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## A CAST FOR FORTUNE

BY CHRISTIAN REID.  
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4.  
AS ONCE, ARDOR, MY DREAM—she passed the horse's arching neck—"are you sorry that you will not have to carry me this morning?"

"I am sure that he is, if I may be allowed to interpret his sentiments by my own," said Derwent. "And you are going to the hospital, senorita? I can say nothing against such a charitable intention; but before you spoke—so quick is thought—I was about to propose a visit to the Canada. Ever since you said that you would like a picture of it, I have been anxious to try what my efforts can accomplish in the way of a sketch."

"But I thought you disclaimed any artistic skill!" she said, with some surprise.

"I said that I was not an artist. That is true. But I have a little facility in sketching from nature, though not much training. I cannot promise you a finished picture, but I may make a passable drawing of the ravine."

"I shall be delighted," she said. "I hope that you will try. And surely my absence cannot matter. You do not need assistance in your drawing?"

"Oh, yes," said Derwent, though he had the grace to blush. "I need your assistance to determine the best point of view—that is, the one you would prefer. But I will take my materials and follow my own judgment. Then, when you have finished your charitable ministrations, you will perhaps come and tell me if you like my choice."

"Yes, I will come," she said, smiling. And then, without waiting to change her dress, she walked away toward the village on the other side of the gardens.

Derwent stood and watched her as long as she was in sight. The closest fitting habit showed every line of her statuesque figure and the perfect grace with which she moved, as she passed down one of the shady avenues, her favorite companion, a beautiful greyhound, walking beside her and looking as though she were herself. All around stretched the grounds, dappled with sunshine and shadow, while the long vista of the tree-lined avenue held only the one moving figure, as a perfect picture in the heart of the green loveliness.

Derwent gave a deep sigh. "If I could only paint that!" he said half aloud, and then turned, with some confusion, to find Padre Francisco beside him.

"What is that you would like to paint?" asked the priest. "This view of the gardens? Yes, it is very charming. But is not that Dona Zarifa that I see walking away, yonder? How is it that your usual ride is not to be taken?"

Derwent explained, adding, "So Dona Zarifa has gone to the hospital to see some poor woman who is wandering in her mind."

"Benita. Yes; she will die, I fear."

"And I am going to try and sketch the Canada. Will you come, padre mio, and see my failure?"

"I will come for a little while and see your success," the padre answered, "for I do not think that you are likely to attempt anything in which you would fail."

"I should not wish to attempt what I knew to be beyond my powers, certainly. But a man cannot always tell beforehand whether he will succeed in an effort, even when he thinks he may."

"If he has gauged his powers correctly he can generally tell, at least, in some degree. You, Senor Derwent, know pretty accurately, I think, what you can do."

"I wish I did!" said Derwent devoutly. "But I am, like other men, misled by vanity. I sometimes essay tasks beyond my strength and fail. I shall probably fail in making this sketch, but I mean to try. Fortunately I have sketching materials with me, for I thought I would do something of the kind in Mexico. This will be my first attempt."

A few minutes later, with a portfolio under his arm and accompanied by the padre, he was on his way to the ravine, where he had spent many delightful hours since the day when he was first introduced to it. They tried various points of view, and it was finally decided that the sketch should be made from the pavilion. So Derwent settled himself, with the more satisfaction because he had a support on the railing for his book and a roof overhead to keep away the intrusive rays of the sun. Padre Francisco lingered, talking pleasantly, until he was finally at work; and then, saying that his own work awaited him, he took his departure, with many wishes for the success of the picture.

As his slender, casketed figure went down the glen Derwent watched it with a smile, saying to himself that if his picture was a success that figure should enter into it. "Dona Zarifa will like that," he thought, for he knew how dear the gentle priest was to every one at Miraflores. He had heard from Don Maurizio that he belonged to one of the proscribed religious orders, which, robbed, exiled and defamed by the government, are yet quietly doing the work of God in poverty and obscurity all over Mexico.

