

# The Fate of a Crown...

...BY... SCHUYLER STAUNTON

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## CHAPTER I.

Leaning back in my chair, I smoked my morning cigar and watched Uncle Nelson open his mail. He had an old-fashioned way of doing this: holding the envelope in his left hand, clipping its right edge with his desk shears, and then removing the inclosure and carefully reading it before he returned it to its original envelope. Across one end he would make a memorandum of the contents, after which the letters were placed in a neat pile.

As I watched him methodically working, Uncle Nelson raised a large blue envelope, clipped its end, and read the inclosure with an appearance of unusual interest. Then, instead of adding it to the letters before him, he laid it aside, and a few minutes later reverted to it again, giving the letter a second careful perusal. Deeply musing, he sat for a time but motionless in his chair. Then, arising himself from his deep abstraction, he cast a fleeting glance in my direction and composedly resumed his task.

I knew Uncle Nelson's habits so well that this affair of the blue envelope told me plainly the communication was of unusual importance. Yet the old gentleman calmly continued his work until every letter of the mail contained was laid in a pile before him and fully docketed. With the last he suddenly swung around in his chair and faced me.

"Robert," said he, "how would you like to go to Brazil?"

Lacking a ready answer to this blunt question I simply started at him.

"De Pintra has written me," he continued—"do you know of Dom Miguel de Pintra?" I shook my head. "He is one of the oldest customers of the house. His patronage assisted us in getting established. We are under deep obligations to de Pintra."

"I do not remember seeing his name upon the books," I said, thoughtfully.

"No, before you came into the firm he had retired from business—for he is a wealthy man. But I believe this retirement has been bad for him. His energetic nature would not allow him to remain idle, and he has of late substituted politics for business."

"That is not so bad," I remarked, lightly. "Some people make a business of politics, and often it proves a fairly successful one."

"My uncle nodded.

"Here in New Orleans, yes," he acknowledged; "but things are vastly different in Brazil. I am sorry to say that Dom Miguel is a leader of the revolutionists."

"Ah," said I, impressed by his grave tone. And I added, having supposed that Dom Pedro is secure upon his throne, and personally beloved by his subjects."

"He is doubtless secure enough," returned Uncle Nelson, dryly, "but though much respected by his people, there is, I believe, serious opposition to an imperial form of government. Rebellions have broken out during his reign. Indeed, these people of Brazil seem rapidly becoming republicans in principle, and it is to establish a republican form of government that my friend de Pintra has placed himself at the head of a conspiracy."

"Good for de Pintra!" I cried, heartily.

"No, no; it is bad," he rejoined, with a frown. "There is always danger in opposing established monarchies, and in this case the Emperor of Brazil has the countenance of both Europe and America."

As I ventured no reply to this he paused, and again regarded me earnestly.

"I believe you are the very person, Robert, I should send de Pintra. He wishes me to secure for him a secretary whom he may trust implicitly. At present, he writes me, he is surrounded by the emperor's spies. Even the members of his own household may be induced to betray him. Indeed, I imagine my old friend in a very hot-bed of intrigue and danger. Yet he believes he could trust an American who has no partiality for monarchies and no inclination to sympathize with any party but his own. Will you go, Robert?"

"The question, abrupt though it was, did not startle me. I had been accustomed to meet Nelson Harcliffe's moods must think quickly. Still, I hesitated.

"Can you spare me, Uncle?"

"Not very well," he admitted. "You have relieved me of the tedious details of business since you came home from college. But, for de Pintra's sake, I am not only willing you should go, but I ask you, as a personal favor, to hasten to Rio and serve my friend faithfully, protecting him so far as you may be able, from the dangers he is facing. You will find him a charming fellow—a noble man, indeed—and he needs just such a loyal assistant as I believe you will prove. Will you go, Robert?"

Uncle Nelson's sudden proposal gave me a thrill of eager interest best explained by that fascinating word "danger." Five minutes before I would have smiled at the suggestion that I visit a foreign country on so quixotic an errand; but the situation was, after all, as simple as it was sudden in development, and my uncle's earnest voice and eyes emphasized his request in no uncertain manner. Would I go? Would I, a young man on the threshold of life, with pulses readily responding to the suggestion of excitement and adventure, leave my humdrum existence in a mercantile establishment to mingle in the intrigues of a nation striving to cast off the shackles of a

monarchy and become free and independent? My answer was assured.

