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THE KNIFE THROWERS

By FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY,
Author of "Not Like Other Men," Etc.

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CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

BOTH were silent until the luncheon was finished—that is, silent regarding the subjects nearest to the thoughts of each. Maria, who had returned to her table as placidly as if nothing unusual had happened and whom Wyndham had warmly thanked for her part in the scene so lately enacted, had turned her back to them and was gazing out through the window at the carriages that were constantly passing to and fro.

"Now, Carmen," said Craig at last, "war is declared. I do not know what Escudera has got up his sleeve"—

"A knife, doubtless," she interpolated, and Craig smiled and continued:

—"but I do not doubt that he has something. We have forced his hand, and I have not a doubt that he will at once endeavor to fix this crime that we know he committed upon me. Still I have considerable time to act, so we need not make unnecessary haste. There are several things that I must know to complete the knowledge I already have, for I already know more about the history of your father and Burr than you think I do. I think the best way to get at what I require now will be to ask you a few questions. It will save time, and in that way we can get directly at the important points."

"I will reply to any question you will ask if it is one that I am informed about."

"Under what name did your father first visit Mexico?"

"Bridge. That is why my cards are inscribed Del Puente—of the bridge."

"Did your mother know his true name when they were married?"

"Yes. He never deceived her."

"Do you know why he went to Mexico under an assumed name?"

"Yes. Pancho, who was his servant and is now mine, has told me. A syndicate that had been formed by my father in New York met with disaster of some kind at the hands of the then Mexican government. He was known to the Mexicans by name only, and he went among them to investigate the affairs of the syndicate. In order to accomplish the task better he assumed a name at random. Bridge happened to be the one he selected. The government of Mexico was very unstable at that time. Life was not valued at a very high price—not much higher than their bonds, which were then worthless. There were national complications of some kind which I do not understand, but"—

"I know about that, Carmen, and I will tell you in a few words enough so that you will know what a really great man Robert Pendleton was. An American officer of the government was grossly insulted by the Mexican government. Your father might, by informing his own government of all he knew, have brought on difficulties between the two nations, which would probably have resulted in the downfall of Mexico, at that time torn by internal conflicts. Your mother plead for her country, and for love of her he not only kept silent, but he voluntarily relinquished a fortune, or what they would call there several fortunes. He did not return to Mexico for the same reason, because his life would not have been safe for a moment and because she begged him not to do so. She promised to come here to him, but she died. That much I have learned from documents that I found in Burr's safe. And here let me add: Burr knew that his father had married again in Mexico and that his wife had died. He did not know that there was a child, but he believed it probable, and that is why he left the property in trust to me, with private directions what to do. Now, Carmen, were you the only child of that marriage?"

"No." She cast down her eyes so that he could not meet her glance. "I had a twin brother."

"You had a twin brother? He is dead, then?"

"No; he lives, but I will not recognize him. Captain Romero, with whom Burr fought the duel, is my brother. He was born at the same time that I was born."

"My God! Brother against brother! What a fortunate thing it is that the duel did not terminate fatally! Did you know about it at the time?"

"Yes, and I tried to prevent. But for Pancho, my old servant, I would have done so. But for once in his life, and only once, I believe, Pancho betrayed me. But he hates Ignacio for his own sake and because he has been unkind to me. After Burr left Mexico he came to me and confessed what he had done. It was Pancho who drove my carriage yesterday, so you may know that I still trust him. He came to New York once with a message from my mother to my father, and he remained here a month. Now you understand how it is that he knows his way about the city."

Then in a few words she related to Craig how she, having learned that there was to be a duel, determined to prevent it; how she sent a messenger to Burr requesting him to meet her in the garden at "Jenks';" how, failing to influence him and not daring at that time to betray the relations between them, she had her servants kidnap him on the road between Tacubaya and Chapultepec; how she kept him prisoner, and how Pancho [illegible] him and conducted him to the dueling ground; she told of her anxiety to get him out of Mexico lest Ignacio Romero should have him assassinated.

"Was Ignacio aware of the relationship between him and Burr?" asked Craig.

"Yes; that is why he hated him so. He would never consent to bear the name of Bridge or Del Puente, but selected instead our mother's name, Romero. But if he could have killed Burr or have had him killed he would gladly have taken the name of Pendleton in order to inherit the property. My mother's family never forgave her for marrying an American and a heretic, as they styled my father. Their hatred fills the veins of Ignacio."

"Who is Captain Agramonte?"

"A very dear friend—one whom I esteem most highly. He has been a brother to me in many kindnesses. Ignacio and he are not friends, although there has never been an open rupture between them. I love him dearly."

She uttered the last sentence quite calmly, as one might speak of a favorite horse, and the sudden leap that Craig Wyndham's heart had given was not repeated.

"Now tell me about Escudera," he said.

"I have already told you that he is my cousin and my fiance. I can only add that he and Ignacio are inseparable friends. In fact, there are four friends in the group, and they are known as the "four duelists" throughout Mexico. They pass their time at the shooting gallery and in the gambling houses, and they are bound together by the ties of some secret society which, I believe, is inimical to the government, but I do not know. Ignacio is still bedridden with the wound he received from Burr. The remaining three came here to accomplish the death of Burr. How well they succeeded you know."

"I want to remember it—always, Craig."

"Three!" exclaimed Craig. "Where, then, are the others?"

"They are in the city. They are not far from this spot at this moment. Between them they would have served you as Burr was served long before this only that they await the recovery of Ignacio so that he may be on hand to claim the estate. It is a tangled skein, Craig, but it is as clear to me as noonday."

