

THE RESCUE OF

EVANGELINA CISNEROS

(EVANGELINA BETANCOURT COSIO Y CISNEROS)

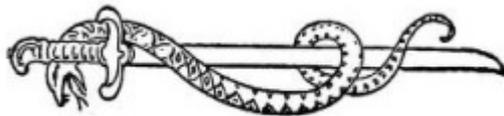
BY

GEORGE CLARKE MUSGRAVE

FROM HIS BOOK

UNDER THREE FLAGS IN CUBA

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THE RESCUE OF EVANGELINA CISNEROS

UNDER THE DUBIOUS PRETENCE of an extended fishing trip, my Negro Cuban guide, Jose landed us at Bahia Honda Point off Pinar del Rio in a schooner from Florida Keys. Bathed in the declining, crimson rays of sunset, the land appeared a paradise, and it seemed impossible that in such a magnificent setting a tragedy of two nations was being enacted, and a whole people were writhing in the throes of despair, oppression, and bloody death.

This was a venture of my own choosing but, after describing the raising and equipping of the conscripts in Spain, I had been asked simultaneously by the editors of the London Daily Graphic and a weekly review to outline the military situation and methods of warfare in Cuba. The winter campaign of '96 was just closing, and the insurgent army of the West was never in a worse condition. Antonio Maceo had been killed but a few days previously, and the province was flooded with guerillas, and soldiers flushed with this success.

Within this environment, I was now abroad in the country to witness the atrocities and the misery of Weyler's vicious subjugation of the Cuban people. I was anxious to proceed inland but the commandante of a local insurgent patrol that had surrounded us on shore, persuaded me against it, pointing out the innumerable dangers and hardships of travelling poorly prepared through a district so strongly invested by the enemy. He advised me to go to a certain prefectura in the hills, where I could secure a guide and good horses, and join some force when things grew more settled. I had a sharp attack of fever in the prefect's house, and was exceedingly well treated. When, after several days' hospitality, I moved on, he was grossly insulted because I offered him money. Many days had passed uneventfully in the district. I rode around occasionally, but in the valley the columns were operating, and guerilla raids took place too close to us to be pleasant. I had a narrow escape one day, several shots being fired after me by a marauding party, and I soon witnessed many phases of the horrible warfare Spain was waging. No important insurgent force came in our district, only small rebel bands; and becoming impatient we finally marched across country toward the Trocha, a mule having been secured for Jose and my own sorry steed exchanged advantageously .

After crossing the hills to the once glorious valley to the south, Weyler's brutal measures were in evidence on every side. Following Maceo's death, he had redoubled his efforts to subdue Pinar del Rio, and each day we came across smouldering houses, rotting carcasses of cattle, wantonly slaughtered, and blackened stalks of burnt crops. For miles we rode without meeting a living soul; but later, striking the woods again, we found Cuban families camped in the thickets, subsisting on roots, and living in constant terror of the guerilla. These cut-throats raided and looted at pleasure, driving into town the fugitives they captured, killing the men and frequently outraging women.

Pressing too closely for photographs in the Santa Cruz area, I was wounded in a skirmish on the Sagua railway but rescued by Cuban troops. My wounds brought on a fever and I had to leave the Cuban camp for the nearest town, Cruces, for medical assistance. On my arrival, I was instantly captured, imprisoned and threatened with execution because the local militia assumed that I was American. I was later released when they realised that I was English. I left Cruces for Cienfuegos and then made my way back to the US to recuperate, returning to Havana at the end of May and continuing to report from there through June and July.

Strolling one hot June morning through the lower quarters of Havana with Mr. George Eugene Bryson, special correspondent of the New York Journal, we visited the Real Casa de Recojidas, a prison for abandoned women of the lowest class. We chatted casually with the alcaide, Don Jose Quintana, in a dingy room pretentiously labelled Sala de Justicia, and after he had partaken of the universal copita at our expense, he graciously invited us to view the prison.