Nevertheless, we Harcliffes are a chary of exhibiting emotion. Any eagerness on my part would, I felt, have seriously displeased my reserved and deliberate uncle. Therefore I occupied several minutes in staring thoughtfully through the open window before I finally swung around in my chair and answered:

"Yes, Uncle, I will go."

"Thank you," said he, a flush of pleasure spreading over his fine old face. Then he turned again to the letter in the blue envelope. "The Castina sails on Wednesday, I see, and Dom Miguel wishes his new secretary to go on her. Therefore you must interview Captain Letrine at once, and arrange for passage."

"Very well, sir."

I took my hat but returned my uncle's grave bow, and left the office.

## CHAPTER II.

The Castina was a Brazilian trading-ship frequently employed by the firm of Harcliffe Brothers to transport merchandise from New Orleans to Rio de Janeiro. I had formed a slight acquaintance with the master, Pedro Letrine, and was not surprised when he placed his own stateroom at my disposal; for although the vessel usually carried passengers, the cabin accommodations were of the best.

The Captain asked no questions concerning my voyage, contenting himself with the simple statement that he had often carried my father with him in the Castina in former years, and was now pleased to welcome the son aboard. He exhibited rare deference toward my uncle, Nelson Harcliffe, as the head of our firm, when the old gentleman came to the head of the table to bid me good-by; this Uncle Nelson did by means of a gentle pressure of his hand. I am told the Harcliffes are always remarkable for their reserve and certainly the head of our house was an adept at repressing his emotions. Neither he nor my father, who had been his associate in founding the successful mercantile establishment, had ever cared to make any intimate friends; and for this reason the warmth of friendship evinced by Uncle Nelson in sending me on this peculiar mission to Dom Miguel de Pintra had caused me no little astonishment.

After his simple handshake my uncle walked back to his office, and I immediately boarded the Castina to look after the placing of my trunk. Before I had fairly settled myself in my cozy stateroom we were under way and steaming down the river toward the open sea.

On deck I met a young gentleman of rather prepossessing personality who seemed quite willing to enter into conversation. He was a dark-eyed, handsome Brazilian, well dressed and of pleasing manners. His card bore the name of Manuel Cortes de Guardie, and he expressed great delight at finding me able to speak his native tongue, and rendered himself so agreeable that he had soon established very cordial relations. He loved to talk, and I love to listen, especially when I am able to gather information by so doing, and de Guardie seemed to know Brazil perfectly, and to delight in describing it. I noticed that he never touched upon politics, but from his general conversation I gathered a considerable knowledge of the country I was about to visit.

During dinner he chattered away continually in his soft Portuguese patois, and the other passengers, less than a dozen in number, seemed content to allow him to monopolize the conversation. I noticed that Captain Letrine treated de Guardie with fully as much consideration as he did me, while the other passengers he seemed to regard with haughty indifference. However, I made the acquaintance of several of my fellow-voyagers and found them both agreeable and intelligent.

I had promised myself a pleasant quick voyage to the shores of Brazil, but presently events began to happen with a rapidity that startled me. Indeed, it was not long before I received a plain intimation that I had embarked upon an adventure that might prove dangerous.

We were two days out, and the night fell close and warm. Finding my berth insufferably oppressive I arose about midnight, partially dressed, and went on deck to get whatever breeze might be stirring. It was certainly cooler than below, and reclining in the shadow beside a poop I had nearly succeeded in falling asleep when aroused by the voices of two men who approached and paused to lean over the taffrail. They proved to be Captain Letrine and de Guardie, and I was about to announce my presence when the mention of my name caused me to halt.

"I cannot understand why you should suspect young Harcliffe," the Captain said.

"Because of all your passengers, he would be most fitted to act as de Pintra's secretary," was the reply. "And, moreover, he is a Harcliffe."

"That's just it, senator," declared the other; "he is a Harcliffe, and since his father's death, one of the great firms of Harcliffe Brothers. It is absurd to think of his position would go to Brazil to serve Miguel de Pintra."

"Perhaps the adventure entices him," returned de Guardie's soft voice, in reflective tones. "He is but lately returned from college, and I know of his to know something of Brazil, whereas the greater part of the Harcliffe fortune has been made."

"Deus Meu!" exclaimed the Captain; "but you seem to know everything about Harcliffe himself, Valcour! However, this suspicion of young Harcliffe is nonsense, I assure you. You must look elsewhere for the new secretary—provided, of course, he is on my ship."