The young man was thinking of that scene, and of all the long line of such

figures which had Christianized and civilized a savage people, as he worked with a facility that surprised himself. Perhaps the stimulus was the desire to gratify Dona Zarifa—for love can do wonderful things and develop powers almost undreamed of—or perhaps he possessed more talent than he had hitherto imagined. At all events his sketch was growing in the most satisfactory manner, and he was so absorbed in its progress that he had almost forgotten to wonder if Dona Zarifa would appear according to her promise, when suddenly, in such quick succession as to be almost simultaneous, two shots rang sharply on the air, the last—a rifle ball—just grazing his ear and then flattening itself on the stone column beside which he sat.

The book dropped from his hand and the sheet of paper on which he was sketching was borne by a current of air over the railing and fluttered unheeded into the current below, as with a violent start he looked up to see Dona Zarifa standing on the path below, with a still smoking pistol in her uplifted hand.

In an instant he was by her side, for instinct told him that the shot had not been fired idly. "For God's sake, what is it?" he cried, gazing with astonishment at the pale, set face, the shining eyes and the uplifted hand pointing so steadily without a tremor in the direction of the pavilion.

"There is a man, an assassin, behind yonder rock," she answered, in a clear, vibrant tone, pointing to a low, long boulder that crowned the hill which rose immediately in the rear of the pavilion. "I saw him about to shoot you, and I fired just as he had his finger on the trigger. His aim swerved and he fell. I think I killed him."

"I will see," said Derwent, turning quickly; but she stopped him by a motion and extended the pistol. "He may be merely wounded," she said. "Be cautious."

With no recollection of his weakness he sprang forward and hastened up the steep ascent. Eighteen or twenty yards brought him to the boulder, and there on the ground behind it was the assassin, his rifle where it had fallen beside him. At the first glance Derwent thought he was dead, but on examination discovered that, though insensible, he was still breathing. Throwing open his loose white upper garment, the young man saw that the pistol ball had entered his chest some little distance below the heart. A stream of dark blood was flowing from it, and Derwent's first act was to place his thumb on the bullet-hole. The next moment he heard a step, and turning his head saw Zarifa standing beside him, looking down at the man's face with an expression of intense pain. But she asked in a hushed tone:

"Is he dead?"

"No; and I am not sure that the wound need be fatal if we can get speedy help. Can you go for it?"

"Yes, certainly," she answered, starting away impulsively. But before she had gone three steps she turned again, and picking up the man's weapon, carried it a short distance away. "Have you the pistol in your hand?" she said.

"Be on your guard; some of these people are very treacherous. I will soon bring assistance and Padre Francisco. I left him at the hospital."

When she was gone, Derwent for the first time looked closely at the man's face. It was dark, with finely cut features and a tangled mass of black hair, but not even the closed eyes and relaxed muscles could soften its fierce and sinister expression. A desperado in appearance as well as in deed, he looked thoroughly capable of the dastardly act in which vengeance had overtaken him, and Derwent felt with a sense of shuddering horror, such as he had never before even imagined, that but for the strangely fortunate chance—or was it the mercy of heaven?—that had brought Dona Zarifa upon the scene at the critical moment, his blood would now be lying with his life blood welling out and his eyes closed forever to the things of earth.

The man must be indeed insensible who, having as it were, felt the very breath of death upon his cheek, is not thrilled by the touch of that great and terrible mystery. Nor was the thrill lessened by thinking of the hand that saved him, the gentlewoman's hand that had never before taken even the life of a bird, but that had not faltered in striking the murderer down. What a fire of fierce indignation had been in the dark eyes when he met them first! It was like the deadly flash of a sword from its sheath. He found himself recalling it with such a sense of conflicting emotion that it was well for him that the sound of quickly approaching steps tore his mind from the subject. Padre Francisco had been met by Dona Zarifa before she had gone far, and he hurried on at once to join Derwent, while she proceeded quickly to the hospital and, in less time than they dared hope, several men bearing a litter made their appearance.