Even the sty of prisoners awaiting execution in Kumassi did not surpass this scene. We entered a passage by a heavy gate, and looked into a vast courtyard through an iron lattice work, like the open side of a huge menagerie cage. Penned within was the most frightful horde of women I have ever seen. Repulsive black viragos raved, swore, and scolded; gorgons, scantily clad, who had lost all sense of shame, clamoured at the bars of their den, begging for money, cigars, or drink, and using filthy language when the jailor threw aside the claw-like arms they extended through the grating. Sitting on the steps leading to the cells, a Negress accused of child murder was gambling with a hideous mulatto woman incarcerated for highway robbery, while from the incomunicado cell came the ravings of a frenzied wretch just arrested for attempted stabbing. There were perhaps a hundred of these repulsive creatures in all; and the filth, the foetid stench, and loathsome surroundings turned me sick and faint. The place resembled rather a huge cage of gorillas; for in the degradation of these outcasts the evolutionistic theory was strongly borne out: they resembled beasts rather than human beings.

There suddenly appeared in their midst a white face, young, pure, and beautiful; a maiden of perhaps seventeen was crossing the yard. With her pale features surmounted by masses of dark hair, her simple white dress and dignified bearing, all accentuated by the horrible surroundings, she resembled the Madonna of an old master, inspired with life but plunged into Hades.

"There's money in that face if she were not a fool!" said the brutal little jailer, as he leered covetously through the bars with his one eye, the other having been destroyed in a fight with one of his protégés. The girl, intuitively divining that she was being discussed by strangers who sometimes lounged in the passage and taunted the prisoners, turned and looked in our direction, half defiantly, half contemptuously; but reading the pity on our faces, she averted her gaze as if ashamed of her surroundings, and hurried inside amid a chorus of jeers and insults from her fellow-prisoners. "Beautiful eyes, eh!" said the alcaide's voice behind us; "but they will be spoiled in there. She is a shameful little rebel and very brave" he

added in a lower tone, "and will never get out, for she is too mulish, when her face would buy her liberty." This was my introduction to Senorita Evangelina Cosio Cisneros.

Over several further libations the garrulous Don Jose recounted the story of the young prisoner. This old alcaide was by no means a bad man, the reverse as Spanish officials go; but orders were orders, he explained, and Evangelina might well receive better treatment if she were more complacent to officers who visited the prison. It is unnecessary to explain what such complacency meant, and my interest in the young Cuban lady was increased a thousand-fold when I heard her full story. Quintana called her into the sala, where she received us with the well bred grace of the salon; but her dignity was assumed. It was so long since she had been spoken to with respect or sympathy, and she soon broke down



EVANGELINA BETANCOURT COSIA Y CISNEROS

and wept. From that day forth we were firm friends. Her story reads so like a mediaeval romance that many doubt its authenticity; but I have obtained the exact details by interviewing every one concerned, including Evangelina's great-uncle, the Marquis of Santa Lucia and ex-president of the Cuban republic, the priest of Gerona, and Arias Sagrera, secretary to the governor of the Isle of Pines.

Evangelina is the daughter of a well-known family in Camaguey or Puerto Principe province, where the old Castilian grandees settled, and have remained select like the Founding Fathers of Virginia. Her father was an officer in the ten years' war, and at the close was reduced to penury, in common with hundreds of other Cubans who lost their all in the insurrection. She was but a child when her mother died, and with her sisters she was brought up by Senora Nores at Sagua. Her education finished, she rejoined her father in Cienfuegos until the outbreak of the revolution of '95. Then their home became a centre of the Cuban party; and to appreciate the spirit of the Cuban ladies, it is necessary to hear Miss Cisneros relate the story herself, and see her eyes flash with the glow of patriotism as she speaks of the preparations to free Cuba.

But it was the old, old story. Her father was raising a body of cavalry when a traitor betrayed the organization, just before they were to take to the field on June 22, 1895. All the men were arrested. Evangelina's sisters were taken away by friends, but she patiently waited by the prison until the court-martial sentenced her father to death. General Campos was in Santa Clara, and to him Evangelina journeyed.

Despite the insults of the soldiers, she waited round the palace for days, and finally met Captain Campos, and through him reached his father. The old soldier was touched by her filial devotion, and commuted the sentence to banishment for life.

