

The Bullfighter

A ROMANCE OF THE THRILLING SPORT OF THE ARENA

By T. S. Stribling

Author of "Birthright," "East Is East," etc.

XIX

RAFAEL'S dissertation on the right and wrong of marriage did not convince even Socorro Jiminez; but it soothed and comforted the girl, and lent her a certain moral support, to know that her brother upheld her course. Still, there was no escaping the fact that it was very, very wrong of her to sit in the garden with Señor Angel and allow him—nay, virtually invite him—to kiss and embrace her, as she had done.

After she had returned to her room that night, the enormity of her conduct so grew upon her and shamed her that she could not even remember how Rafael had arranged the logical members of his syllogism to make her appear in the right. Finally, restlessness routed her out of her chamber and sent her over to Rafael's study, for a restatement of the grounds of her defense.

But Rafael had that mercurial type of mind which never repeats a formula. This time he justified his sister's conduct by telling her that all human life was a compromise between the laws of society and the individual will. The objects of these two forces were usually diametrically opposed. Any social body made an effort to preserve itself, and that was the reason for the convention forbidding marriage outside of one's own circle. On the other hand, the individual was impelled toward mésalliances to reinvigorate the original human stock with the increased vitality of a mixed breed. So all human life whirled about these cross currents—aristocracies tending to destroy life and preserve social forms, the individual tending to renew life and destroy social forms.

"Now that is why an outside marriage

pleases a girl and shocks her family," said the poet, smiling.

"But which is right and which is wrong?" demanded Socorro, with the feminine desire for a rule of thumb.

"My dear sister," laughed Rafael, "if you want a commandment, go to the priests. If you want to do as you please, come to the philosophers."

That was all she could get out of Rafael—nothing very definite or satisfactory. However, the *señorita* was not really unhappy. Inside of every woman run two distinct codes, and her fealty shifts from one to the other with the exigencies of her life.

Socorro made her brother promise to go and tell Angelito the family's decision early next morning. Then Rafael kissed her, wished her, rather tamely, any happiness that her proposed marriage might bring her, and sent her away to her own room, while he resumed the grave task of putting into Spanish verse his thoughts on the subject of glands.

Whatever was the disturbance in the Jiminez family, Angelito's pain was more acute than Socorro's, because his sense of loss was more fundamental. It seemed to him that he had irretrievably lost the girl he loved.

He went to sleep with this hag riding his heart. At intervals, all night long, he would struggle out of the vague and symbolic torments of his dreams into a gray hopelessness of ever possessing Socorro Jiminez. In his twilight state of lethargy, desire and tenderness flooded him. His memory became an inquisitor which tortured him with endless repetitions of the kisses he had received in the garden, of the softness of her flesh, of her arms about his

Copyright, 1923, by T. S. Stribling—This story began in the December (1923) number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

neck, of the faint fragrances of her hair and body.

These graces, these refinements, these perfumes, this voluptuousness, were in conjunction with the sweetest and simplest innocence. They blended in him a fever of desire and a surpassing tenderness—the unstable combination of a lover. Her phantom came and lingered beside him with an aching sweetness.

Amid the pain of his longing and his hopelessness, the music of the “Hymn of the Sun” slowly reestablished itself in his sleep-drugged brain—that strange, melancholy movement, the repeated, delicately modulated cadenzas, which were like sad questions asking:

“Can this be love? Is this endless grieving passion? Oh, night, does your sea-blue bowl hold only the waters of desire and sadness and despair?”

The music beat in the bullfighter's brain. By slow degrees his thoughts became bent and distorted with returning sleep, and presently his consciousness was filled once more with the *jacquerie* of dreams.

When Angelito arose, at eight o'clock next morning, the braying of donkeys in Traposo Calle, the cries of the street vendors, the sound of his mother rattling pots in the kitchen, tempered somewhat his nocturnal impression that all existence centered in and ended with Socorro Jimenez. The bustling, matter-of-fact sounds suggested a certain possibility of life proceeding without her.

His bath helped him. In a shower bath, muscles become an end in themselves. The sunshine slanting among the pink columns of his *patio* suggested peace, if not joy. The black coffee his mother served him at the breakfast table revived in him a faint hope that his suit had not been utterly rejected.

Rafael had promised to come and tell him the family's decision. However, if the decision was adverse, he did not expect young Jimenez to come. Among the Latins all couriers bring good news, or they bring no news at all. Almost unconsciously Angelito began listening for the doorbell. If the bell should ring—if Rafael should come—

As he sat sipping his coffee, with rather a drugged feeling from his unwholesome night, there really came a clanging at his door.

The bullfighter upset his coffee. A shock

went through every nerve in his body. Old Ana, who had been smoldering at her son ever since he entered the kitchen, now burst into eruption.

“*Caramba*, look at you—jumping as if that was your passing bell! I knew you were waiting for somebody or something—a woman, a baggage, some *señorita* who doesn't care two *centesimos* for you, but is after your bolivars!”

“*Diantre!*” cried Angelito. “Go to the door and see who it is! Don't stand there sputtering all day!”

The bullfighter had half risen, but he controlled himself and sat down again. The ring of the bell could mean only that Rafael had come with an affirmative answer. He tried to take some coffee from his shaking cup into his dry mouth.

“Go on!” he managed to say. “Don't stand there all day!”

Old Ana turned and shuffled off through the *patio* with an obstinate plopping of her *alpargatas*. Angelito watched intently as she disappeared among the columns. After a prolonged wait she reappeared, wearing a sardonic smile in the wrinkles of her weather-worn face.

Angelito watched her anxiously, wondering whom she had seen and what she had done. He thought, with trepidation, that it was not one whit beyond her to refuse Rafael admittance to the house, or to tell him that Angelito was not at home. She might do anything.

She came plopping back with her enigmatic grimace, and then, when she was quite close to him, she drew from behind her a damp copy of a newspaper and flung it down on the table in front of her son.

“There's your *Sol y Sombra*,” she snapped. “That's what you were spilling your coffee and kicking the table over about! The boy had brought your *Sol y Sombra!*”

Her sardonic smile grew sourer, and she turned, with a shrug, to her pots again.

Angelito felt the peculiar tightening of the chest that comes of a sharp disappointment. He made an effort to hide this from his mother. He took up the paper mechanically, and unfolded its limp pages.

Over the front page was spread a long description of Juan Leon's fighting bulls, and the complicated methods by which the animals were prevented from seeing a human being from the day when they were calved until the moment when they charged

into the arena with barbs sticking in their shoulders.

Angelito could not read the article. The desolating fact that the Jiminez family had decided against him made reading impossible. He stared at the page, and his eyes picked out isolated phrases:

Raised on the loneliest haciendas—driven by night to the railroad—shipped to the arena in closed cars—driven blindfolded to the *circo*—imagine the fury of a thoroughbred fighting bull when confronted for the first time in his life, in the glare and uproar of the arena, by his natural enemy, man!

Angelito's brain functioned sufficiently for him to know that he was reading about the coming Spanish *corrida*. He began planning some sort of reprisal for his treatment by the Jiminez family.

In the coming *corrida* he was to be second *espada*. He determined that when that moment came, he would carry his part through with such spectacular daring that Spanish impresarios would invite him to the *circos* of old Spain; that eventually he would be making a world tour with a shipload of fighting bulls. Then, when the Jiminez family saw that they had rejected a world-famous man, he could imagine their sensations!

But then he thought he might make Socorro unhappy, and he did not want to do that. The very suggestion of Socorro filled Angelito with a melting tenderness. He would never be allowed to marry her, but even so he would always love her. In the bullfighter's heart there grew up a dim vision of a tenderness and a love for a woman which could persist quite without marriage or any physical contact.

As he sat thinking on this new and wistful possibility, he recalled tales he had heard the priests tell of saints in old times, who loved with all the ardor and passion of earthly lovers, and yet were monks. That was a strange thing, love divorced from flesh; yet here in his own heart he heard its possibility reiterated.