"Oh, he is doubtless on board," answered de Guardie, with a low, confidential laugh. "De Pintra's letters asked that a man be sent on the first ship bound for Rio, and Nelson Harcliffe is known to act promptly in all business matters. Moreover, I have studied carefully the personality of each of your passengers, and none of them seems fitted for the post so perfectly as young Harcliffe himself. I assure you, my dear Letrine, that I am right. He can be going out for no other purpose than to assist de Pintra."



You will have him arrested when we reach Rio?

demands delicate treatment, and my orders are positive. Our new secretary for the revolution must not reach Rio."

Again the Captain whistled—a vague melody with many false and uncertain notes. And the other remained silent. Most interesting, and no feeling of elation prevented my straining my ears to catch more of it. It was the Captain who broke the long silence.

"Nevertheless, my dear Letrine—"

"De Guardie, if you please."

"Nevertheless, de Guardie, our Mr. Harcliffe may be innocent, and merely journeying to Brazil on business."

"I propose to satisfy myself on that point. Great God, man! do you think I love this kind of work—even for the Emperor's protection? But my master is just, though forced at times to act with seeming cruelty, I must be sure that Harcliffe is going to Brazil as a secretary to the rebel leader, and you must aid me in determining the fact. When our man goes to breakfast in the morning I will examine his room for papers. The pass-key is on the bunch you gave me, I suppose?"

"Very well. Join your passengers at breakfast, and should Mr. Harcliffe leave the table on any pretext, see that I am duly warned."

"And now I am going to bed. Good night, Letrine."

"Good night, de Guardie."

They moved cautiously away, and a few minutes later I followed, regaining my stateroom without encountering any one.

Once in my bunk I lay revolving the situation in my mind. Evidently it was far from safe to involve one's self in Brazilian politics. My friend Valcour, as the Captain had just said, was a spy of the Emperor, Manuel Cortes de Guardie. A clever fellow, indeed, despite his soft, feminine ways and innocent chatter, and one who regarded even murder as a necessary part of his duty as a spy in the execution of his duty to Dom Pedro. It was the first time in my life I had been, to my knowledge, in any personal danger, and the sensation was rather agreeable than otherwise.

It astonished me to discover that de Guardie knew so perfectly the contents of Dom Miguel's letter to my uncle. Doubtless the secret police had read and made a copy of it before the blue envelope had been permitted to leave Brazil. But in that case, I could not understand why he had allowed the missive to reach its destination.

In his cool analysis of the situation, my friend the spy had unerringly hit upon the right person as the prospective leader of the revolutionary movement. Yet he had no positive proof, and it was pleasant to reflect that in my possession were no papers of any sort that might implicate me. Uncle Nelson had even omitted the customary letter of introduction.

"De Pintra knew your father, and your face will therefore vouch for your identity," the old gentleman had declared. Others have remarked upon the strong resemblance between my father, and I had no doubt de Pintra would recognize me. But, in addition, I had stored in my memory a secret word that would serve as talisman in case of need.

The chances of my puzzling Dom Pedro's detective were distinctly in my favor, and I was about to rest content in that knowledge, when an idea took possession of me that promised so much amusement that I could not resist undertaking it. It was that I was influenced by a mild chagrin at the deception practised upon me by de Guardie, or the repulsion that a secretary man always inspires in the breast of a villain. Anyway, I resolved to pit my wits against those of the senator Valcour, and having formulated my plan I fell asleep and rested comfortably until daybreak.

It had been my habit to carry with me a pocket diary, inscribing therein any vivid impressions or important events that occurred to me. There were many blank pages, for my life had been rather barren of incident of late; but I had resolved to keep a record of this trip and for this purpose the little book was now lying upon the low shelf that served as table in my room.

Arising somewhat before my usual hour I made a hurried toilet and set out to make entries in my diary. I stated that my sudden desire to visit Brazil was due to curiosity, and that my uncle had placed several minor business matters in my hands to attend to. My return to New Orleans would depend entirely upon how well I liked the country where our house had so successfully traded for a half-century. Arriving at this point, I added the following paragraphs:

"On the ship with me Uncle Nelson is sending a private secretary to Dom Miguel de Pintra, who, it seems, was an ancient customer of our house, but is now more interested in politics than in commerce. This secretary is a remarkable fellow, yet so placid and unassuming that no one is likely to suspect his mission. He seems to know everything, and has astonished me by his intimate knowledge of all that transpires upon the ship. For example, he tells me that my friend de Guardie, of whom I have already prepared for his name other than a certain Valcour, well known in the secret service of his majesty the Emperor of Brazil. Valcour is on board because he knows the contents of a letter written by de Pintra to my uncle, asking for his private secretary; also Valcour is instructed to dispose of the rebel secretary before we land at Rio—meaning, of course, to murder him secretly. This seemingly horrible plot but amuses our secretary, for Valcour has only poor Captain Letrine to deal with, whereas the wretched American has a following of desperate men trained to deeds of bloodshed who will obey his slightest nod. From what I learn I am confident the plan is to assassinate my friend Valcour in a secret manner, for here is an opportunity to rid themselves of a hated royalist spy. Poor de Guardie! I would like to warn him of his danger, but dare not. Even then, I doubt his ability to escape. The cold blood flowing about him, even while he innocently imagines that he, as the Emperor's agent, controls the situation. It would all be laughable, were it not so very terrible in its tragic aspect.

"There! I must not mix with politics, but strive to hold aloof from either side. The secretary, though doubtless a marvel of diplomacy and duplicity, is too unscrupulous to suit me. Yet, after all, it is not to my entire credit from the engineers down, and at his word I am assured the fellows would mutiny and seize the ship. What chance has my poor friend de Guardie—or Valcour—to escape a denunciation after all, it is not my affair, and I dare not speak."

This entry I intended to puzzle Senator Valcour, even if it failed to wholly deceive him. I wrote it with assumed carelessness, to render it uniformly uninteresting. Naturally, perhaps, the book contained these last were of a trivial nature, dating back for some months. They would interest no one but myself; yet I expected them to be read, for I left the diary lying open upon my knees, and made number of plinkmarks in the pages, at the edges of the cover, so that I might assure myself on my return to the room, whether or not the book had been disturbed.

This task completed, I locked the door behind me and cheerfully joined the breakfast party in the main cabin. De Guardie was not present, but no one seemed to miss him, and he lingered long after the conversation overboard, as it is the custom of passengers aboard a slow-going ship.

Afterward, when I went on deck, I discovered de Guardie leaning over the rail, evidently in deep thought, as I turned around, and the sight of his face, white and stern, positively startled me. The soft dark eyes had lost their confident, merry look, and bore a trace of fear. No, he was not upon me, as it is the custom of passengers aboard a slow-going ship.

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## CHAPTER III.

During the remainder of the voyage I had little intercourse with Senator Manuel Cortes de Guardie. Indeed, I had turned, by the subtlest cleverly arranged means, the subject of his many dangers in addition to those indicated in my diary. For my part, I became a bit ashamed of the imposition I had practised, despite the fact that the innocent and trusting Brazilian had exhibited a perfect willingness to assassinate me in the Emperor's interests. Attracted toward him in spite of my discoveries, I made several attempts to resume our former friendly intercourse, but he would shun my overtures and shunned my society.

In order to impress upon de Guardie the truth of the assertions I had made in the diary I selected a young physician, a Dr. Neel, to impersonate the intriguing and bloodthirsty American secretary. He was a quiet, unobtrusive fellow, with an intelligent face, and a keen, inquiring look in his eyes. I took occasion to confide in Dr. Neel, in a mysterious manner that nearly all have missed, and he, the physician, was a man of whom I was afflicted with an incomprehensible disease. He promptly mistook me for a hypochondriac, and humored me in a good-natured fashion, so that we were frequently observed by the other passengers in confidential conversation. My ruse proved effective. Often I surprised a look of anxiety upon the Brazilian's face as he watched Dr. Neel from a distance; but de Guardie took pains not to mix with any of the crew, and he was not aware that it was evident the detective had no longer any desire to precipitate a conflict during the voyage to Rio.

I do not say that Valcour was cowardly. In his position I am positive he would not have escaped the doubts that so evidently oppressed him. He secluded himself in his state-room, under pretense of illness, and we drew nearer to Brazil, and I was considerably relieved to have him out of the way.

Captain Letrine, to whom Valcour had evidently confided his discovery of the diary, was also uneasy during those days, and took occasion to ask me many questions about Dr. Neel, which I parried in a way that tended to cool his suspicions. His anxiety was none other than the secret missive sent by my uncle to Miguel de Pintra. The good Captain was nervous over the safety of the ship, telling me in a confidential way that nearly all his crew were new hands, and that he had no confidence in their loyalty to the Emperor.