With the practiced skill of one accustomed to such work, the padre bandaged the wound, and the man was placed on the litter just as Zarifa once more appeared.

"The doctor will be at the hospital by the time you get there," she said. "Do you think, padre mio, that?"

"He will live," the priest said, concluding her faltering sentence. "I cannot tell. He is still insensible, but I believe he will recover consciousness soon, and I shall stay beside him. Go home now, my child. This has been a great shock to you."

But Dona Zarifa shook her head, and Derwent saw by her pallor and the expression of her face how much she was suffering. "I will go to the hospital," she said. "I can render assistance there."

"None," said the padre gently, but firmly. "You must go to the casa. If Don Maurizio has returned send him to us, but you can do nothing. Take Senor Derwent with you."

"No," said Derwent, "my place is certainly here to help you with your burden. But Dona Zarifa must go. It is too painful a sight for her."

"Nothing is too painful when one can do anything to help," she said. "But if there is nothing!"

She cast one more glance at the man on the litter, shuddered and turned away. Derwent followed her with his eyes and with his heart, but an intuition told him that it was best to leave her alone, even if there had not been work for him to do. It was slow and difficult work conveying the wounded man to the hospital, where Our Lady of Guadalupe stood above the doorway, as if to welcome all who came, and where he was laid down on a white bed—the most wild, gaunt, bloody object that had ever come within those quiet walls.

CHAPTER XIII.

He took the other hand and kissed it.

Exultation is the only word which will at all describe Don Maurizio's sentiments when he heard of that morning's work. He could scarcely think of Derwent's narrow escape, or of the terrible necessity laid upon Dona Zarifa, in his gratification at having the would-be assassin in his own hands.

"Now we shall know all!" he said; "now the mystery will be cleared up. Nothing better could have happened—if only the scoundrel can be kept alive until he confesses."

"I am afraid," said Derwent, "that he will be difficult. He looks to me as if he were sinking fast."

They had just left the hospital, where the subject of their conversation was lying in a state of apparent insensibility, with the doctor on one side of his bed and Padre Francisco on the other.

"I do not think he is so near death as you imagine," Don Maurizio answered. "These Indians have wonderful powers of vitality. He will rally sufficiently to speak, and that is all we want. I have told the doctor to spare no effort to keep him alive and give him strength to do this. Our best hope, however, is from the influence of Padre Francisco. He will bring him to contrition and confession."

"Do you believe it possible?"

"Yes; I have seen it too often not to believe it possible. Men like this are different from your criminals, inasmuch as they are not able to rid themselves of the saving principle of faith. Like the devils, they believe and tremble. The justice of God is a very real thing to them—the comfortable delusion that there is no such justice not having yet reached them; and when death comes, their overmastering desire is to make their peace with God as far as possible."

"I hope, for Dona Zarifa's sake, that this man may not die," said Derwent, after a short pause. "Does the doctor think there is any hope for him?"

"Not the least. The bullet is in his lung. It was a good shot—no man could have made a better. Why should she regret it? If she had not shot him she would be dead; and there cannot be much doubt of the relative value of the two lives. And it will save him trouble if he dies now—after having spoken—for if he were to recover it would only be for to be marched out and shot as a highway robber. Such crimes are dealt with summarily here."

Derwent could not but smile. "In that case it will be better for him to die comfortably in your hospital, with Padre Francisco's gentle ministrations," he said. "But I am grieved beyond measure that Dona Zarifa should have been forced to act so painful to herself in order to save my life. It almost makes me regret that I ever came to Miraflores."

"Nonsense!" said Don Maurizio, good-naturedly. "If she feels any pain on the subject—which I cannot believe—it shows a morbid spirit that I would not have suspected in her. I am proud, my self, that she rose to the occasion so well. She should be grateful to have had the opportunity not only to save your life, but also to clear Senor Barrera of a very dark suspicion; as I am sure this man's confession will clear him."