He was thinking wistfully on this point when he heard his name called from the *patio*.

The bullfighter looked around, straightened, then stared. Rafael Jiminez stood in the *patio*, at the entrance of the kitchen, smiling at him. Such a sudden flood of happiness swept over Angelito that he could hardly find his voice.

"Rafael! It's you!" he cried in an

amazed voice. "Does it mean that I am fortunate? *San Pablo, hombre*, don't stand there laughing like that!"

Rafael spread his hands.

"How do I know whether you are fortunate or not? You are accepted. That's not the same thing. Send old Ana off on an errand, *mi amigo*, and we will have a little talk."

Angelito glanced at his mother uncertainly, and delayed action a trifle by asking Rafael how he got into the *casa*.

"I found the door unlocked. I thought, everything considered, that I might walk in unannounced."

The bullfighter was more delighted than ever at this brotherly approach in Rafael.

"Sit down here by the table," he invited rapturously. He turned to his mother again with some of his rapture vanishing. "Ana," he said, with some hesitation, "you might go to the market now and buy our *comida*."

"Yes," interposed Rafael, drawing a coin from his pocket at the obstinate set of the old woman's face. "Take this, Ana. Buy one of your lottery tickets and keep it for yourself. You might draw a fortune."

He handed a five-bolivar piece to the crone. The old woman took the silver sulkily, and started off, muttering. Then, suddenly, she broke into the violent obscenity of a peon enraged, and flung it on the tiles.

"Ana!" cried the bullfighter furiously, fearing lest this outburst might break off his delicate negotiations with Rafael.

Old Ana went on, and the two men looked after her.

"Servants get like that when you keep them too long," observed Rafael. "They get to owning you. I shouldn't be surprised if, when Socorro comes here, you had better get rid of the old virago and hire another girl."

"Yes—yes," hesitated Angelito. He jumped up and rushed over to his companion. "Friend of my soul!" he cried. "I can hardly realize that I am the accepted lover of your sister, that Socorro will be my bride!"

He threw his arms about his friend's neck, and kissed him on both cheeks. The crippled youth smiled faintly as he accepted the bullfighter's caresses.

"My dear Angelito, I assure you that your pleasure is hardly greater than my own."

"I can hardly comprehend it!" glowed the *torero*. "*Hombre*, a saint out of heaven would not be more welcome! To think of my amazing good fortune!"

Rafael patted him on the shoulder, and moved toward a chair at the table. The *espada* went on in his ebullient mood.

"*Caramba*, but I was a despairing man, Rafael! I was afraid that my—er—sitting in the garden would prejudice the *señora* against me."

"It did," admitted Rafael frankly.

"And it prejudiced the *Señorita Margarita*, too, I suppose—I could see that much last night."

"*Cá, naturalmente*, it did," agreed Rafael dryly.

"I saw that, so you can imagine how I spent the night, dear Rafael. *Diantre*, a night of torture! To fling away by my own act the most beautiful, the tenderest, the most virtuous—"

"My dear Angelito," laughed Rafael, "if you hadn't committed your indiscretion in the garden, you would never have gained *maman's* consent to your suit."

"I gained the *señora's* consent by acting improperly?"

"*Seguramente*, it forced her hand. You know the conventional penalty for such a peccadillo is the marriage of the offending parties, Angelito. It would never enter my mother's head to question that convention, to question the wisdom of giving my sister to a breaker of the rules of conduct."

"It is rather a queer punishment," admitted Angelito, who had never thought of it before, "to insist that a lover should take what he most desires. Since you mention it, I wonder what your mother meant by that."

The poet waved a finger.

"*Nada!* My mother meant nothing at all. She simply followed a convention as automatically as an insect follows its instincts. By the way, have you ever thought that the conventions of society and the instincts of animals are exactly analogous?"

"No, I never did; but your mother—"

"There is a convention here in Caracas that a youth and a maiden who have enjoyed dual solitude in a garden must marry. Why they should marry, or how their marriage can cancel their indiscretion, is a matter not to be questioned by a woman. It is accepted as a miraculous fact, like the transubstantiation."

The poet's satirical flavor disturbed An-

gelito in his new happiness. The suggestion that he had in the slightest degree compromised Socorro pained him. He wanted her to appear to the world, as she appeared to him, adorned with a sort of celestial purity.

A line of reasoning popped into his head to prove that she still retained her transcendental estate.

"But *mire*, my friend," he began, "listen to this—if there is a convention that two persons shall marry after certain things have happened, then that shows that Socorro has never really stepped outside of the conventions, for there is a rule governing her case."

The crippled youth began laughing again.

"You really are in earnest, I suppose, about wanting my sister to be a very paragon of propriety!"

"*Seguramente, señor.*"

"I fancy you never had a sister."

"No."

"I thought not. They don't come like that. However, listen—I will give you a more comfortable way of looking at conventions than what you have. You place too much accent on conventions, and too little on persons. You have observed that some conventions are a little flexible, as in your own case. Why is that?"

"*Cá!* To save us suffering, I suppose."

"Not at all. It is because the persons who break that particular convention are the most ardent, and therefore the most valuable individuals of our race. Their offspring will be the most vigorous, and will have the greatest share of the *élan vital* which propels life to its mysterious goal. So, you see, this whole disturbance is the very greatest compliment that could be paid you. Instead of holding the episode in regret, you should wear it upon your sleeve as a decoration."

"*Caramba*, what an idea! And did your mother think of all that? She must be the wisest—"

"My mother think of it? *Diantre*, no!" cried Rafael, amazed. "That is simply the rational foundation at the back of her instinct. She submits to it with ill grace and much complaining, but if I should tell her why she submits to it, she would think I had gone utterly insane."

"Then, *diablo*, why does she—"

"My dear fellow, how does a bee fly straight to its hive after wandering and

turning among flowers all day? Women are the custodians of life. They divine its necessities. They sacrifice themselves, their kin, their loves, their ambitions, and even their vanity, at its behest. My dear Angelito, it is a miracle. It is the finger of God!"

The two men sat for some moments in silence.

"I shall tell that to Socorro," the bullfighter said, after a time. "I know it will make her happy."

The poet held up his finger.

"Don't do it. Human beings, Angelito, are occupied mainly in justifying their actions to themselves. A man always saves his face by reasoning away his peccadilloes. A woman dismisses hers according to how she feels. That is why every reconciliation between the sexes must be based on simple forgiveness. They have no mutual ground for explanations."

"Then I had better not mention this to Socorro?"

"No—she already feels perfectly at ease about her conduct. The best thing you can do is to assist her in forgetting it."

Rafael picked up the copy of *Sol y Sombra* which Angelito had dropped on the table, and glanced idly through the paper. The bullfighter sat glowing over his suddenly changed prospects.

Into what a family he was marrying! His brilliant brother-in-law, his heavenly wife, even his aristocratic mother-in-law! What a step up for a peon boy born in the slums of the Matadero!

His pleasant musings were interrupted by an exclamation from Rafael.

"What is it?" asked the bullfighter.

"*Diablo*, listen to this!" cried the poet, and in a voice trembling with wrath he began reading an article from the paper:

A CALL TO PURITY

Aristocrats of Caracas, take heed! We have been too lax in our solidarity. We have been negligent guardians of the sacred blood of the old Conquistadors. Into that pure stream is draining turgid, bestial peon blood, which is stultifying our lineage, dulling our intellects, corrupting our manners, and debasing our morals.

Lacking in breeding, courtesy, aplomb, and gentility, the social scum which chance has thrown into our midst does not hesitate to go to the extremes of indecency in order to force itself into matrimonial alliances with the aristocratic families of this city.

Not long ago the writer of this article had the painful experience of seeing a certain peon, who has some notoriety as a bullfighter, seated at mid-

night in a garden with a *señorita*, unaccompanied by any *dueña*.

