Marcos Zappa stood straight and rigid. His eyes were gleaming, but his face did not move. Don Juan turned toward him.

"Marcos, my son-to-be," he said, "no doubt this man is mad and what he has said must be a pack of lies. I do not doubt you. But it will be easy to show. Pedro Garcia his mistake. Will you, of your free will, expose your forehead for us to see?"

Pedro Garcia's eyes were mocking. "It is the end for you, *señor*," he told Marcos Zappa. "Take off your head-band and brush back your long hair and let us see the mark, *Señor el Renegado*!"

Marcos Zappa looked straight at him, at Don Juan and the *señorita*; then slowly he lifted his right hand. He seized the headband and tore it off. Those around him bent forward, tense and silent.

Marcos Zappa put up his hand again and seized the lock of hair over his forehead. "You say the brand of the renegade is on my forehead, Don Pedro Garcia?" he asked.

"I do!"

"If it is not there, I shall immediately call you to account."

"Ha! My blade is ready to cross yours, *señor*, if I err. Enough of this mockery! You can no longer delay the exposure, *señor*. We are waiting."

Then, Marcos Zappa smiled and brushed aside the long hair. And all close to him could see that his forehead was fair and smooth, without a blemish on it.

"*Dios!*" Pedro Garcia cried. "What trick is this?"

"Are you the one to speak of tricks, *señor*?" Marcos Zappa asked him. "Perhaps you have some explanation? You have accused a man of a thing unspeakable and caused a lady pain—"

"The brand was there! I saw it myself," Pedro Garcia raged. "Attend me, all! I say this man is Felipe Hernandez—"

"That is true."

"That he is a renegade—"

"And that is not true," Marcos Zappa said. "There is a renegade here, but I am not the man. You are, Pedro Garcia!"

IN HIS rage, Garcia started to hurl himself forward, his right hand darting to the dagger in his belt. But suddenly Capitán Cervera and one of his men seized his arms and held him. He struggled in vain to get free.

"Release me!" Garcia stormed.

"Be quiet, *señor*, else we use more force," Cervera warned.

"You dare speak so to me? I'll have you punished for your insolence!"

"Silence, *señor*. Fray José has something to say as to this."

The old *fray* had shuffled to the head of the table and had been patting the *señorita* reassuringly on her shoulder. Now he stepped forward and looked at Pedro Garcia, and then around at the company.

"My children, it is not a pretty story," he said. "But all of us who love truth, who admire sacrifice and nobility, are proud if this man who calls himself Marcos Zappa is our friend."

"He is Felipe Hernandez, known as a renegade, whose name has been held up to scorn. I have known of it for a long time."

"And did not warn us, *fray*?" Don Juan cried.

"He had work to do, and I could not ruin his plans," the *fray* replied. "Some three years ago, it became known that the pirates who preyed upon the coast of Alta California had an ally on the shore. That he was a man of high birth became apparent, but his name could not be learned."

"He informed the pirates where and when to strike, told them how to locate the riches of his friends, in the houses where he was a welcome guest because of his rank. The Viceroy became determined to rid the earth of such a man."

"Felipe Hernandez suggested a plan and volunteered for the duty. He pretended

to fall in love with a native girl in Mexico. He declared her people were mistreated and seemingly headed an uprising. So he was caught; it was given out that the brand of the renegade had been stamped on his forehead and that he was exiled from the Mexican mainland.

"The branding was not done publicly. It was not a real branding. The mark was made with chemicals which dried and puckered the skin and made the mark look like a brand. Felipe Hernandez, scion of a noble house, allowed the world to believe him one who turned against his own kind. This he did in his king's service."

"News of his infamy was spread, and reached those he wished it to reach—the pirates. He contrived to fall in with them in Baja California, and became one of their crew. He lived their life and won their confidence, always seeking to ascertain the name of the man who was their ally on this coast."

"Gradually he gathered proof and submitted it to the officials at Monterey, who had intelligence from Mexico as to his real identity and what he was doing. When he came near this locality, I received the story from my superiors in Mexico. And they sent me chemicals and instructions how to bleach the brand off his forehead."