"I hope it will," said Derwent, "but to take human life—that is a hard word for a man!"

"To take human life—the life of a cowardly assassin—when it is to save the life of an unconscious man at whose back he has leveled his gun!" cried Don Maurizio with impatience, not unmixed with scorn. "I should feel no more regret for that necessity than for shooting a tiger in a jungle. Neither would you. Neither, I am certain, does Zarifa. The marvelously fortunate thing is that she came upon the ground just at that moment when her presence was needed."

"Yes," said Derwent; "if she had been a minute later I should not be walking here with you now."

He looked around, as if with a sudden sense of how near the peril had been, and how narrow the chance that he would ever look again upon the beauty of earth. Never had that beauty seemed to touch him more keenly than in connection with this thought. The long shadows of late afternoon were now stretching across the grounds through which he had watched Dona Zarifa walking in the morning, unconscious, as most of us are when the dark wing of Azael nearly overshadows us, that he might be looking his last upon that gracious form; the wide plain stretched into magical blueness afar to meet the luminous sky, the distant purple heights had a more mystic charm than ever in his eyes, and the fresh, delicious air seemed fraught with blessing. He had a feeling as if a new life were given to him—a life divided from that of yesterday by the gulf of a great danger, and a life which was the gift (after God) of Zarifa. "It is owing to her that I am here!" he thought, after a rush of emotion, a sense that existence had become something dearer and more precious for that fact. "She will tell me that she would have done the same for any one, and I know that she would have done it for the poorest peon in Mexico. No matter. It was for me that she did it. Nothing can alter that."

Almost oppressed with these thoughts, and also with the passionate desire to express them (in a modified form), he sought Dona Zarifa when he entered the house, but sought her in vain. He had by this time learned most of her habits, but in none of them was she to be found. No one had seen her for hours—not since, after having done everything that it was in her power to do for the wounded man, she had returned to the house and gone to her own apartments. She was not there, however, when Derwent, waylaying her maid, asked for her. "No, the senorita has gone out," Marcela made him understand. "I saw her pass across the court a short time ago."

It will not say much for Derwent's devotional instincts that it was only when he was altogether balked in his desire to express his gratitude to Zarifa that he thought of offering the same sentiment to God. Perhaps he would not have thought of it at all—certainly not of taking his way to church for the purpose—had not the atmosphere of Miraflores begun to tell on him. But he had a nature readily impressed by all things beautiful, and most readily by those which were beautiful in the moral rather than in the physical order. When he saw the whole household of Miraflores, and all those on the hacienda who were able to do so, gather every morning in the beautiful chapel for the most august of all acts of worship—when he saw all day long men, women and children passing through its open doors, seizing a few moments from their toil to offer a petition, to leave a thanksgiving, or simply to rest soul and body as in the shelter of a father's house—the beauty of it struck him more than words can express. The lovely church, with its never dying altar flame and its atmosphere of infinite calm, seemed like the heart of all the busy life around—a heart ever turned to God, yet also open ever to man, and full of holy thoughts and words as a censor is of fragrance.

Thither, then, he took his way, as the sun of the day which might have been his last on earth was slowly sinking behind the western mountains. Crossing the quiet, cloisterlike court which led to the church, he entered by the side door and found himself in the soft, mellow gloom, with which he was by this time familiar. As usual, two or three figures were kneeling here and there over the nave; but it was not until he had been in the church for several minutes that he identified one of them as Zarifa. She was kneeling on a prie-dieu just before the altar, her bowed head covered and her form partially concealed by the black drapery thrown around her. She seemed absorbed in prayer, and Derwent watched her for some time before she made the faintest movement. It was not until the dusk had deepened and the only light in the church was that of the flickering, golden radiance from the tabernacle lamps that she lifted her head and rising glided across the nave toward the door by which he had entered. He followed her at a distance, and when she paused for a moment under the pointed archway outside, reached her and spoke.