This young woman has hitherto been of the most honorable repute, as well for her modesty as for her beauty and talents. Without doubt this scurrilous killer of bulls—it would be too great a compliment to call him a *torero*— inveigled the young lady into this compromising position, but for which her family would never have countenanced the low and vicious purpose of forcing his marriage to the unfortunate *señorita*—a marriage otherwise impossible.

With such contemptible devices, fellow aristocrats, is the *canaille* intrenching on our racial purity. Such conduct is worse than seduction. Seduction slays one individual; *mésalliances* contaminate the race. Such unions should be ostracized by society and banned by our holy church.

During Rafael's passionate reading the bullfighter sat listening with vague comprehension. All that he gathered distinctly was that a bullfighter had sat in a garden with a *señorita*. This much of the philippic came home to him with a certain familiarity.

"Who wrote it?" he asked.

"Who should write it," cried Rafael, "but Narciso Montauban?"

"What did he say about a garden?" inquired Angelito.

"*Diablo*, he publicly accuses you and my sister of sitting in a garden together at midnight!"

"*Cà*, that is a fact!" ejaculated Angelito uncomfortably.

"*Fuego*!" cried Rafael, striking the table with his fist. "What if it is a fact? Is Montauban to be allowed to publish every indiscretion my family commits?"

"Did he really say us? I didn't hear any names."

"He said that a *torero* had induced a *señorita* to sit with him in her garden. You know everybody will know whom he is talking about!"

Angelito frowned, but in his heart he could not help feeling pleased at the distinction. Such a tale would cast a certain glamour over him in the *circo*. However, he frowned and growled out:

"*Caramba*, I am clear enough, but by good fortune your sister's name is not mentioned."

"*Hombre*!" cried Rafael. "He couldn't have made it plainer. He says that you are going to marry her, and that such a thing is worse than if she had been an indecent woman."

The bullfighter half rose.

"What—Socorro worse than a common baggage?"

"Here he says, it!" replied Rafael, striking the paper.

"Socorro an indecent woman!" A sudden quaking wrath went through the bullfighter's powerful body. "May the lighting of God strike him dead! I'll go down and break every bone in his—"

The peon started impulsively for the *calle*, his nostrils expanded, ready to smash his enemy. Rafael saw that he was really leaving the *casa*, and limped rapidly after him.

"Here, what are you about?" he cried.

"I am going to the office of *Sol y Sombra* to smash that snake!" he cried.

"Stop! You can't do that!" warned the poet.

"Why can't I?"

"You can't go into a man's office and start an ordinary street brawl!"

"Hell's sacred devils, I can, and I'm going to!"

"Angelito, you'll disgrace yourself. You would be the butt of everybody's scorn. It isn't done!"

"But I am going to whip him! I'm going to smash him to bits—calling Socorro Jimenez a baggale!"

"That's all right, that's proper, but you'll have to challenge him formally. You can't go blundering into his office, breaking up the furniture, and getting yourself arrested and dragged to the police court. You must challenge him as one *caballero* challenges another."

Angelito controlled his wrath, with a sensation as if again some one had checked his mighty muscles with the trivial threads of wont and custom.

"When will we get to fight?"

"Your seconds will arrange that."

"I'm going to fight him and kill him!" roared the bullfighter, as if Rafael opposed the idea.

"You are quite right in that, Angelito. It will clear up your record as a man of honor and reinstate my sister's good name. Just how it does it, I don't know; but it does. It's another miracle, I suppose, like the loaves and fishes. Anyway, I'm glad to see you take that course. I had thought of challenging Montauban myself, but it's better to come from you."

"Yes, yes!" agreed Angelito sharply. "That's right!"

"Now the question is, what arms are you the most skillful with—swords or pistols?"

The bullfighter came to a halt and considered the question.

"I suppose I'm best with swords."

XX

WITHIN the next forty-eight hours all Caracas was gossiping about the article in *Sol y Sombra*, and speculating on the outcome of the Angelito-Montauban duel.

The bullfighters at old Malestar's wine shop predicted a swift disaster for the editor.

"The fight will depend," gesticulated Ercolito, pushing out a double-nine domino, "upon how long Angelito cares to play his man. He will lure him on for three or four rushes, perhaps half a dozen, and then—*pouf!* It is a great pity, because Señor Montauban has talent, and has given us all very good press notices."

The crowd began to speculate who would be the next editor of *Sol y Sombra*.

Among bullfight devotees in the down town districts, the jeweler stepped into brief prominence because he had sold Angelito his plate. This gave the merchant a certain authority on the *torero's* prowess as a swordsman.

"*Caramba!*" he would say, with a shrug. "What chance has an ordinary man against a trained athlete? Fighting skill is like all other skill, *señors*, it comes with seasoning. Look at me in this business. If a diamond has a flaw in it, be assured that I will detect it at a glance. The years, *señors*, the years make us—fighter, editor, jeweler, what not. The years are like molds which inclose us ever so softly at first, but they become like stone."

"Perhaps it is Señor Montauban's way of committing suicide," suggested an old *caballero* with a skin like parchment. "He is young enough to prefer death to the loss of a *querida*. The young trip to death lightly, *señors*, as if to their partners at a *baile*. Later, when death comes quite close, and you can see his features—"

The old gentleman lifted his shoulders and his brows, and drew down his lips, to deprecate such folly as seen from his maturer point of view.

In the Jimenez villa in Paraiso, it was Señora Jimenez who was most often vocal. She pointed out to Socorro, to Margarita, to Rafael, innumerable times, what came of receiving a bullfighter into the family—an instantaneous challenge, a precipitate attack. Holy Virgin, he would be forever

fighting and murdering men! They would never have any peace with such a member in their home!

"But, *maman*," Rafael would interpose, "he had provocation enough. Montauban wrote an article—"

Narciso write such a thing? She would never believe it. If he did, did he not have provocation? For Socorro to give him the mitten like that? How he must have suffered! How he had loved Socorro! And now to be flung over for a bullfighter who goes about flinging challenges without cause!

Here the *señora* would weep in a peculiar manner, holding her face almost still, so as not to wrinkle her smooth, girlish skin, but with the tears trickling out of her eyes. She had practiced this mode of weeping so long that she did it without effort. She was weeping for Narciso, whom she desired for a son-in-law, for his standing in Paraiso would add prestige to her family. Now all her plans had gone awry on account of a peon bullfighter! It was enough to make a good woman weep!

Socorro Jimenez avoided her mother's endless reproaches, as well as she could, by finding tasks in the sunshine of garden or *patio* which her delicately blooming mother carefully avoided.

The impending duel hovered like an incubus over the girl's nights and days. It seemed unreasonable that Narciso Montauban was going to fight over her. Such a thing was in character with Angelito, but Narciso! She couldn't understand it at all. She couldn't think what had come over him.

In her imagination the two men fought all day long. She could see the big *torero* and the little editor making swift lunges at each other. One of them would be killed—the editor, of whom she was fond, or Angelito, whom she loved.

The possibility that Angelito might be killed filled her with the utmost terror. She felt like going to Narciso and telling him that he must by no means hurt Angelito. It still seemed to her that she would have her old sway with him, that he would give up to her out of habit, as he had always done.

But her reason taught her that that was untrue, that he and Angelito were actually fighting over her. Her innocent girlhood had somehow broken down, and had dropped her into the black and tortured

currents of life and passion, whose very existence she had never suspected.

One noon the girl stood in the *patio*, binding a new orchid to a piece of wood, in order to root it; but her thoughts were plodding the treadmill of the duel. Presently Rafael came limping from his room. Socorro watched his painful walk, and it filled her with pity. His lameness had somehow taken the edge from his youth.

As he paused to watch her fix the epiphyte to its host, he said that he had been over on Traposo Calle.

"How is Angelito?" she asked, looking at her flower and coloring faintly.

"In the most insolent health, as usual."

"I mean is he uneasy about—"

With a little gesture she signified the fight.

"Not as much as you are, I'm afraid, poor little *muchacha*," said the poet sadly.

"Then he is—a little?" asked the girl apprehensively.

"Pues, no—he's not."