"It begins to be clear to me also," he replied.

"Now that you have served Carlos as you have," she continued, and she smiled again when the scene recurred to her, "I do not think they will have the patience to wait. Certainly you are in constant peril. With a Mexican—that is, with such Mexicans as they are—vengeance comes before money."

"You have already told me," said Craig thoughtfully, ignoring her reference to his own danger, "that you are not in need of money—in short, that you are—er—rich. Did the property of your mother all descend to you?"

"No; Ignacio received the same that I did, but he has gambled his portion away until he has nothing. It was to demand money of me that he accosted me one day on the Paseo, when Burr interfered, and which was the real cause of the duel.

"That was the first time that Burr ever saw me," she added after a moment's pause.

"One word more about the property, Carmen. I know that there are estates in Mexico, in the state of Michoacan, which were in the hands of a man named Sepulvida, and I know that Burr's father in a letter directed him to go to Mexico and recover them. I know that Burr wrote to Sepulvida several times, or, rather, I wrote for him, and that no satisfactory replies were received. I also know that those properties were transferred by Sepulvida to Burr while he was there, for I have found copies of the papers relating to them, but I do not know any of the particulars. The real cause of Burr's trip was to find a brother or a sister; ostensibly it was to recover this property, for which he did not care a fig. Can you tell me anything about that?"

"Yes. Pancho knows about it and has told me. My father made my mother a very rich woman before he left Mexico, and he was thoughtful enough to place it all in United States government bonds in her name. He also possessed large estates in Michoacan, but those he did not dare, for some reason, to transfer directly to her. Therefore he made Senor Sepulvida the ostensible owner, with directions to transfer them to my mother whenever it was safe to do so and in the event of her death and his to his son in New York. Senor Sepulvida is a very conscientious man. It was his wish long ago to give the property to me, but he did not believe he had the right to do so. Ignacio knows nothing about those properties. It is the regret of my life, Craig, that I never saw my father—only his picture," she added pensively.

"What are the names of the two Mexicans who came here with Escudera?" asked Craig, suddenly changing the subject.

"Juan Rodriguez and Emilio Bustamente. Both are rather light complexioned and might readily pass for Americans, for they speak English fluently."

"Good!" exclaimed Craig, rising suddenly. "I know them both. I have seen them with Escudera twice when they did not see me. Now let us go. I will take you back to your hotel, and I want to see Pancho."

"He is there; but if you take him away I will not be safe a moment. I am afraid of Carlos."

"Carlos will be kicking his toes against iron bars before he is twenty-four hours older," replied Craig, with a frown.

"But he is crafty, and much may be accomplished in twenty-four hours. You must not leave me unprotected."

"Unprotected, Carmen? Unprotected? I will never leave you unprotected as long as I live if you will give me the right to protect you. Hush! Hush! That slipped out without permission, Carmelita; but I mean it, I mean it. It is too sudden, but I am a sudden fellow, and you must not mind. Have I frightened you, Carmen? Am I a great big brute? There; keep back your tears and forget that I said what I did."

She raised her glowing eyes to his and, looking deep into his own, replied:

"I do not want to forget it. I want to remember it—always, Craig."

After that neither spoke during a full minute, but sat like two statues gazing into each other's eyes. What silent sentences passed between them then nobody will ever know. Presently Craig broke the silence.

"Come, Carmelita," he said gently; "we must go. There is so much to do, but I believe with it all that I am at this moment the happiest man on God's green earth. God has been good to me always, but better now than ever before, querida mia."

And when he turned around he for the first time that day discovered the old duenna looking at him, and she murmured so that the words just reached his hearing:

"Esta bien, senor. Esta muy bien!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

TEN YEARS AGO AND NOW.

Good Antidote For Despondency is Suggested.

There is no better antidote for despondency than to take a measure of your own community as it was 10 years ago and as it today—unlsss you live in an unrepresentative and stagnant community, says the World's Work. You will be likely to find the roads or streets better than they were; the railroad service better, the postal service, possibly even the telegraph and the telephone service; you will observe better houses, more attractive grounds; the people are better clad, or more are well clad. Inside their houses you will find more books or better; more bathrooms, better lights and better furniture. A larger proportion of children and youth are receiving good training at better schools. All this means more than prosperous years. It means a higher level of life and a stronger ambition. The well-being of the people of the United States is rising higher and especially it is diffusing itself wider. Life is constantly becoming more comfortable and more cheerful, as well as longer and safer—leading to better conditions for intellectual growth and social development.

A Sable Budding Genius.

Brother Dickey came in leading a black picka'inny by the hand. "He ain't but 10 years ol,' suh," he explained, "but he done gone inter the writin' business, en he say he gwine beat disyer Dunbar feller writin' fer de race. He done light in ter buildin' of a story, en heah's a small sketch er it: but he say hit'll be 'bout three stories high 'fo' he get thoo' wid it." And Brother Dickey handed over the following, which is printed verbatim:

"When spring begin to dawn the young sprouts of all varieties that has been nestled in the earth during the long and dreary winter puts out their green heads, looking upward. The birds begin to warble sweet melodies from their throats. Also one can see, by close observation, poisonous reptiles lieing about as if they were sunning themselves and resting up from the sleep of the cold winter that had just passed into the great beyond: still there is nothing or no one more thankful for the spring than the Poet."—*Atlanta Constitution.*

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Men's Shoes, from	$1.00 to $5.00
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