Broken in health, the prisoner was removed to the Isle of Pines, where a system similar to the old Australian convict days was in vogue. Escape from the island being almost impossible, the prisoners were engaged in cultivation, and lived in separate huts. Evangelina voluntarily followed her father into exile, and, contented by the reunion, they enjoyed comparative happiness in their seclusion. The military governor, Colonel Menendez, was a quiet man, who troubled his prisoners little; but he was of the Campos day, and upon Weyler's arrival was recalled. Colonel Berriz, a nephew of General Azcarraga, the Minister of War in Madrid, afterwards Premier, was eligible for any post of fat perquisites and little risk; so he received the appointment. Though married, he had been involved in a notorious scandal in Havana, and altogether was a regular type of blasé Spanish officer and gentleman.

In Gerona, the port of the penal colony, he missed the society of the gay capital. There were but a few wives of exiles, and some indifferent female prisoners there, and the striking beauty of Evangelina soon attracted his notice. He was governor, she a rebel's daughter. He marked the innocent girl as an easy prey, and was exceedingly surprised to find his attentions met with no response. His vanity was hurt, and he at once tried other means.

Without warning, her father was seized, and shut in the protectorado. Half divining the reason of the persecution, Evangelina went to Berriz and begged for her father's release. The governor, gallantly assuring her that he could refuse her nothing, ordered his liberation. Trembling with joy the frail girl poured out effusive thanks, but her heart sank when the roué continued: "Thanks are easy, but later I will judge your gratitude;" and he then made violent protestation of love. From that day Evangelina remained closely indoors, and her father, realizing her danger, seldom left her.

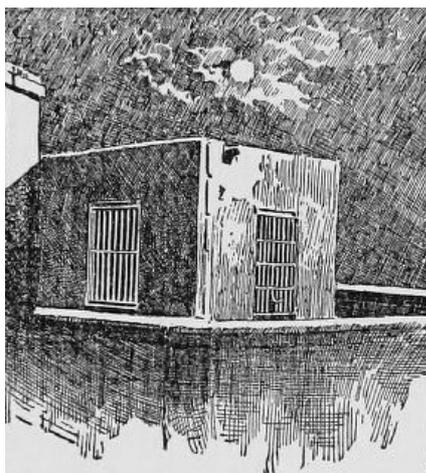
After the inspection of prisoners on July 24, he was again placed under arrest; but his daughter, realizing what the persecution implied, did not venture into the brutal officer's presence. Two nights later she had retired, when a knock came at the door. In hope for her father, in fear of her tormentor, she slipped on a dressing-gown, when the door opened and Berriz in full uniform entered. Trembling with fear, she asked her visitor to be seated, and he inquired why she spurned him when she knew her parent's fate was in his hands.

She pitifully begged him to cease molesting her, and prayed him to release her father; but he swore he was devoted to her, threatened and cajoled alternately, and became so persistent in his attentions that she dashed for the door. The colonel seized her by the shoulders, and stifling her screams, forced her back to the inner room. But her cry for help had been heard. In the hotel, near by, some men were gathered, and rushed to the rescue. One, a young Cuban named Betencourt, was an ardent admirer of Evangelina; and with him was Vargas, a clerk, and a young French merchant named Superville. Without ceremony they rushed into the house,

seized Berriz, and flung him to the ground. Betencourt, not unnaturally, thrashed him soundly, and then he was bound with rope to be taken to the civil judge.

At first the craven cur begged for mercy; then, seeing soldiers standing undecided in the crowd, he shouted for the guard, yelling that the Cuban prisoners were murdering him. From the Cuartel a company of troops doubled up, and the people scattered. They fired down the street killing and wounding several, and then released Berriz and seized Evangelina and her three rescuers. The governor thought it politic to hush up the matter, but unfortunately, prominent citizens had been shot, and an inquiry was imminent. That he was found in a lady's room he was powerless to deny, but he excused himself by saying Evangelina had enticed him to enter, and the men, hiding inside, were ready to kill him, free the prisoners, and seize the island. The story was ludicrous; but rebellion is always scented in Cuba, and Weyler ordered the prisoners brought to Havana for trial for attempted murder and rebellion.