She looked at her brother suspiciously.

"What do you mean by saying 'he's not' like that?"

The poet paused undecidedly.

"I hardly know whether to tell you."

Socorro became alarmed at once.

"You'll have to tell me now," she said in a low tone.

"*Sí, naturalmente*. The truth is that I—I am a little disappointed in Angelito."

"*Anda!* How?"

"It's an odd thing. Still, it's simple enough after you understand it. The fact is that he is not a very good swordsman."

"Not a good swordsman!" She stared blankly at her brother. "That can't be, Rafael! An *espada* not a good swordsman!"

"Yes—you see, he has never used the rapier for any other purpose than in the bull ring. He never took lessons with the foils. He—hardly had an opportunity. You probably know that he was a poor boy." Rafael paused, and presently added, in a slightly different tone: "I thought I had better tell you."

The blood receded slowly from the girl's face as the full implication of her brother's warning grew in her mind. She laid the half-bound orchid on a flower box.

"Rafael, do you *know* that he can't use a sword?"

"*Absoluto!* I carried down my foils, to give him a little practice, and to explain a

few little thrusts which I know Montauban possesses; but"—Rafael spread his hands hopelessly—"it was no use. He knew nothing about the foils at all. I could touch him at will."

"Then Narciso will—kill him?" whispered the girl.

The poet made a helpless gesture.

"Narciso may possibly wound him and spare his life. I have always found him a generous fellow; but, of course, in an affair of this kind—"

The girl flushed.

"Oh, Rafael, *don't* say 'affair' like that! It sounds so shameful!" She stood with a look of shame and distress in her face. "Why did Angelito go flinging out a challenge, if he is not a swordsman?"

"Pues, it was thrust on him, in a way. When he read the attack on you in *Sol y Sombra*, he leaped up and said that he was going to throw Señor Montauban out of his own window. Of course, that was impossible. I told him that a man couldn't commit such a—"

"Why was it impossible?" cut in Socorro. "That was the very thing to do!"

"Go in and raise a disturbance like a street bravo?"

"Wouldn't that be better than being killed?"

Rafael made an annoyed gesture.

"*Caballeros* don't go about mauling persons with their fists. Such a thing would be absurd, impossible!"

Socorro gave up that point.

"Let's stop this duel, Rafael!"

"If Montauban would apologize—"

"Why couldn't Angelito apologize?"

"*Demonio*, Socorro!" cried the poet, outraged. "Apologize because he resented an insult to you! *Huy!* He would far better be killed!"

"*Madre in cielo!*" gasped the girl, giving up this defense in its turn. "This is the most brutal thing I ever dreamed of! This duel is about me, but no one gives me or my wishes a thought. Angelito goes out and is killed to protect my honor! What good will my honor be to me if Angelito is killed?"

Sudden tears stung Socorro's eyes. The cripple put an arm about his sister.

"Don't exaggerate your danger. I wanted to give you a little warning, so that if Angelito was wounded it would not be too great a shock. He will hardly be killed. That doesn't happen often. Besides, An-

gelito is one of the most powerful and active men I have ever seen."

Rafael was inducing his sister to walk with him toward her room, but his instinct to philosophize impinged on his consoling attitude, for presently he added:

"The difficulty is that Angelito is stepping outside of his class to marry. That is his real tragedy. Among all classes of society men fight for the women they marry. Some men here in Caracas fight with family prestige, some with their wealth, some with their art. The peons fight for their women by kicking and butting. You see, Angelito has climbed up into a new stratum, and so, when he attempts to mate, he meets a new method of fighting—one in which he is not at all trained, and at which he may possibly lose. He is under that natural handicap."

Suddenly the girl began to weep outright.

"Oh, how horrible this is! How horrible! They think nothing at all of me—neither of them. I might be an animal, a thing!"

"Are you really so neglected as you feel, Socorro?" mused her brother. "They are really helping you to decide. A woman usually prefers the winner."

"Rafael, you are outrageous!"

She flung off his arm and went into her own room.

"Now isn't that characteristic?" mused the brother. "Poor *chica!* To show her that all this is inevitable doesn't console her in the slightest degree. Somehow a woman can't lean back on mechanics and allow it to bear her where it will without hope or despair. No, there is something too vital about a woman to endure that. A woman is the *entrepreneur* of life. She will have nothing at all to do with death and the inevitable."

XXI

THE way in which old Ana clanged open the grilled entrance of the blue *casa* and shuffled into the entry told Angelito that she was excited and angry, and that she must have heard of his approaching duel. The bullfighter put down a foot to stop the faint oscillations of his hammock, where he swung between two columns of the *patio*, and lay with narrowed eyes watching the entry. The next moment he saw his mother hurry in with her board of lottery tickets; and immediately she shifted her physical haste into a verbal onslaught.

"This is what comes of running after fashionable *señoritas*—a fight! Getting disgraced in the papers! I have heard it! You might have been visiting a virtuous peon girl, but these silk-stockinged baggages, with half a dozen men hanging after them and fighting and brawling—"

The *torero* sat up in his hammock abruptly.

"Mother, don't speak of Socorro Jiminez like that!"

"*Caramba*, it's true! The world knows what you did. It came out in the paper!"

The bullfighter grew intensely angry.

"That's because the editor was cold mutton for her, and tried to avenge himself by printing lies; but I've stopped him. He'll print no more of his filth after to-morrow!"

"God help you!" cried the old peon woman, aghast. "Are you going to kill a man on account of a demirep?"

The son leaped out of his hammock.

"*Madre*, if you call that lovely, innocent girl a—"

"*Demonio*, isn't she? Didn't she go out in the garden with you at night, and didn't her brother force you into the *casa* at the point of a sword and make you swear on the cross to marry her? Oh, I have heard it all!"

"God's lightning!" roared the *espada*. "Are they venting such damnable perjuries? I begged, I pleaded to marry her! She is an angel on earth!"

Old Ana's eyes widened in apprehension.

"Pancho, you are not really going to marry her, are you? Can't you give them the slip somehow?"

"I'll marry her if the saints preserve my life!"

Old Ana went into a fury.

"A thousand devils! Bring such a fly-by-night into my *casa*! I'll not have it! I'll not endure it!"

A certain relief went through Angelito that this subject was broached.

"Very well!" he agreed, with a little more composure. "I'll not bring her into your *casa*. I suppose that wouldn't do. No mother-in-law gets along with her daughter-in-law."

"What do you mean—that I'm to move out?" cried the old woman instantly. "I'll not move a peg! You can't put me out! Surely, if there is any justice in the laws, a son won't be allowed to put his old mother into the street!"

"No, I mean that you may have this

casa, and I'll get another. When I get a wife, naturally we must separate, *madre*. You know we have never done anything but quarrel all our lives. You beat me when I was small, and you have quarreled with me since I've been grown."

The old crone became furious again.

"*Cà*, you ungrateful son! All that you remember is my beatings and quarrels. *Pues*, I remember getting up at night when you whimpered, patching your shirts, and selling mangoes in the streets to keep something in your belly! And now all I get for my slaving is that I quarreled and beat, and you'll turn me out of your home!" Tears of self-pity filmed the old woman's eyes. "May the holy saints forgive you, Pancho!"

She turned away to her own dirt-floored room at the back of the *casa*.

As the bullfighter watched her go, remorseful qualms seized him. He was moved to call after her that he was not turning her out of the *casa*, but would willingly go himself. Nay, more, he would put servants here to wait on her hand and foot; but to all this she shuffled silently to her room, her head wrapped in a coarse black *mantilla*, her board of tickets sagging under her arm. She was deeply wounded, and would remain so no matter what her son did or said.

Angelito drew a long breath of despair. Presently his thoughts came around to the duel that he was to fight on the following morning. He knew by Rafael's manner that the poet was greatly disturbed about the outcome of the duel, but Angelito himself was not anxious. Somehow he could not find it in himself to be apprehensive of the withered little editor. In fact, when the thought of Narciso Montauban crossed his mind, spasms of anger twitched through his great muscles, his nostrils expanded, and the veins stood out in his neck, like the bulls he fought in the arena.

