

# DEVIL'S RIVER NEWS.

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## Dice of Destiny

By Jackson Gregory

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### CHAPTER VIII.

At Three O'clock. The questions perplexing Stanway were these: "Is there a large force of men backing Torre and Juarez? Are they alone in the thing? And there was only one way to answer them.

As the afternoon slipped by and dusk came down upon them, sweet and warm, through the groves of oranges and olive trees, Teresa sent word to the men's quarters for all, excepting a half dozen of them, to come to the house.

Those not coming in were to remain on guard over the corrals into which the saddle-horses had been herded, and to serve as sentinels along the border. The guard over Torre and Juarez was doubled; the two men were disarmed and assigned to couches upon the opposite side of the drawing-room.

Doors were fastened, windows locked, shutters drawn, and the hacienda was like an old fortress in time of siege.

"I do not anticipate an attack," Stanway smiled into Teresa's grave face. "Surely the insurgents are not looking for complications with this country. But we are taking no chances. It would take a whole regiment of them to trouble us here tonight."

"But are we doing right?" she whispered a little fearfully. "If we gave them the money—it is so small a part of papa grande's estate—he would be out of all danger. And as it is—"

"It is a bluff of Torre's, pure and simple," he told her. "If anything should happen to Senor de la Guerra, Torre and Juarez would not last fifteen minutes with your little army of retainers, senorita. They talk big, both of them, but I am not afraid."

But when she had given him her hand and a wan smile by the way of "Buenas noches," he was not content until he himself had seen to the watchfulness of the men stationed here and there throughout the big house. And, by the way of final precaution, he saw that another man slept that night at Pedro's side, in front of the senorita's door, and that both men were armed.

He had not again gone to where Dempton fumed and worried in the library. It was his thought to leave the lawyer to chew upon the cud of suspicion his own parting words had given him, to make the night long and uneventful for him, so that his trembling little soul might have time for thought.

It was late when Teresa heard his urging and went to her room. He left her at the foot of the stairs leading up to her chambers; saw Pedro preparing to spend the night at her doorway, and then went to his own room, decided to sleep until the stiller hours of the night came; then to superintend in person the watch which was being kept throughout the house.

On his way to the wing of the building which had been given over to him, he passed through the drawing-room for the last time.

Juarez seemed to be asleep upon his couch. Half a dozen of Gaucho's vaqueros, all armed, were scattered about the room, their quick eyes showing how alert was the spirit within them. Torre, sitting at a table idly turning the leaves of an illustrated book of poems, rose quickly when Stanway came into the room and stepped to his side.

"A word to your ear, senor," he said, his voice and manner gayly impudent, his words low so that they reached no ears but those he intended to hear. "Twenty thousand dollars now, immediately, or I give you my word as a gentleman that when the sun is up you will rush to me, trying to make terms, and I shall then answer you by demanding fifty thousand!"

The threat in the man's voice again disturbed Stanway. He had a feeling which he could not entirely reason down that Torre meant what he was saying. Then he looked at the half dozen stern-featured, faithful servants, who served the De la Guerra as old subjects served a beloved sovereign; saw them watchful, armed, eager for an excuse to fling themselves upon their two captives; and, frowning at his own fears, he went to his room.

His windows faced westward and to the south.

He stood before one of them which looked to the border, half ready to expect a rush of cavalry through the olive trees.

He saw the olive trees away to the little, warm wind from the south; watched his window curtains pulsing slowly like one breathing; noted how the moonlight gilded the ripe fruit upon the orange trees, and, with a last look toward the eastern wing of the house, where a little balcony jutted out among roses, he jerked down his shade, fastened his window, placed a revolver upon the chair at his side, and went to bed.

A low, insistent rapping at his doorway awakened him.

Stanway sat up in bed, a sudden shiver of uneasiness upon him.

"Who is it?" he called sharply.

"It is Lugo, senor. Senor Torre sends me with a message. It is to come to the drawing-room immediately. He has something to say to you. He says it is very important. He insists you come to him before it is three o'clock—within fifteen minutes."

"He has his nerve," muttered Stanway. "Tell him to be more explicit or to go to the devil."

"Si, senor."

Lugo chuckled his approval, and hurried away through the still house. Stanway lay back upon his bed and closed his eyes, only to open them quickly to stare into the darkness of his room.

He was remembering those forebodings which had come to him with Torre's veiled threats; he was feeling an uneasiness which he could not drive out. Torre had sent for him in the middle of the night—

Again he sat up, groping for matches and a candlestick. In the little yellow glow he saw that it lacked but ten minutes of three. He sprang out of bed, drew on his clothes hurriedly, and hastened to the drawing-room.

"Ah, senor, you are very kind," Torre's smile was full of mock-politeness. "To trouble yourself so at the slightest wish of a guest is—"

"Get down to business if you have any," Stanway interrupted bluntly. "What is it?"

"I want a word with you in private," Torre answered quietly. The man was fully dressed and now rose from the couch upon which he had been lying. "There is no objection to the others being in the room, but at least let us stand at the far side of the chamber so that they may not hear."

"If you have anything to say, say it aloud," Stanway retorted. "I am tired of your way of doing business Torre. Now, what is it?"

Torre shrugged.

"Then I shall be silent," he said carelessly. "I think that you are making a mistake, senor."

Was he? Stanway didn't know. He looked about the room. Juarez seemed to be sleeping heavily upon his couch; the vaqueros, seven of them, sat along the walls or lounged about the room, each man of them as watchful, his eyes as keen and suspicious as at the beginning of their vigil at dusk.

And yet, in spite of all this security, in spite of the fact that Stanway and the De la Guerra servants were armed, the rancher had the odd feeling that there was a weakness in his position which he could not see, but

which was very plain to the smiling Torre. And then his curiosity decided him.

"Come," he said after a brief moment. And then again: "Now, what is it?"

He had stepped to the far corner of the room, motioning two of the lounging cowboys out of earshot. Torre, debonaire, his manner gracefully indifferent, stopped at the big mahogany table to light his cigarette at one of the candles and came to Stanway's

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