"I had a chance to do that when he was sorely broken in body after rescuing the *señorita* from the runaway. And I learned how this Pedro Garcia, thinking him to be a renegade, had made a deal with him."

"For a thousand pieces of gold, Marcos Zappa was to win the love of the *señorita*, so Pedro Garcia could shame her by exposing his identity, as he tried to do tonight. And he also was to quarrel with and slay Don Miguel de Gandara, whom this Garcia hates."

"This deal brought them together and gave Marcos Zappa an opportunity to gather the remaining evidence he needed. But it chanced that he fell deeply in love with the *señorita*, and she with him, hence this feast tonight. It was necessary to withhold knowledge of all this until now,

that Pedro Garcia might fall into the trap."

"What lies are these?" Garcia cried. "Has he made a fool of you also, *fray*? Or is this some trick of your own? You dared remove the renegade brand officials put on this man's forehead? There is friction between the Franciscans and the government—"

CAPITÁN CERVERA silenced him with a gesture and stepped toward him. Then it was seen that four of Cervera's men had appeared quietly and were standing around Pedro Garcia.

"Allow me to conclude this scene," Cervera said. "When this man you know as Marcos Zappa appeared here, he communicated with me. I sent word to Monterey and received from there by courier, straight from His Excellency the Governor, the truth as relayed from Mexico. I was told how to act.

"Pedro Garcia, I arrest you in the King's name and the name of his Viceroy for high treason. You are to be sent to Monterey in chains to stand trial."

There was a chorus of cries, and Marcos Zappa suddenly found the *señorita* clinging to his right hand and Don Juan patting him on the shoulder. But Capitán Cervera signaled for silence again.

"Pedro Garcia was the ally of the pirates," he said. "We have the proof. He engaged Marcos Zappa to do the perfidies of which the *fray* spoke. He is part owner of the pleasure house run by Esteban Gonzales, where gentlemen of his own station were tricked and robbed of gold. He planned to have Marcos Zappa escape from this house after being denounced—and had four men waiting to kill him as he escaped. My soldiers have the four.

"Esteban Gonzales and his daughter were informed a short time ago that they must quit this vicinity before the setting of another sun. Pirates even now are about us, for Pedro Garcia plotted with them to raid the haciendas of the Vasquez and the Gandaras late tonight. We have both places guarded.

"Because these pirates have actually made no move here, I shall not proceed against them, for Marcos Zappa, having been their comrade, wishes them a chance to escape present punishment."

At that moment Bardoso, standing back against the wall and weak from astonishment, made his way swiftly out of the house, through the front patio, and into the night, on the way to warn his men. They would be on the schooner and at sea as soon as they could manage.

Pedro Garcia, his lips curled, still stood at the side of the table with the eyes of all upon him. The soldiers pressed closer. Then Don Miguel de Gandara thrust his way forward.

"Though you are a renegade, Pedro Garcia, I will cross swords with you!" he cried. "Not because you plotted to have me foully slain, but because you tried to bring shame to *Señorita* Manuela and her house." He drew back his arm and slapped Pedro Garcia across the face, and the crack of the blow could be heard through all the room.

"I thank you, Don Miguel, my friend, but this is my affair," Marcos Zappa said. "My work is not finished until I have attended to this rogue. I owe him two years' absence from decency and many affronts."

"He is my prisoner—" Capitán Cervera began.

"Did you not have instructions, *capitán*, to allow me discretion in this matter?" Marcos Zappa asked, smiling. "Let the front patio be cleared. The torches in the wall give ample light. And post your soldiers, so this renegade cannot run away."

"*Dios!*" Pedro Garcia cried. "That is one thing I never will do."

"My love," the *señorita* was protesting, clinging to Marcos Zappa's arm. "You are weak—"

"*¡Sí!* You are but poorly mended in body, Don Marcos," Miguel cried. "And your left arm is still in splints. This Garcia is a noted swordsman. Let me attend to him for you."

"It is my duty—and my delight," Marcos Zappa said. "Let the patio be cleared."

Capitán Cervera gave orders, and Pedro Garcia was led into the patio. The soldiers began ordering the guests to go to other parts of the house.