All the rest of the day the bullfighter's mood fluctuated between anger at Montauban, rapture at his approaching marriage, and distress at the idea of having to cast off his old mother. He tried to think of some way to house his bride and his mother together; but when he saw old Ana going about with an obstinate expression on her old face, and refusing to address a word to him, he knew that that was impossible.

In the afternoon he set off to look up real estate dealers, and to find a finer *casa*

for his future wife. As he went about town, a number of men spoke to him about his approaching duel, and wished him good fortune.

That evening his duel occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else.

During the night, he was startled by a knock at his door. He was afraid it was the police, who might have come to arrest him for challenging the editor; but it proved to be his mother.

She stood in the doorway, with her face in high illumination from the candle in her hand. She begged Angelito not to buy another *casa* and move away from her. Loneliness would kill her in this great house. She would be like a lonely old bat in a cave.

She began weeping again, and her old face was convulsed with grimaces. Between sobs she promised that she would not scold any more, but would work in silence there in the *casa* as a servant for him and his wife. She said that she would work for the aristocrats once more, as she had worked for them in her youth. For years she had been free from them, but now they would enslave her again. This *señorita*, she knew, was marrying her son for his money, and she would fling it right and left, after the fashion of unvirtuous women.

So the old woman did her cause little good and much harm before she took herself back down the *patio* again.

There is a law in Venezuela, as in most countries, prohibiting dueling, but in Caracas there is a tacit understanding that duelists will not be molested at sunrise in a certain secluded level space beside the Guayra River, just above the Puente de Hierro. The theory is, apparently, that the Caracas police are not up at such an hour.

So the early morning found Angelito and his second, Señor Via, a quick-motioned little man whom Rafael had selected, *en route* for the conventional spot.

The Guayra River is little more than a brook in the dry season, but its flood bed is very wide, and the Puente de Hierro, or Bridge of Iron, spans the whole valley at a great height. The road that leads to this low dueling ground beside the Guayra breaks away from the street at the mouth of the bridge, and runs down into a banana truck farm. Through the rank growth An-

gelito's cab followed a mere cart track, with weeds and flowers growing in the middle and on both sides.

This rural-looking road reminded Angelito of his boyhood, when he worked on the cacao plantations. On just such roads he rode, a peon boy, in the great two-wheeled cacao carts. Now he was a *caballero*, in a cab, with an aristocrat for his second, on his way to fight a duel for the honor of a *señorita*. Truly the transition was a magical one!

Here the cab driver, peering down between the vehicle and the horses, said that another cab had been along the road this morning.

"The Montauban party," observed Señor Via, drawing out his watch. "They were early, we are prompt."

"I wish we had got there first," said Angelito, feeling that he had lost a certain point.

"That's of no consequence. Remember, you must keep perfectly cool and collected during the encounter. Don't allow a slight scratch to cause you to fling away caution."

"I think I have learned coolness in the bull ring," remarked Angelito, with a tinge of arrogance.

Sure enough, as they rounded the edge of the banana field, they saw two cabs and four men on a level grass plot in the midst of the lush growth along the river bank. As Angelito drove up, the men bowed ceremoniously. The bullfighter and Señor Via returned the salutations.

As Angelito bowed, it struck him as a ridiculous thing to be bowing to a man whom he meant presently to kill. In the Matadero he had been accustomed to starting a fight with boastings, abuse, and obsequy, not with bows.

Señor Montauban's second had a case of dueling swords, which, as Angelito could see, were considerably shorter than the rapier used in a bullfight. The editor's second was a red-headed man, who now approached Señor Via. The two seconds talked together for a few moments, pointed toward the sunlight, which filtered through the morning mists, and chose the positions of their principals with reference to it. Then the red-headed man presented Señor Via with the case of swords, and he, in turn, brought the weapons to the bullfighter.

Both were exactly alike, delicate weapons with silver-wrought hilts and slender blades. Angelito took up one, bent the

point to the guard as a test, and then accepted it. It was one of the handsomest swords he had ever seen.

"You will stand facing the north," directed Señor Via. "You will touch blades and then engage. Keep as collected as possible. Don't allow a scratch to irritate you. Now I believe the *caballeros* are waiting on our convenience."

Señor Montauban and his second were advancing toward the middle of the dueling ground. Angelito and his friend went forward to meet them. The other three men, the two cab drivers, and the surgeon grouped themselves near the selected spot, and watched silently, with the keen interest that such a spectacle provokes.

A certain feeling of unreality hung about the whole proceeding for Angelito. It did not seem possible that the small, dignified, slightly bald man who was stationed opposite, with a sword in his hand, could have written the scurrilous attack on himself and Socorro. Nor did it seem that he was really going to fight. Señor Montauban appeared too dignified to do either of these things.

Angelito himself was not in the least angry. As a matter of fact, to fight a formal duel for a stated cause was far too intellectual a proceeding for Pancho Pacheco. Such a proceeding required an abstraction of which he was incapable. The bullfighter badly needed the stimulus of abuse, oaths, and a buffet or two, before he could really begin to fight.

The *torero* stood with his sword held a trifle high, as if he expected Señor Montauban to charge at him like a bull and impale himself on his blade. The steels clicked together, and the two men fell into the peculiar doll-like poise of fencers.

For a moment Angelito stood feeling the strength of his opponent through his blade. It gave before his own iron wrist, and the next moment he lunged rather awkwardly. There was a whisper of steel, and his point passed harmlessly to the little man's side.

The bullfighter recovered with great swiftness, and lunged again. He passed over the little man's shoulder. At the same moment he saw a flicker of steel toward him, and felt a sting in his upper arm.

Angelito sprang back with a little wave of surprise at the adroitness with which he had been pinked; but, although he had retreated, Señor Montauban was just as close as ever. The editor's left arm and shoul-

der were swung behind him, giving the *torero* no target but the edge of a man.

It was with difficulty that the bullfighter parried his antagonist's thrust. He tried to address his blade and lunge in return, but Señor Montauban kept pressing him back, step by step, and kept him parrying, high, low, middle, face, legs, stomach.

A certain rising anger grew up in the peon at this sharp and persistent attack. The editor was like a machine, that went on perpetually driving him back and back. The *torero* had a feeling that his own sword was too long, that its point was useless.

He made a sharp effort to leap back suddenly, get his sword tip down, and drive in again; but his blade again encountered steel. It thrust off at an angle, while a hot streak up his forearm told him that he had been touched again.

At this second sting, and at the sight of blood staining his sleeve, wrath seized Angelito. There was something monstrous and hateful in this absurd little wooden figure with its edge turned toward him. Now that Angelito was hurt, the wrong this little editor had done Socorro flared up again in the bullfighter's heart. Abuse, unspoken, was on the tip of his tongue, and a pulse began beating in his temples.

He poised his sword as if at an oncoming bull, and lunged terrifically at the little man's heart. His point slithered to one side, but the two men met, and the bullfighter's momentum carried them several yards.

At the same instant Angelito felt a keen pain through the heavy costal muscles under his arm. They were breast to breast. The point of the *torero's* sword was thrust vainly into air behind his adversary, while Angelito was transfixed.

The bullfighter howled an oath, and like a flash loosed his sword and struck a full swing at the editor's jaw. There came a thud. The editor's hold on his own sword loosened, his slightly bald head flew back. The bullfighter lowered his mop of black hair and butted with terrific force into the pit of the little man's stomach.

The seconds and the surgeon shouted in horror at the ghastly sight of a man stuck through by a sword pounding, butting, and kicking a helpless antagonist into insensibility. They rushed on Angelito.

"*Diantre*, stop him! Catch him! Hold him! The madman!"

The three men grabbed and struggled

with the wounded giant. He flung them off with a whip of his body, and continued pounding and kicking his prostrate foe. In the scuffle, one of the men got his hand cut on the sword sticking in Angelito's flesh.