Having locked up Evangelina in the Recojidas, he shut up not only the male participators, but Arias, the secretary of Berriz, and every one likely to have damaging evidence against the governor. Then he coolly allowed the matter to drop, for the screening of Azcarraga's name and honour was far more important than the personal liberty of a dozen Cubans. Miss Cisneros languished ten months in that foul prison without news of her father, and in suspense as to her fate. At first the wretched inmates had beaten her, but eventually they left her alone. Few girls of her age could have lived through her experiences; but the hope of reunion with her father sustained her, though her health was greatly impaired. I promised to try and smuggle a note to her parent in the Cabana fortress, and when, by bribing a soldier, the note was delivered and I took her the reply, she cried for joy.



RECOJIDAS PRISON CELL



DORMITORY WARD IN RECOJIDAS PRISON

By judicious presents to the venal warden, we soon had the entrée to the prison at all times, and at least were able to cheer her in her loneliness. At this time also Senora Agremonte, Miss Aguilar, Mrs. Sotolongo, and the unfortunate wives of Generals Recio and Rodriguez were held in the Recojidas on political charges. General Lee visited the prison, and protested to Weyler against the herding of these ladies with

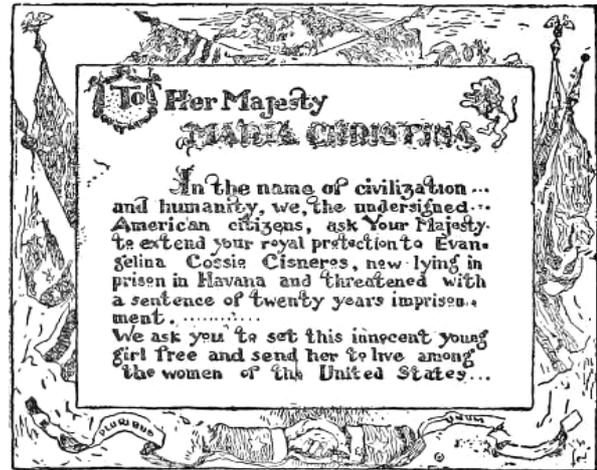
criminals. Orders were then given to have a separate sleeping-place partitioned off. Mrs. Fitzhugh Lee, the general's noble wife, and her daughter, also called and cheered these ladies greatly. Then the political prisoners were freed and expelled from Cuba, and only Mrs. Sotolongo and Evangelina remained. Mrs. Sotolongo was soon moved to the prison hospital, and Evangelina was again alone. Meantime Bryson, who had considerable influence in Havana, was working hard to secure the girl's release. The publication of her story in the press we sedulously avoided, realizing that it would stir up further resentment against the helpless prisoner.

Money is the key to all Spanish jails, and Bryson soon located the military judge in whose charge the case was pigeonholed. He demanded \$2000 in gold to secure her acquittal, \$500 paid in advance as earnest money. He made threats when the cash was not promptly forthcoming; and Bryson, without committing himself, advanced a certain sum to stay action. With a view to extortion, and by the judicial jugglery prevalent in Cuba, the judge strove to force Bryson's hand by fixing a court-martial for the prisoners, and asking a heavy sentence for Evangelina. I doubt if the sentence would have been sustained; it was simply blackmail, and we at once formulated plans to frustrate the scheme by rescuing the girl. The judge, thinking she would induce Bryson to pay the bribe, notified Evangelina of impending exile to Africa, but she entered into our plans of rescue with avidity. No risk seemed too great for her to undertake, and finally we had arranged to reach the window of her dormitory by a plank from a house opposite, and were only awaiting the chance to secure her escape from the city, when a new complication arose.

Bryson was ignominiously expelled by General Weyler as an insurgent sympathizer, and at this juncture also the "Official Gazette" contained a notice of impending trial of the Isle of Pines case in furtherance of the game of blackmail. American papers printed garbled accounts from Spanish sources, and it became necessary to publish the true story in New York. I next planned, with the assistance of a friend, to visit the prison one evening, and having sent the sentinel from the main gate to purchase cigars as usual, to seize and gag the alcaide when he brought the prisoner out into the sala, which was beyond the inner gates of the prison. The key of the outer postern lay on the official's desk, so Miss Cisneros could then have easily left the building with us; but the supreme difficulty was to secure her escape from Havana. It was arranged with a patriotic engine-driver on the Matanzas Railroad to carry us out in disguise in a freight-car, and deposit us beyond Regla, where the young general Aranguren had promised to meet us by the barrier and cut a way through. Once with the insurgent army she would be comparatively safe, until her passage from the island could be arranged.

