

TURK AND MARGARIDA

By Clarence L. Cullen

Drawings by Peter Newell

TURK O'FALLON (of Topeka and Tangier and eke of Tunis and Truxillo and Everywhere) told this one without urging, for the reason that, as appeared at the finish, it was "on him." When the subject matter of a story threatens to aureole him in an agreeable or victorious glamour, Turk, being diffident to the verge of bashfulness, has to be cajoled into the rôle of narrator. But when he knows that the conclusion will find him impaled on the point of the incident, he is willing enough to oblige with the tale. Thus true greatness inevitably reveals itself in modest midrifts.

"Because I've got a name—the front part of it accidental—that listens like the Star and Crescent of the Ottoman Empire and the harp of Erin commingled, the New York ship news reporters, as soon as they saw my *nom de hike* on the passenger list of the incoming Panama steamer, danced a ring around rosy with me in the middle on the main deck. I was sunburnt; my hat—the only one I had—had three dents in it; I was nibbling on a brownish cigarette; my oriental occidental monaker was enrolled as you know it on the passenger list; and ship news was (or were) scarce at the moment. That was the combination. That's why the ship news reporters made the cordon around me. The three dents in my hat alone were enough to indicate to them that I knew all about the nine vaudeville revolutions that were then simmering in Central America; all about the hooded cobras of the Orinoco; all about Venezuela and the inner workings of Castro's cagey mind; all about the rice powdered near-beauties of



"She Was Making Sad Work Getting Out."

Santos and Pernambuco,—that I must know all about everything coming off, or likely to, south of Key West and this side of the Sargasso Sea.

"And I did. Seeing that they asked me and were so pressing about it, I did know all about everything, and freely told them all.

"As a matter of fact, I'd been down in Bogotá only to see what the inauguration of a Colombian President looked like, and maybe to find out if the sportier elements of the Bogotá populace would hold out inducements to somebody who'd start a roller skating rink for them.

"But I couldn't say that—could I?—to eleven ship news reporters who told me that I might just as well go ahead and regurgitate all about everything in Central and South America; might as well, that is, if I expected them to turn me loose and permit me to land.

SO, corraled, I told the ship news reporters all, and a good deal of it was printed. Told them that I was the important noise in only seven out of the nine slapstick revolutions then pending or impending in Central America; but that, concerning the other two with which I was only indirectly connected, I'd try to answer any questions they cared to submit. I sort of let it drop that I was thinking of sifting down to Washington presently to see if I couldn't buy a few warships from the Navy Department; for some of us had it in mind, I intimated vaguely, that perhaps we'd fetch the Braganza family back from Portugal and put 'em back on the throne of Brazil. Tossed it out in a hesitating kind of a way, too, that Castro and I had been talking a lot lately about the partition of Honduras, and that maybe we'd get at that job after the rest of the revolutions were cleaned up and laid away. Said that delegations of folks from Paraguay who wanted to make me Dictator of that country had been bothering me a good deal lately; but that I couldn't think, of course, of assuming any more

dictatorships, having such a big string of those things already on hand.

"Yes, I told those ship news reporters all; didn't withhold anything whatever from them. They had me hemmed in on the main deck close to the midships engine-room hatch, whence the hot steam was issuing, and the hot steam suggested things to me. So I told them all—plus a few.

"I figured, of course, that they'd know I was only dishing up a little of that old No. 7 brand of comic supplement bunk; but if they knew it they didn't let anybody else in on it—the readers who read the interviews, I mean. You never saw or heard of such a serious and solemn little layout of young interviews about Central and South American affairs as appeared in the newspapers on the next day, with T. O'Fallon standing in the middle of the printed pages, metaphorically speaking, moaning for hogsheds of revolutionary blood and then a lot more of the same. They pictured me as the revoluter what was; stated that I had the negotiable papyri in my nankeens wherewith to purchase most of the warships and all of the arsenal stores in the United States for use in connection with my personally conducted revolutions; and played me up generally as a Simon Bolivar in a three-dented hat and with a consuming hatred for peace.

THAT'S what started it. That's what caused all the former and would-be prowlers then living in New York and its environs to call upon me. I took my old rooms over a little Spanish-American restaurant on Avenue A. The proprietor of that snug haven—it had often been pretty snug for me—was an ex-Guatemalan friend of mine, a *hombre* who knew how to smile and shrug on settling day if his guests lacked the increment wherewith to settle. He had a lot of smiling and shrugging practice with me; but I always decorated his till out of the first fruits of a coiniferous project, which made me good there even when I was being hauled around by a twin hoodoo working tandem.