"You damned *bribon*!" he howled. "What a cowardly attack!"

The red-headed second made a leap to get Angelito's sword and kill the bullfighter. Señor Via shouted to forbid it, and succeeded in getting his own arms locked around the big fellow's neck, throttling him and hauling him backward.

Angelito was cursing and roaring that they must let him alone, that he would kill the little imp of hell. In the midst of this his own second throttled his uproar and dragged him backward. It took the three to hold him back.

Montauban's second was in a furious rage.

"This devil from Hades! This mannerless wild man! It is our duty, *señors*, as *caballeros* and guardians of fair play, to kill this mad dog!"

Angelito's own second was crying:

"You infamous wretch, attacking your opponent with your hands! What are you—a *caballero* or a gorilla?"

"Here, you monster," the surgeon was saying, "let me pull that sword out of your side! Are you utterly devoid of all human sensations?"

As the red mist cleared before Angelito's eyes, he saw Señor Montauban prostrate on the ground. He straightened himself, and allowed the surgeon to approach him peaceably.

"The infernal little rat!" snarled the bullfighter. "I'll show him what it means to print his damnable articles about such a saint of a girl! I can whip an *estancia* full of such puny little aristocrats! I'm the best man in Caracas!"

He boasted, and cursed, and held himself stiffly against the surgeon, who was pulling the steel from his side. The doctor had poured iodine on the protruding blade so that it would sterilize the wound as he withdrew it. The iodine felt to Angelito as if the surgeon were drawing a red-hot iron through his flesh. He did not grunt, but he did stop his cursing.

All the party were utterly disgusted at this attack on the editor, so utterly outside the conventions of a duel—all except the two cab drivers, who were peons. These two winked at each other, and made sharp,

striking gestures with their fists, to show that they were intensely pleased.

Señor Montauban did not need a surgeon. He was jolted and jarred, but did not have a scratch. Presently he revived, and, seeing the bullfighter's blood on his own clothes, asked if Angelito had wounded him. He seemed to remember nothing of what had occurred.

"No! No! You are not wounded, *señor*," cried the surgeon, "but you have been assaulted in a most cowardly and shameful fashion. It has been a disgraceful fiasco. I, for one, repent that I came out here at all. To call this spot the field of honor would be to expectorate on decency. The best that all of us can do is to go back to the city and never pay the slightest attention to this unmannerly yokel again!"

He swung his head furiously toward Angelito. The bullfighter was now beginning to be ashamed of his own violence.

"He made me mad," he grumbled in faint extenuation.

"*Caramba!*" snarled the red-headed man.

The two parties climbed back into the cabs, but this time they were divided differently. Neither the surgeon nor either of the two seconds would ride with Angelito. They and Señor Montauban got into one cab, while Angelito and the two drivers used the other.

XXII

By the time the morning mists had fully cleared away from the valley of the Guayra, polite society in Caracas was amazed and horrified at the conduct and the upshot of the duel. Amazement came that Señor Montauban had proved himself a more skillful swordsman than the famous *diestro*, horror at the brutal and shocking conclusion of the encounter.

By noon the most exaggerated tales were all over the city. Angelito, with his bare hands, had maimed his rival for life. The editor's blade had pierced the *torero's* lungs. The physicians and surgeons of Caracas were so outraged at Angelito's breach of etiquette that not one would dress his wounds, and he lay slowly dying in the blue *casa* on Traposo Calle.

Other stories were that Angelito was not dying, but that Señor Montauban would certainly challenge him again, and would kill him the next time; that Angelito had

hopelessly disqualified himself as a *caballero*; and so, on and on.

By two o'clock—that is to say, immediately after her siesta—Margarita Miraflores brought a selection of these versions to the Jimenez villa in Paraiso. A number of them were mutually contradictory, but with the ladies that did not shake their credibility, either singly or in the lump.

As soon as Margarita reached the *señora's* door, she began pouring forth her news in breathless Spanish.

"It was a terrible scene, *señora*. Señor Angel was stabbed in a dozen places, and a sword was sticking through his liver when he assaulted Narciso."

The *señora* dropped her embroidery.

"Is he dead?" she inquired, and her voice was ghastly.

"No, but he will die. All the surgeons in Caracas have refused to dress his wounds!"

"Maria in heaven! But why?"

"Because he *assaulted* Narciso!"

The girl stressed the word with a sharp nod.

"But didn't they go out there to assault each other?" said the *señora*.

"Yes, but he threw away his sword and beat him with his hands. He flung him on the ground and kicked him, and all with a sword sticking through him!"

"Through Narciso?"

"No—through Señor Angel!"

"Holy Mary!" gasped the *señora*, turning pale. "That sounds like some wild beast one reads about in African travels."

"Oh, the whole city is outraged at it! Everybody is talking about it, and saying how shameful it is, and what an insult on poor Narciso!"

"*Dios te oiga!*" cried Socorro. "To be flung on the ground wasn't half as bad as to be run through with a sword!"

"Socorro!" cried the *señora*. "It's the insult of the thing, for that great bull of a *hombre* to be beating a *caballero* with his hands! Suppose it had been Rafael! You can see that, can't you? *Huy*, what an insult!"

"Every one says that it was utterly indecent, and must be avenged," rattled Margarita viciously.

"How badly is Señor Angel wounded?" asked Socorro, with a colorless face.

"Oh, badly! He can't get well!" declared Margarita, instinctively giving the worst version she had heard.

Socorro rose excitedly.

"And his wounds are not dressed?"

"Now, Socorro!" cried her mother. "You are not going down there?"

"Of course not, mother, but I want to get a doctor to him."

"But the doctors won't go!" cried Margarita.

"*Pues*, I can send Rafael. He's clever about everything. He could dress a wound."

"Socorro, I can't understand you! How can you consider resuming your unfortunate relations with that man, when he has disgraced himself in a duel? Don't you realize that the whole city is holding him up to contempt?"

"*Absoluto*, every one is talking about it, Socorro," seconded Margarita. "Every one says Señor Angel's honor is gone. He is *sin vergüenza*. He can't live over it, no matter whether he gets well or not!"

"I don't care what they say!" cried Socorro. "He did the most sensible thing, under the circumstances. If Narciso were sticking me with a sword, I'd knock him over, too, if I could! Holy Mary, they were fighting, weren't they? I'm glad he beat Narciso! I'm glad! He's been needing a beating for a long time!"

"Socorro!" gasped Margarita.

"Daughter, what unwomanly sentiments!" cried her mother.

"I don't care! Narciso is a prig, and I could beat him myself!"

"*Socorro!*"

As Socorro hurried into the *patio* toward her brother's room, she heard Margarita calling angrily after her:

"Everybody says, *everybody* says—"

XXIII

RAFAEL JIMINEZ looked up at his sister's entrance, saw her face, and immediately asked in a shocked tone:

"Is he dead?"

"No, but you must go to his *casa* quickly, Rafael. He is badly wounded, and not a surgeon in Caracas will go near him!"

"What?"

"The doctors won't help him!"

Tears filled Socorro's eyes. Rafael dropped his pencil and looked at her.

"Who told you such rot?" he asked.

"Margarita, just this moment!"

"Don't you know that's silly? A surgeon not go near a wounded man—a rich wounded man! Did she say why?"

"B—because he—he picked Narciso up and flung him down during the fight!" gasped the girl.

"Did he do that?"

"Y—yes, with a sword sticking through him. Oh, Rafael, it's horrible! And Narciso is going to challenge him again!"

Rafael got up and limped a little way from his writing desk.

"Stop, don't jump at every wild tale you hear! That's a most absurd story!"

"But, Rafael, everybody says—"

"Says what?"

"That he's in disgrace, and they'll have to fight again!"

Socorro's eyes were full of tears, and she bit her lips, to keep from sobbing outright. Rafael patted his sister encouragingly.

"A lot of that is gossip. I'll go find out what truth there is in it."