"Senor Derwent!" she exclaimed with a start. "I did not know that you were here."

"Could I be in a better place?" he asked, in a voice that trembled a little from emotion. "I came here to thank God for my escape from sudden and violent death. And having thanked God, senorita, will you now let me thank you? Thank you! Ah, what a world that is to express such debt! If I could only utter what I feel—if I could

only words in which I might venture to utter it!"

She lifted one hand with a slight, lending gesture as she turned her face toward him. There was still light enough from the blue sky overarching the court to show him that it looked like a pale, beautiful cameo in the setting of the soft, black drapery of China grass which surrounded it. Yet, beautiful as it looked, Derwent was almost shocked to see what a change the last few hours had wrought. It was not only the pallor of the skin and the purple shadows under the eyes—those shadows which come so quickly in a sensitive organization from illness or mental pain—but the very features looked chiseled and attenuated, as if by suffering.

"Do not thank me, senor," she said, with grave gentleness. "Thank God if you will, and as you truly should; that I was there in time. But how could I have helped doing what I did? It was no merit on my part. I saw and I fired. The two things were simultaneous. There was not an instant to be lost. I stepped down upon that path—ah, how lightly! how unconsciously!—and some instinct caused me to glance up at the hillside. The rest was like a flash of lightning. I saw the sunshine reflected on the barrel of that gun, I saw the man leaning over the rock and taking aim at you so intently that he did not perceive me. To see was to act. I had still in the pocket of my habit the little pistol we used yesterday, and do you think it was an accident that I had not taken that habit? I felt one thrill of passionate indignation as I saw you sitting so quietly, so unsuspectingly and that coward drawing his gun upon you behind your back on the very soil of Miraflores!"

He saw the flash that came into her eyes at the recollection. "I fired, and I was glad to see him drop. Yes; I could not have believed it if I had been told of it beforehand, but I was glad! The horror of what I had been forced to do did not come over me until I saw the poor creature bleeding to death. Then—then it was awful! I do not think I can ever forget the sight!"

As she lifted one hand, with an involuntary gesture, to her eyes, as if to shut out the memory, he took the other and kissed it—the hand that had saved his life—so gently and so reverently that it was like offering homage.

"What can I say?" he exclaimed. "To spare you such pain I would have done anything. Would to God I had never come to Miraflores, since my coming was to cost you what you have suffered today!"

She withdrew her hand and looked at him with a very sweet and pathetic regard. "You must not think that," she said. "I should be very sorry if you believed that I regretted it. How could that be possible? It was a great privilege to be allowed to interpose to save the innocent from the guilty. But that I am a little unnerved is surely natural. The peril was so awfully near. In another instant it would have been you who lay bleeding, dying, before me. The pitiful sight of the other helps me to realize that. And then, while I thank God that it was spared, the picture of the poor wretch yonder in the hospital comes before me, and I shudder at the thought that she is suffering, that he will die from a wound inflicted by my hand!"

He said that she was indeed thoroughly unweary. Something of the tragedy had certainly stirred her nature to its depths. The fire that he had suspected was there, he had seen it blazing in her eyes as she stood with the uplifted weapon that had struck the destroyer down, but how soon it was quenched by gentleness and divinist compassion. His heart melted within him in the stress of his love and sympathy. Yet what could he say or do? Never had he felt more keenly how wide were the barriers between them than as they stood alone together in the soft twilight and the cloistered quiet.

"I feel for you more than I can or dare express," he said. "I understand what a shock it is to have had such a necessity laid upon you, and to have seen the result with your own eyes. It is vain to repeat that I would have done anything—anything whatever—to spare you. But we were both powerless; it was the work of fate."

"No," she interposed, "it was the mercy of God that sent me there and placed the duty before me. That being so, what reason have I for regret? None, believe me, none. If I shudder at the memory of what I have seen, I am nevertheless very grateful—grateful beyond measure—to have been allowed to save your life."