"Those woolly and ensanguined interviews, then, caused all the professional and amateur trouble hunters then domiciled in and around New York to shoal, flock, herd, school, and covey in and around my Avenue A rooms. They couldn't be shooed away. When I politely requested them to beat it while their moccasins remained good, they'd threaten to cave in the door and I had to admit them. They all hankered to insurg. They were all wild to have me lead them—transportation and en route expenses to be paid by the leader, the same being me—to any insurging camp offering an even money chance of providing military victuals; uniforms and side arms to be served out by the insurgent organizer,—me again,—and a commission in the ag'in'-the-government army at least of the rank of Major for each of my besieging applicants.

"Most of them were husky, tired looking young lummoxes, jobless and secretly glad of it, whose ideas of the insurging business had been gleaned from R. Harding Davis's hand painted china plaque pictures of dardivvle young Americans with remarkably boxed jaws (and a dimple in their chins) who'd insurged themselves into Central American Cabinet portfolios after teaching their Greaser followers how to take a cold bath every morning, use dental floss instead of toothpicks, shave while in full retreat, manicure their nails with bolos between drills, and thereby win battles.

"It so irked, fatigued, and wrought upon me, this besiegement by the gang of aching-to-be adventurers in tropic lands,—and hardly any of 'em had ever adventured any farther from the New York cobbles than Coney Island or Hoboken,—that I sought to flag them by craft and deceit. On the second day, when about a dozen of them had me hemmed and were gradually backing me into a corner of my room, I tried to tell them that I was merely a manufacturer of toy balloons, passementerie, and fish horns for the Chile and Argentine trade, and that the nearest I'd ever come to seeing a revolution was when a baseball umpire had given a punk decision against the home team in Pentwater, Michigan. But I couldn't get away with it. They wouldn't believe me.



IN desperation I plunged for the door through their tightening cordon, went down the stairs three at a clip, and reached the sidewalk just in time to save a lady from embarrassment.

"She was trying to get out of a sagging, dilapidated caloosh—you'd call it a hack—that was drawn up at the curb. How she'd ever got into the hack, I took it upon myself not to inquire. But she was making sad work of it trying to get out. She was trying to back through the narrow little door when I first saw her. For reasons all too manifest, that method of exiting from the hack was not for her. The hack swayed and creaked and looked as if it wouldn't stand much more of that. So I stepped over.

"Madam," said I to the fat lady, "if I may venture to suggest, the sidewise method of evacuating too inadequate a vehicle might be—er—might be—"

"She turned her engaging fat face upon me and showed a flustered smile. Then, while the hack's springs squeaked in torture, she released herself from her wedged half-in and half-out position and plumped back into the seat, sighing distressfully.

"Perhaps," I tried again, "it would be more desirable, to say nothing of the convenience, if the party you desire to see here," waving a hand at my restaurant rooming plant, "were to descend, or emerge, or walk out, thus saving you—"

"You speak the thought that just came to me," panted the fat lady. "Yet, I hate thus to summon a stranger. Perhaps the Senhor Turco O'Fallonio might object to being disturbed by one who—"

"By one, senhora," said I, noticing her Portuguese accent, "who has every visible right to summon—er—princes and potentates?" and I turned it off into a question. "The Senhor Turco O'Fallonio greets you, senhora, and abjectly awaits your commands."

"The fat and fair one gave a little start at that; then smiled from the corners of her eyes to the lowermost of her three chins.

"Perhaps it would be better, more discreet—" and she beckoned me into the hack. I obeyed the beckon. There wasn't much room beside her. There was, moreover, a perilous list on her side. But I pretended not to notice.

"Anywhere," said I to the hackman when he turned his bleared eyes upon me with the question.

AND there was I, rid of my besiegers, and carriage riding with a lovely fat lady whose name I did not know. I reiterate it, lovely! Not in any sylphlike, Salomish way; but lovely. She was bilowy and bedimpled. She possessed the Taftian bulk and the smile that goes with it; a skirted levian, but pleasing. I have said that she had three chins. She had. But three chins—any reasonable multiplication of chins—are all right if the cuticle covering them is milky and flawless. Her skin was very white and free from oil. She had a fine mop of burnished raven hair and gazelle eyes to match. She had beautiful fat dimpled hands and perfect nails. Her teeth were chalk white and as even as picket palings. She was dressed mitigatingly in black. Being Portuguese, she was patchouli-sprayed; but so are many American fat ladies. Her English was naively incompetent; but I could help her out with a word or a phrase of Portuguese. Her voice atoned for her lingual deficiency. It was of the lower register, sibilant and persuasive.

"I say it, knowing what I know, that this fat



"My Margarida and I Exchanged Only One Glance."