"*Bien!* Do go and see if he has a surgeon, Rafael!"

"He either has one or doesn't need one."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am, Socorro. But that tale about Narciso going to challenge Angelito again—I'll look into that."

He started limping about his study, trying to find his hat. Socorro, who had been somewhat calmed by her brother's manner of accepting the news, now started thinking on a less urgent but equally painful topic. She had several minutes for her reflections, for Rafael's room was in disorder, and his hat was lost. When he found it, and was nodding good-by at the door, she asked in a small voice:

"Rafael, do—do you think he really was dishonorable?"

"Who?"

"Señor Angel."

"Quite likely. What did he do?"

"Rafael!" reproached the girl.

Then she repeated, in a desolate tone, that Señor Angel had flung away his sword in the midst of the duel, leaped at Narciso, and butted him over. The poet stood listening. Gradually his composure gave way, and he began laughing immoderately before her outraged eyes.

"*Huy, Rafael! Rafael!*" she cried.

"I can just see Narciso tumbling over," explained the poet. "I know how shocked and amazed he was."

"But was it dishonorable?" pressed the girl impatiently.

Her brother became sober, and made a gesture.

"Now, my dear, what sort of honor do you mean?"

"Oh, holy Mary!" sighed his sister, at the end of her patience. "I might have known I could get no sense out of you!"

But Rafael was not to be denied this philosophic point.

"*Pues, Socorro*, that is a very simple thing," he said gravely. "What we call honor is a term which means the rule of conduct in a certain locality among a certain class. Here in Caracas we have Spanish honor, peon honor, Carib honor, negro honor. Before I could possibly answer your question you will have to tell me to what sort of honor you refer."

"You know I wouldn't speak of Carib or negro honor!"

"Probably not. I was simply giving you an idea of how many codes there were. When you analyze it, any code of honor is what a certain class of folk has found expedient to do under certain circumstances. When a man like Angelito comes up from one social sphere to another, a great many things which were honorable down below are considered dishonorable above. For instance, in a fight, peons butt with their heads, Spanish *caballeros* do not. I should say that the essential ingredient of dishonor is originality, or the element of surprise. Victorious armies have uniformly used dishonorable methods, from the standpoint of the vanquished. Great financiers always have shady reputations. Successful politicians—but really that is too tainted a topic even to use as an illustration."

"Rafael," said Socorro, "from what you say I have no idea what you think about Señor Angel. I do wish you would go and see how he is getting along!"

The poet perceived that his sister was not as much interested in his reasoning as he was himself. He gave it up, went back to his writing desk, picked up a manuscript, put it into his pocket, and turned toward the door.

Socorro watched this act with evident disapproval.

"Rafael, you are not going to read that to Señor Angel, are you? Remember that he is wounded already."

Rafael said he might strike up with some friend or other, and Socorro told him that he was cold-hearted to think of such a thing, under the circumstances.

Oddly enough, when he got outside the Jimenez lawn, Rafael hailed neither cab nor

street car, but limped along the boulevard, studying the pavement in deep thought. When he came to the Montauban château, with its heavy, solemn Spanish architecture, he stood undecided for a moment, and then went inside.

Rafael Jiminez never entered the Montauban *casa* without a faint feeling of irony that such a gravely handsome structure should be wasted on such a man as Narciso Montauban. For Narciso to brood in such a nest, and produce such an egg as *Sol y Sombra*, was simple bathos.

"Now," thought Rafael, "the poem I have in my pocket would be worthy of the height of these walls and the spring of this ceiling; but Narciso—"

He shrugged very faintly as he moved with halting gait along the great hallway of the château.

He found Narciso in a study which was as severely simple as the great oaken rafters overhead and the polished floor underfoot were rich. The long, narrow windows gave the study a somewhat monastic effect, which Montauban's slightly bald head accented.

The editor of *Sol y Sombra* was apparently no whit the worse for the drubbing Angelito had given him. He sat at his great flat yellow writing desk, on which were neatly arranged some papers, manuscripts, and a pile of galley proofs.

The journalist was evidently surprised to see Rafael. The poet began a carefully prepared conversation by asking his former friend if he might tell him how shocked and grieved he had been at the appearance of the vindictive article in *Sol y Sombra*, and how deeply he regretted the rift between their families.

At this Señor Montauban's thin face paled somewhat, but he asked in an even voice if he might tell Rafael how shocked and wounded for life he had been when he and Rafael had blundered into the Jiminez garden on the most unhappy night of his existence.

As Narciso said this, he did indeed look, to use his own Spanish hyperbole, "wounded for life." His sallow face had the thin, drawn look that comes from some continued strain. Rafael began to perceive vaguely something of the depth of his former friend's wound—a phase of the unfortunate affair which had heretofore escaped him, because of a brother's congenital inability to conceive of any mortal man really hav-

ing a tender passion for his sister. Now he suddenly felt sorry for the editor.

"I saw that you were shocked, Narciso. So was I; but even at that I simply couldn't understand your article."

"You couldn't?"

"Frankly, no. I could not understand how a man could sit in a study like this and write such a thing."

The poet's old admiration for his friend's study, and his impersonal attitude toward the insult thrown at his family, aroused in the editor some of his former liking for young Jiminez.

"The truth is, Rafael," said Montauban drearily, "I don't understand it myself. The next morning, when I read my own article in my paper, I was dismayed. It seemed impossible that I had written such a thing. That night I must have been mad!"

"*Olà! Olà!*" ejaculated Rafael, divining the storm in his friend's heart, and marveling that Socorro had caused it. He cast about for some way to console his friend. "Pues, after all, Narciso, this—er—misfortune at least will leave you more leisure for your literary work. You did spend a lot of time at our *casa*. I have often thought—"

"You mean my work on *Sol y Sombra*?"

"Yes."

The editor pushed away the proofs on his table, as if they were distasteful to him, and arose.

"I am through with *Sol y Sombra*!"

"You are what?"

"*Dios*, yes—I'll either sell the paper or let it drop. I'm through. I never before realized what barren, futile work it is. To spend one's life recording the doings of illiterate peons who have learned to stick a bull—what a beggarly occupation!"

The poet stared at him blankly.

"What will Caracas do without a sporting paper?"

Señor Montauban made a gesture which meant that it was no concern of his.

"What are you going to do yourself?"

"I don't know. I am thinking of going to Paris."

"For a permanent residence?"

"I think so."

Rafael, still with intent to console, made a few vague suggestions about love and marriage. He said something about the biological tendency of persons to marry their opposites—blondes, brunettes; tall

men, short women; fat men, thin women; and, naturally, aristocrats, peons.

The editor did not seem impressed with this theory, for he made no reply.

"What I really dropped in to ask you, Narciso," said the poet, "is this—is it your intention to—er—pursue the unpleasantness of this morning, on account of what Angelito did?"

The editor's expression changed.

"I have never before accepted a blow like that, Rafael!"

"Still, a blow in a fight is not on the same footing as a blow meant as an insult. Besides, Narciso, you might have foreseen that Angelito would have reverted to his peon method of fighting, if pushed to it. That was his reflex action when angered. It would be foolish to expect him to change his reflexes merely because he had a sword in his hand."

"The trouble with you," said Señor Montauban dryly, "is that you utterly destroy honor, will power, and self-direction with your mechanistic theories, Rafael."

"*Caramba!*" cried the poet, rather touched. "Honor, will power, and self-direction are all right as long as one doesn't mix the classes; but when you bring two men together who are fundamentally different, you might know there would follow a confusion of method, and that's dishonor. You ought never to have accepted a challenge from a peon, Narciso, and you certainly ought never to issue one to a peon. Anything so formal as a duel is impossible between men of different classes. All they can do is to fight." The poet bowed. "Now that is what I wanted to say, and I thank you for the courtesy with which you have heard me."

Rafael started limping toward the door of the study. Narciso followed him.

"I am glad you came, Rafael. Your conversation has been a pleasure to me." He hesitated, and then added: "I wish, Rafael, you would tell your sister how deeply I have regretted my impulsiveness."