This plan we should have carried into effect had not the almost friendless girl suddenly found her name on the lips of the civilized world, and it seemed her release would come pacifically. Mr. Hearst of the "Journal" sent for her history, and I was able to send him the statement of the prison doctor that consumption was inevitable if she suffered further imprisonment, and also two pictures, one taken before her imprisonment and one eight months later. The story made a great sensation

on August 27, when published, though unfortunately my full signature was placed above it, and from thenceforth I was under close surveillance and my movements hampered. The press in all parts of the globe took up the case. The ladies of America, and later of Great Britain, started petitions for the girl's release. In a few days more than 20,000 signatures had been affixed in the United States. Mrs. Jefferson Davis, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, Mrs. Logan, Mrs. Grant, Mrs



THE PETITION

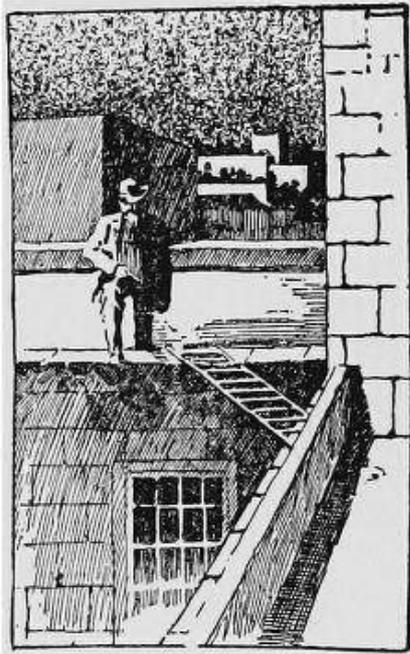
Sherman, Mrs. McKinley, Mrs. Hodgson Burnett, and many others worked energetically on the case. Mrs. Orraiston Chant took up the petition in England, Lady Henry Somerset and Miss Marie Corelli both actively participating. The Hon. Hannis Taylor, United States minister to Madrid, presented the petitions to the Queen Regent, and was assured that Evangelina would be sent immediately to a convent, pending investigations; but the unfortunate lady of Spain was powerless to act against Weyler backed by Canovas.

The Spanish press of Havana was furious at the prominence given to the case, and the damage caused thereby to Spain; and "El Comercio" and an even worse production, "La Union Constitucional" were soon filled with filthy insults and suggestions against Americans in general, and myself in particular. Senor De Lome, the Spanish minister to Washington, did not hesitate to defame the character of the defenceless girl. General Lee had gone to the States for vacation, and he was freely quoted or misquoted in the circular issued by the Spanish legation, and which tried to prove Miss Cisneros of humble birth. "Nobilitatis virtus non stemma character." "It mattered little if she were niece to a marquis or to a laborer," she was at least a woman in dire need; but the interest, nevertheless, was somewhat lessened. Eventually in eastern Cuba, I obtained signed verification of the relationship from the aged marquis himself, to reassure the excellent people who feared they had been unwittingly interested in the case of a plebeian.

Not only was the Queen Regent's promise that Evangelina should go to a convent never fulfilled, but upon my visiting the prison three days after I heard of the agitation in her favour, Don Jose met me with a long face, begging me to leave at once, as the prisoner was shut up incomunicado, and a guard had been placed with orders to arrest any one attempting to see her. Luckily Mr. Rockwell of the United States consular service, a friend of the Marquis de Palmerola, had obtained a permit to visit the Recojidas. That permit proved the only means of communicating with the prisoner.

Her rescue by force was now far more difficult, and at this juncture Mr. Karl Decker arrived in Havana. He is a Viking by nature and appearance, and had

previously proved his courage during an adventurous trip to Gomez. We spent the first afternoon together at a Regla bull-fight, during which our conversation frequently reverted to Miss Cisneros, and the frustrated plans for her liberation. "She shall be rescued" said Decker, simply, but in a tone that carried conviction with it. Our past plans were reviewed, and setting aside the house I had first selected, Decker picked out an empty residence in the Calle O'Farrill, from the roof of which our ladder could be stretched to the parapet of the Recojidas with less risk of discovery by the sentinels of the adjacent arsenal.