He longed to take and kiss her hand again, as she said those words with the most earnest emphasis; but never could he less have dared anything that savored in the remotest degree of presumption. Not only the greatness of his obligation overpowered him, but, as she revealed to him (with unconscious reliance upon his sympathy which touched him to the heart) all the depths of her feelings, he was like one taken into a sanctuary, where the very atmosphere rebuked anything that inclined to selfish passion.

"Yes, you have saved my life," he said. "And I beg you never to forget it, for it is a thought upon which I shall always be glad to dwell. Life given to me through your hands seems to have a greater value than ever before, as it is cherished according to our feeling for the giver. God knows, I would give this life to you, if you had asked for it, even the least. There is no one I could render you that service."

"Could I be in a better place?" he asked, in a voice that trembled a little from emotion. "I came here to thank God for my escape from sudden and violent death. And having thanked God, senorita, will you now let me thank you? Thank you! Ah, what a world that is to express such debt! If I could only utter what I feel—if I could

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As she lifted one hand, with an involuntary gesture, to her eyes, as if to shut out the memory, he took the other and kissed it—the hand that had saved his life—so gently and so reverently that it was like offering homage.

"What can I say?" he exclaimed. "To spare you such pain I would have done anything. Would to God I had never come to Miraflores, since my coming was to cost you what you have suffered today!"

She withdrew her hand and looked at him with a very sweet and pathetic regard. "You must not think that," she said. "I should be very sorry if you believed that I regretted it. How could that be possible? It was a great privilege to be allowed to interpose to save the innocent from the guilty. But that I am a little unnerved is surely natural. The peril was so awfully near. In another instant it would have been you who lay bleeding, dying, before me. The pitiful sight of the other helps me to realize that. And then, while I thank God that it was spared, the picture of the poor wretch yonder in the hospital comes before me, and I shudder at the thought that she is suffering, that he will die from a wound inflicted by my hand!"

He said that she was indeed thoroughly unweary. Something of the tragedy had certainly stirred her nature to its depths. The fire that he had suspected was there, he had seen it blazing in her eyes as she stood with the uplifted weapon that had struck the destroyer down, but how soon it was quenched by gentleness and divinist compassion. His heart melted within him in the stress of his love and sympathy. Yet what could he say or do? Never had he felt more keenly how wide were the barriers between them than as they stood alone together in the soft twilight and the cloistered quiet.

"I feel for you more than I can or dare express," he said. "I understand what a shock it is to have had such a necessity laid upon you, and to have seen the result with your own eyes. It is vain to repeat that I would have done anything—anything whatever—to spare you. But we were both powerless; it was the work of fate."

"No," she interposed, "it was the mercy of God that sent me there and placed the duty before me. That being so, what reason have I for regret? None, believe me, none. If I shudder at the memory of what I have seen, I am nevertheless very grateful—grateful beyond measure—to have been allowed to save your life."

He longed to take and kiss her hand again, as she said those words with the most earnest emphasis; but never could he less have dared anything that savored in the remotest degree of presumption. Not only the greatness of his obligation overpowered him, but, as she revealed to him (with unconscious reliance upon his sympathy which touched him to the heart) all the depths of her feelings, he was like one taken into a sanctuary, where the very atmosphere rebuked anything that inclined to selfish passion.

"Yes, you have saved my life," he said. "And I beg you never to forget it, for it is a thought upon which I shall always be glad to dwell. Life given to me through your hands seems to have a greater value than ever before, as it is cherished according to our feeling for the giver. God knows, I would give this life to you, if you had asked for it, even the least. There is no one I could render you that service."

"Could I be in a better place?" he asked, in a voice that trembled a little from emotion. "I came here to thank God for my escape from sudden and violent death. And having thanked God, senorita, will you now let me thank you? Thank you! Ah, what a world that is to express such debt!