"I will explain it to her, Narciso. She is really a very generous girl, according to her viewpoint of life."

"I know she is, I know she is, Rafael. Sometimes I have thought that Socorro never did really care for me. I don't know—little things—but she is a generous girl!"

As Rafael limped to the entrance of the château, he felt a little pang of disappointment at having found no opportunity to

read to Narciso the poem which he had in his pocket. It did seem that his sister's rift with Narciso was an unfortunate affair for every one.

XXIV

BARRING the contingency of a challenge from Narciso Montauban, Angelito's affairs smoothed and straightened themselves into the commonplace raptures of a betrothal accompanied with passionate love. The bullfighter became a regular visitor at the Jiménez villa. The *señora's* manner toward him softened from open hostility into her original chill and disapproving courtesy. Margarita resumed her light and teasing friendship, and occasionally Rafael called the *torero* into his study to hear his latest poem.

Angelito hit on the device of listening to the verses, nodding solemnly, and saying nothing. This gradually installed him in Rafael's estimation as a man of literary taste—"untrained, you know, but deep in his heart." The *señora* scoffed at such a dictum. Margarita laughed at it. Socorro believed it, and was not surprised.

Nevertheless, the fact that Angelito had challenged a man and had been wounded in defense of Socorro's good name gave him a sort of standing, even with Señora Jiménez. There is no way to satirize or ignore an act of this kind. It is as dogged a fact as money received, and cannot afterward be denied.

Naturally enough, the duel enhanced the bullfighter's attraction for Socorro. She showered on him the blind prodigality of a girl's first full-blown affection. She was at an age when she should normally have had several such emotional experiences, but these had been precluded by the protracted and rather tedious courtship of Señor Montauban.

Socorro had thought, at times, that she was in love with Narciso; at other times she was sure she could never love any one. Angelito's unfortunate dinner caused her to reconsider this point, but it was not until her transfiguration in the garden that there burst on her the possibilities of delight that lay in her brain, her body, and her whole nervous system—in brief, what one means by being in love.

It is true that since the night in the garden Socorro's reaction to Angelito's caresses never reached such complete abandonment, except on the evening when he came

back to her from the duel, wounded by Señor Montauban. Then the girl quite melted from tenderness and anxiety; but at other times she mixed with her yieldings a certain increasing display of intellectualism. She found herself setting right certain little mistakes that Angelito made in his Spanish, and suggesting little differences in his deportment.

Nevertheless, each evening she awaited her lover's coming with the utmost impatience. She was displeased if he did not first come quietly around to the music room, where she might have him for ten or fifteen minutes before she presented him to the family circle. His step on the walk, his tap at the window, were quite enough to catch her breath, to make her leap up and run to the side door, where she could slip into his powerful arms.

As soon as Socorro's affection had reached this intimate stage, she set about using all her influence to break Angelito's connection with bullfighting. She became chronically anxious for his safety.

"Light of my eyes," she would plead, "it is inhuman of you to torture me by entering the *circo*. Suppose something should happen to you!"

"But what else can I do, little heaven?" he would plead.

"What else, indeed? *Caramba!* What difference does it make whether you do anything at all? You might write poems, like Rafael."

"Holy San Miguel, me write a poem!"

"I write a poem," corrected Socorro.

"I write a poem," Angelito repeated after her.

"Rafael says you have talent. Music, then—why not develop your music? Your guitar speaks a thousand voices to my heart."

"But, adorable," he said, drawing her to him and smoothing her hair, "I have a great idea. I want to be the leading *diestro* of the world. I want to sail around the world with a great herd of wild bulls, like Juan Leon."

Socorro was horrified.

"But just think of it, traveling like a king through all the South American republics, going back to Spain, meeting the king himself, and you with me!"

"But how will you do it, *mi vida?*" asked the girl, beginning to be dazzled.

"By the reputation I make in the *corrida* with Juan Leon."

"But, beloved," cried Socorro, "you can't go into the *corrida* with your wound!"

"Oh, my dear, I am like tar. Thrust a sword through it, draw it out, and the place heals instantly. Now feel here at this place in my side, to see how nicely it has healed."

"O-oh, Angelito—I won't do it!"

"Yes, do. It is cured!"

He took her hand, and forced it inside his clothes to his wound. They slipped into each other's arms with the innumerable and protracted kisses of young lovers in hot latitudes.

However, Socorro's anxieties always returned to Angelito's dangerous profession. One day she took the *torero* to Rafael's study, to talk the matter over with her brother.

The girl laid the matter before the poet with vehemence, and demanded that he should show Angelito how wrong he was to continue in the ring.

As usual, Rafael did not give the sort of advice his sister was seeking. He told Socorro that if she hoped to preserve her present tenderness and passion for Angelito, he certainly had better continue in the bull ring.

The girl was astonished and indignant that Rafael should suggest that Angelito's profession had anything to do with her affection for him.

"I am fond of Angelito purely for himself," she insisted tartly. "Do you imagine his risking his life in the *circo* makes me care for him more keenly? It just makes me anxious and miserable, that's all."

"But your anxieties increase your emotions, Socorro," argued the poet, with gathering impatience. "In fact, the danger a man risks is a sort of premium that he pays on his love insurance."

"Rafael, you have chosen an ill time for a joke!"

"Joke! That's not a joke. It is a trait built into all womankind. It is the foundation of romance. You will have to admit that if you had never seen Angelito in the arena, you would never have been impressed by him in the first place."

"Perhaps not, just at first, but now, of course—"

"There you are! You see, it is in your blood. That trait was cultivated in you by hundreds of thousands of years, during which man's chief occupation was fighting. If the old cave women had not acquired a

taste for returned heroes, the world would have been given over to cowards, and our race would have retrograded. So, for the man of to-day to hold the genuine passionate attachment of his wife, there must be something risky in his occupation."

"What a shameful idea! Can't a woman love a man for himself alone? That's what every man and every woman wants—love for their real selves"—she tapped her bosom impulsively—"not for their wealth, rank, position, beauty, or anything but themselves!"

The poet wagged a sardonic finger at his sister.

"Nobody has a real self in the sense in which you use the term, Socorro. There is no one thing about you or any one else which is yourself. Every person is a plexus of innumerable influences. His clothes, his wealth, his language, his appearance, his social standing, the house he lives in, the clubs he frequents, his likes and dislikes, his sense of humor, his love of poetry or of beer—all these are factors in his repulsion or attraction for any other human being.

(To be concluded in the April number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

All these and a million other items are included in that very vague term 'self.' When a girl imagines she has any one concrete thing in her which is herself, and asks to be loved for herself alone, she is talking nonsense. It is on a par with the belief in Santa Claus, and all the other items in the mythology of childhood."

Socorro looked at Rafael vexedly.

"Sometimes I wish I never had a brother like you! Occasionally you say a bright thing, but I never go to you for anything especial but what I get the silliest talk I ever heard!"

She stood looking at the poet in disgust, and then broke out again:

"The idea that Angelito here isn't one person! That he is like a bundle of sticks, and if you took one stick away—his bull-fighting, for instance—perhaps I wouldn't like him any more! I think the main reason you are so silly, Rafael, is because you never loved a human being in all your life!"

The poet watched the two lovers go out of his study without saying anything more.

A THOUGHT OF SUMMER

WHEN winter goes—
Would it were gone!—
With all its snows,
Into the sweet oblivion
Of the wild rose,
So that its very name
Is lost in summer's flame—
Oh, love, when June's sun glows,
And you smell sweet
As flowers do with the heat,
Breathing out myrrh
From breast and mouth and hair,
Oh, I shall play the bee,
And at your flower
Make honey every shining hour,
Or be the butterfly that sips
The nectar from your parted lips,
Or be the rocky pool—
Ah, that were best!—
Whose waters cool
Run over your white breast;
Or the green bank be I,
Where afterward you lie,
All marble to the sky!

Oliver C. Moore