THE ROAD TO LIBERTY

The details of the rescue have been fully published by Decker in the "Story of Evangelina Cisneros;" so I need not recapitulate fully, how, on the night of October 5th, the first attempt to cut the bars was unsuccessful, but on the following night the prison was broken and the prisoner freed. It will suffice to say, here, that in Decker's account, fictitious names were used so that the identity of the rescuers remaining in Havana might be hidden. No one knew, then, that I was Decker's Mallory; or that the one man, referred to as Hernandon who, by reason of his determined pluck and thorough knowledge of the situation, made the rescue a success by superintending local details, procuring tools and disguises, cutting the bars, and arranging for the dangerous embarkation of the fugitive, was William McDonald, well known in shipping circles in Cuba.

Decker also tells how Miss Cisneros was hidden in Havana until Saturday, while the police started a house-to-house search, but dressed as a boy, she escaped on board the steamship "Seneca", having in the gathering darkness presented a regular passport as Juan Soldado to police inspector Perez at the gangway, without discovery. When she was safely at sea, we invited every friend on sight to a birthday dinner; and a convivial party gathered, though but three of us knew what that birthday really was.

On Sunday Decker sailed under an assumed name on the Spanish steamer "Panama" just as the police obtained warrants for his arrest; for the full story was printed in New York and the Spanish consul notified the authorities. My rooms in the Plaza Cristo were raided at 3 o'clock in the morning on Monday, but I had anticipated this and departed to the country. The police tore my things to pieces, but though two hard steel saws, used on the bars, lay in a strop case on the dressing-table, and letters from Gomez to



ON THE DECK

his wife, which I had been asked to forward, were concealed in the false fly-leaf of my battered copy of Webster's Dictionary, the astute detectives found nothing.

The entire American nation arose to welcome the sweet-faced Cuban girl, whose case is without parallel in modern history. When enthusiastic thousands greeted her and her praises were on every lip, she did not forget her bleeding country, and one of her first acts was to privately visit President McKinley to plead the cause of the despairing womanhood of Cuba, writhing under the iron heel of the relentless Weyler. The rescue of Miss Cisneros is now a well-known story, but few



RECEIVED BY THE PRESIDENT

are aware that the mysterious house of refuge that the police hunted for in vain was the residence of Senor Carbonelle of the Casa Hidalgo. This gentleman willingly ran the risk of breaking prison and sheltering Miss Cisneros, absolutely without personal interest. He had never seen the prisoner, but joined in the enterprise with avidity, because he knew how deeply Miss Cisneros was suffering for the Cuban cause. But little did this noble Cuban expect the sequel when he took such dire risks for a compatriot. "The brave deserve the fair" and

who shall say the age of chivalry is passed? He carefully guarded his protégée through the three terrible days in Havana; and then watched her leave.

When war was declared in the following April, he left Cuba to accept a captaincy on General Lee's staff and when he visited the general in his old Virginia home, he was formally introduced to another visitor. Miss Cisneros. With great surprise did host and hostess learn of the previous romantic meeting of these two guests. Need I add the finale to this chance reunion? Dressed in his simple American uniform, with only Mrs. Logan and a few friends as witnesses, Captain Carbonelle led his bride privately to the altar in Baltimore, thus escaping the vulgar notoriety that the climax of such a romance would have brought them at a public wedding. He went to the front with General Lee immediately after. Now they are living happily in Havana near the scene where manifest destiny first brought them together; there is also a wee Evangelina, but, as Kipling would say, "that is another story."

Several weeks after his daughter's rescue, Colonel Cosio y Cisneros was removed to Aldecoa prison hospital, where I surreptitiously gained entrance and visited him. He was terribly emaciated, but overjoyed at his daughter's release, and quoted the famous words "La Libertad" from "Don Quixote", gladly accepting the increased severity of his lot, as the penalty of his daughter's liberation.

George Blake Mungaut

Havana 1898