Don Juan de Vasquez touched Marcos Zappa on the shoulder. "My son—" he began, and choked.

"It must be done, Don Juan."

"It must be done—*sí*. But I wish you were in better condition."

"The memories of the past two years will give strength to my arm."

Señorita Manuela clung to him. "Come back to me, beloved," she said. "I'll be waiting here at the head of the table."

CHAPTER XXVI

TORCHLIGHT ON STEEL

A HUSH had fallen over those in the feasting throng. They grouped around the tables, speaking only in whispers. They watched the *señorita* as she settled herself in the chair at the head of the table. Don Juan handed her a glass of wine, and she took a tiny sip. The hand which held the glass trembled.

Most of the men had gone outside to watch from beyond the patio wall and from the doorway. Fray José, oblivious of those around him, knelt quietly in a corner to pray.

Don Miguel de Gandara helped Marcos Zappa off with his jacket, removed his sword belt, tightened the sling which held the wounded arm. At Marcos Zappa's gesture, Don Miguel drew the blade and offered it, and Marcos Zappa grasped the hilt.

"If I could do this for you—" Miguel said.

"It is something I must do myself, *amigo*."

"Forgive me, if for a moment I held dislike for you," the boy begged. "Manuela was right to give you her love. A woman's intuition is to be trusted in such matters. If anything goes amiss, *señor*, she will not

survive the shock. Take that thought with you, and may it give you strength and skill."

"I am sure it will, my friend."

"If anything does go amiss with you, I promise to slay the rogue even if I am compelled to do it foully. You are not forced to fight him, for he is a renegade. Why not see him hanged?"

"It is too late to change the affair, and I would not have it changed," Marcos Zappa said. "And, though Pedro Garcia is what he is, the fact remains that his lineage is a high one. Regardless of his perfidy, he should not die by the rope."

"That is true, *señor*."

"If you are ready, Don Miguel, we will go to the patio now."

In the patio, the others were waiting. Pedro Garcia had removed his jacket and rolled up his ruffled sleeves. He had drawn his blade, and held it ready. He stood back against the wall, while soldiers guarded the arches and men with strained faces watched on every side.

"You are slow to come to your death, *señor*," Pedro Garcia said, when Marcos Zappa stepped through the doorway.

"Are you so eager to rush to yours?" Marcos Zappa countered.

"I'll deal my repartee with my blade, *señor*, not with my tongue."

Capitán Cervera took up the position of judge.

"One last chance, *señores*," he called, according to the code of the day. "Is it not possible this conflict can be avoided?"

"It is not!" Pedro Garcia said.

"It is unavoidable," Marcos Zappa declared.

Cervera drew his own blade.

"Then I warn you, *señores*, that at the first foul move, with my own blade I'll cut down the man responsible. Is this engagement to the death?"

"To the death!" they both answered.

"The victor, having risked his own life, is absolved in advance of the crime of homicide. Prepare to engage, *señores*."

A moment later, steel clashed and rang.

PEDRO GARCIA'S onslaught was swift and terrific. He seemed expending his rage in the attack. Marcos Zappa fell back quickly, cautiously on guard. Garcia, too experienced to let his rage rob him of skill, controlled himself quickly and began a methodical battle.

Carefully, Marcos Zappa felt him out. In his present physical condition, he could not endure a long contest. Every move lessened his precious supply of strength. He would have to make a quick end of it if he was to emerge victor, yet could he not let a desire for haste lead him into carelessness.

For he knew, in the first minute of fighting, that Pedro Garcia was clever with a blade. The man had been well taught, and had had experience in duels before. But Marcos Zappa had lived with pirates for two years, men who fought on after defeat had put its stamp on them; and he had learned much from them.

The sputtering torches gave a treacherous light, and both men fought for the advantage of it. For an instant, Marcos Zappa had the flare of one in his eyes, and saw a dozen blades against him when there was but one. He felt the bite of Garcia's weapon in his left shoulder, heard the exclamations of the watchers.