His face bore an expression of great relief when we anchored in the bay of Rio de Janeiro on a clear June day, and down to make entries in my diary, I stated that my sudden desire to visit Brazil was due to curiosity, and that my uncle had placed several minor business matters in my hands to attend to. My return to New Orleans would depend entirely upon how well I liked the country where our house had so successfully traded for a half-century. Arriving at this point, I added the following paragraphs:

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# FOR BOTH

One disease of thinness in children is scrofula; in adults, consumption. Both have poor blood; both need more fat. These diseases thrive on leanness. Fat is the best means of overcoming them; cod liver oil makes the best and healthiest fat and

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Another thing that influenced me was the deception that I had practised upon the detective Valcour. The Emperor at his back, was now a power to be reckoned with, and as soon as he discovered that I had misled him the police would doubtless be hot upon my trail. So my safest plan was to proceed at once to the province where my new chief had power to protect me.

I reached the railway station without difficulty and found I had a quarter of an hour to spare. "Give me a ticket to Cuyaba," I said to the clerk at the window.

He stared at me as he handed the card through the grating.

"Matto Grosso train, senator," he said. "It leaves at eight o'clock."

"Thank you," I returned, moving away.

A tall policeman in an odd uniform of black and gold barred my way. "Your pardon, senator Americano," said he, touching his visor in salute; "I beg you to follow me quietly."

He turned on his heel and marched away, and I, realizing that trouble had already overtaken me, followed him to the street.

A patrol was drawn up at the curb, a quaint-looking vehicle set low between four high wheels and covered with canvas. Started at the sight I

half turned, with a vague idea of escape, and confronted two stout policemen at my rear.

Resistance seemed useless. I entered the wagon, my captor seating himself upon the bench beside me. Instantly we whirled away at a rapid pace. I now discerned two men, also in uniform, upon the front seat. One was driving the horses, and presently the other climbed over the seat and sat opposite my guard.

The tall policeman frowned.

"Why are you here, Marco?" he demanded in a threatening voice.

"For this!" was the prompt answer; and with the words I caught a quick flash as the man called Marco buried a knife to the hilt in the other's breast.

My captor scarce uttered a sound as he pitched head foremost upon the floor of the now flying wagon. The driver had but given a glance over his shoulder and lashed his horses to their utmost speed.

Cold with horror at the revolting deed I gazed into the dark eyes of the murderer. He smiled as he answered my look and shrugged his shoulders as if excusing the crime.

"A blow for freedom, senator!" he announced, in his soft, native patois. "Dom Miguel would be grieved were you captured by the police."

I started.

"Dom Miguel! You know him, then?"

"Assuredly, senator. You are the new secretary. Otherwise you would not be so foolish as to demand a ticket to Cuyaba—the seat of the revolution."

"If you wish to undertake my mission, after a moment's thought, 'Your are of the police?'"

"Sergeant Marco, senator; at your service. And I have ventured to kill our dear Heutenant in order to insure your safety. I am sorry," he added, gently touching the motionless form that lay between us; "the lieutenant was a good comrade—but a persistent royalist."

"Where are you taking me?" I asked.

"To a suburban crossing, where you may catch the Matto Grosso train."

"And you?"

"If I am in no danger, senator. It is you who will escape this cruel deed—and you who will join me in accusing you."



Your pardon, Senator Americano.

When I arrived at the suburban crossing, I was met by a man in a uniform who told me that my friend de Guardie was waiting for me. He led me to a room where I found de Guardie sitting at a table, looking pale and ill.

"You are here," he said, with a look of surprise.

"I am," I replied, "but I am not sure I should be here. I have been told that you are a spy for the Emperor."

"I am not a spy," de Guardie said, "but I am a man of honor. I have been forced to do things that I do not like, but I have never betrayed my friends. I have been waiting for you here, and I am glad to see you. I have a letter from your uncle, and it is very interesting. It tells me that you have been to Brazil, and that you have seen my father. I am very glad to hear that, and I am sure that you will do what is right. I have been waiting for you here, and I am glad to see you. I have a letter from your uncle, and it is very interesting. It tells me that you have been to Brazil, and that you have seen my father. I am very glad to hear that, and I am sure that you will do what is right. I have been waiting for you here, and I am glad to see you. I have a letter from your uncle, and it is very interesting. It tells me that you have been to Brazil, and that you have seen my father. I am very glad to hear that, and I am sure that you will do what is right. 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