

upper pasturelands and past the pale and reedy lakes riding erect and stately until the rain caught her up and shrouded her figure away in that wild summer landscape: real horse, real rider, real land and sky and yet a dream withal.

STARBUCK

THE DUEÑA ALFONSA was both grandaunt and godmother to the girl and her life at the hacienda invested it with oldworld ties and with antiquity and tradition. Save for the old leatherbound volumes the books in the library were her books and the piano was her piano. The ancient stereopticon in the parlor and the matched pair of Greener guns in the italian wardrobe in Don Héctor's room had been her brother's and it was her brother with whom she stood in the photos taken in front of cathedrals in the capitals of Europe, she and her sister-in-law in white summer clothes, her brother in vested suit and tie and panama hat. His dark moustache. Dark spanish eyes. The stance of a grandee. The most antique of the several oilportraits in the parlor with its dark patina crazed like an old porcelain glazing was of her great-grandfather and dated from Toledo in seventeen ninety-seven. The most recent was she herself full length in formal gown on the occasion of her quinceañera at Rosario in eighteen ninety-two.

John Grady had never seen her. Perhaps a figure glimpsed passing along the hallway. He did not know that she was aware of his existence until a week after the girl returned to Mexico he was invited to come to the house in the evening to play chess. When he showed up at the kitchen dressed in the new shirt and canvas pants María was still washing the supper dishes. She turned and studied him where he stood with his hat in his hands. Bueno, she said. Te espera.

He thanked her and crossed the kitchen and went up the hall and stood in the diningroom door. She rose from the table where she was sitting. She inclined her head very slightly. Good evening, she said. Please come in. I am señorita Alfonsa. She was dressed in a dark gray skirt and a white pleated

blouse and her gray hair was gathered up behind and she looked like the schoolteacher she in fact had been. She spoke with an english accent. She held out one hand and he almost stepped forward to take it before he realized that she was gesturing toward the chair at her right.

Evenin, mam, he said. I'm John Grady Cole.

Please, she said. Be seated. I am happy that you have come. Thank you mam.

He pulled back the chair and sat and put his hat in the chair beside him and looked at the board. She set her thumbs against the edge and pushed it slightly towards him. The board was pieced from blocks of circassian walnut and birdseye maple with a border of inlaid pearl and the chessmen were of carved ivory and black horn.

My nephew will not play, she said. I trounce him. Is it trounce?

Yes mam. I believe it is.

Like him she was leftbanded or she played chess with her left hand. The last two fingers were missing and yet he did not notice it until the game was well advanced. Finally when he took her queen she conceded and smiled her compliments and gestured at the board with a certain impatience. They were well into the second game and he had taken both knights and a bishop when she made two moves in succession which gave him pause. He studied the board. It occurred to him that she might be curious to know if he would throw the game and he realized that he had in fact already considered it and he knew she'd thought of it before he had. He sat back and looked at the board. She watched him. He leaned forward and moved his bishop and mated her in four moves.

That was foolish of me, she said. The queen's knight. That was a blunder. You play very well.

Yes mam. You play well yourself.

She pushed back the sleeve of her blouse to look at a small silver wristwatch. John Grady sat. It was two hours past his bedtime.