Marcos Zappa remained cool. He was careful to keep a position where the light would not bother him. There was a swift exchange, and the point of his blade ripped Pedro Garcia's ruffled shirt and stained it with blood.

"Perhaps the brand is gone from your forehead, *señor*, but I'll carve one over your heart," Garcia cried.

"You bear your brand now, *señor*," Marcos answered. "But I'll give you the opportunity to forget it—in death."

Garcia began another furious onslaught, driving Marcos Zappa back almost to the patio wall. The ringing steel sent a shower of echoes beating against the house. Marcos Zappa felt his strength ebbing rapidly. His vision was growing dim, and his breathing became labored. He realized

that he was losing much blood from the shoulder wound.

He remembered the ordeal of the past two years, the work he had done, and told himself this renegade should not triumph now. He thought of the *señorita* waiting for him at the head of the table.

Pedro Garcia continued the onslaught. Marcos Zappa retreated before the furious attack. A sudden rage came to him, and he stood and fought, then pressed the attack himself.

This was his last chance, he knew. He felt the bite of Garcia's blade again, this time in his left thigh. Red flashes came before his eyes. The torches seemed to be dancing on the walls.

His vision was dimming again. Every breath he drew meant a pain in his chest. His blade felt like a weight of lead in his hand. His arm was growing weary. His legs were wobbling.

"This is the end, *señor!*" Pedro Garcia cried.

He laughed and pressed the fighting again. But he grew careless in his eagerness. Marcos Zappa got the feel of his adversary's blade, and he knew Pedro Garcia had overreached himself, that he could not recover in time. With his last strength, Marcos Zappa drove his own blade forward.

Pedro Garcia reeled aside and tossed wide his arms. Steel rang as his sword dropped to the flagstones of the patio floor. Then Pedro Garcia dropped also, his arms asprawl, his eyes rolling, great gasps coming from his lips, and his life's blood flowing into the ground.

Marcos Zappa did not see him die. For Marcos Zappa had lurched on past his fallen enemy, dropping his own blade and starting to fall headlong. Don Miguel and Capitán Cervera caught him as he fell.

WHEN he opened his eyes, he was in the *casa*, in a room on the second floor. He was stretched on a couch, and Fray José was working over him. The flow of blood had been stopped, his wounds were bandaged, and his nostrils tingled

from the sting of the salts which had brought him back to consciousness.

"You are with us again, my son," Fray José said. "Let us hope for many years."

"For many, many years," Marcos Zappa muttered, smiling. "I have so much living to do now."

His sight cleared, and he saw Don Juan and Miguel standing beside the couch.

"Do not let them stop the feast," he begged. "Though I am too weak just now to go down and dance, others may, and I can listen to the music. The *señorita*—"

"Cried herself almost sick with joy, but she is calm again now," her father said. "Cover his nakedness, Fray José, for here she comes—and all the *duchás* in the world could not prevent her."

She came rushing into the room and knelt beside the couch, laughing and weeping at the same time. She kissed Marcos Zappa on the lips.

"I shall nurse you," she said. "You will soon be well. And Fray José shall not starve you this time, beloved. What meals you will have!"

"Broiled doves with a sauce of cherries," he said, his eyes twinkling.

"*Si, señor!*"

"Fish baked with the rinds of wild oranges—"

Smiling, she placed a finger over his lips. "Enough," she said. "I shall be your servant."

"Then I beg a service of you now, such as you gave me a moment ago."

She bent over him, and when she lifted her head again, her eyes were brilliant. Fray José touched her gently on the shoulder.

He knew, that good man.

"Let him sleep now, *señorita*," the *fray* whispered. "Let him sleep . . . and dream."

THE END

Looking Ahead!



MAKER OF SHADOWS

Before Time itself, they were—dancing their evil rigadoons in the living mist. They had died yet they were immortal, for each of them, dying, gave life to the Maker of Shadows, the Spinner of Webs. . . . Gees, that blithe young seeker-out of mysteries found *his* trace and knew that to save the life of a lovely young girl, he would have to kill this Master of Darkness. But Gees had sworn to uphold the law—not to break it. A gripping new novel of worlds beyond the world of man, by

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