



THRILLING ADVENTURES

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The Whirlwind's Private War



The Whirlwind was charging back at them from another direction

*El Torbellino Makes Swords Resound as He Valiantly
Faces a Ruthless Horde of Vandal Pirates!*

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "Alias the Whirlwind," "The Mark of Zorro," etc.

THUNDERING hoofs spurned the dusty highway as the mule, with ears back and stomach to the ground, rushed down the last slope toward the little

pueblo of San Diego de Alcala late that summer afternoon.

In the plaza, the gentefolk were taking the air after their *siesta*; shopkeepers were busy; and men

drank wine and dined in the inn conducted by one Lazaga. The troopers sprawled on benches in the shade in front of the barracks building at the *presidio* and listened to burly Sergeant Juan Cassara boast.

"The times are dull," said Sergeant Juan Cassara. "Even this pest of a highwayman who calls himself El Torbellino, the Whirlwind, has not been doing anything of late. No doubt he has taken his activities elsewhere, having heard something of my record, and knowing that I now am in command here, due to the absence of our officer—"

Sergeant Juan Cassara ceased speaking, sat erect, and with a gnarled hand shaded his eyes against the slanting rays of the setting sun.

"What, in the name of the saints—" he began.

DOWN the dusty highway thundered the mule, sweat glistening on his hide. A native was riding him bareback. It was a tired and angry mule, and as he passed the *presidio* in a cloud of dust he was commencing to wobble.

"Somebody in need of a man of physic," Sergeant Juan Cassara said. "Or, mayhap, in need of one of the *frailes* of the mission to mutter prayers for the dying. As I was saying—"

But he ceased speaking again to watch the native on the mule. For he was not riding toward the chapel where *Fray Felipe* was in charge, the good *fray* being adept at healing both broken bodies and broken souls. The mule was directed toward Lazaga's inn, and he skidded to a thankful stop before it in a shower of dust and sand and gravel, causing some of the dainty *señoritas* to forget the ogling *caballeros* for a moment and indulge in squeaks and swoons.

"Dolt of a native cur!" Cassara swore, lumbering to his feet. "He

should be whipped soundly for frightening quiet folk so. Manuel, hurry down to the inn and learn the cause of this mad ride. If you do not like the native's looks or words, fetch him here for questioning. It has been days since I have laid a whip across a bronze back, and lack of exercise softens me."

Manuel, the trooper designated, strode away, his mind dwelling on the fact that he would have a chance for a mug of wine at the inn, where his credit was good until payment day for the soldiery.

The big sergeant began boasting again, meanwhile watching the scene below. He saw a *caballero* swing to saddle and gallop madly up the hill.

"Something stirs," Cassara said. "Carlos, prepare my horse. Stand by, you others, for there may be imperative orders."

Cassara drew himself up and saluted respectfully with a wave of the hand as the *caballero*, young and proud scion of a prominent family, brought his horse to a stop.

"Sergeant! Don Pedro Vallejo has been slain, and his coachman also, and jewels taken, and the *Señorita Carlotta*, Don Pedro's fair daughter, stolen and carried away."

"What is this?" Cassara howled. "Trumpeter, blow! Sound the assembly call! Saddle up, men!" He faced the *caballero* again. "And you, kind *señor*, please to tell me more."

A NATIVE servant brought the word. Don Pedro was starting for San Diego de Alcala from his *hacienda*, his daughter intending to pay a visit here. The carriage was waylaid in a gorge near Don Pedro's place, almost twenty miles out."

"Waylaid? By whom?" Cassara roared.

"By this El Torbellino! By the Whirlwind, the native says."

"And how about this native?" Cassara asked.

"He is a worker in the fields. He was riding his mule to the *hacienda*, and heard the outcries and saw what happened. El Torbellino shot a pistol at him, but the ball missed. He rode wildly, and El Torbellino pursued for a short distance, then turned back."

"And carried away the *señorita*?"

"Picked her up and put her before him on his saddle, and rode into the hills, the native relates. He thinks that the *señorita* had swooned."

The troopers were rushing about, saddling their mounts and getting their weapons from the armory, and one brought Sergeant Cassara's horse to him. He swung to saddle.

"Follow me to the inn," he howled at his men. He rode off swiftly, with the *caballero* beside him.

There was quite a crowd in front of the inn when they arrived. The native, his eyes bulging with fear, was gulping at a mug of wine which had been given him. He gasped out the story again for Cassara's ears.

"This must be avenged!" the *caballero* cried. "This El Torbellino must be hunted down and slain like a mad wolf. Every able-bodied man here will ride with the troopers!"

A cheer greeted the speech. Every young and wild *caballero* in town hailed the chance at a man hunt. Others, older and far from being *caballeros*, remembered the heavy rewards offered for the Whirlwind's capture, and rushed for horses also.

IT was almost dusk when they swept from the town, heavily armed, with Sergeant Juan Cassara at their head: the troopers, the young gentlemen making a lark of it, the others who hoped to share in a reward! None was left behind except old men and those with no stomach for fighting.

Somebody sought the native, to glean more horrible details of the deed, but he could not be found. The

mule was wandering around the corner of the plaza, and he was turned into the public corral.

In the doorway of the inn stood one Pedro Garzo, general roustabout, looking along the highway where the cavalcade had disappeared. There was a puzzled expression on Pedro Garzo's face. He wondered what all this meant.

For he knew that El Torbellino, the Whirlwind, had not slain Don Pedro and kidnaped Don Pedro's daughter. He knew it very well—for Pedro Garzo himself was the Whirlwind.

II

LIGHTS gleamed in the houses and the soft dusk deepened rapidly to night. In from the sea came a cool breeze. Stars burned in a cloudless sky.

A boat swept in across the bay and grated on the pebbly beach. From a clump of brush, a man hurried to meet it. Other men jumped out, splashed ashore, and pulled the boat high. There were nine of them.

"It is well," the watcher reported. "The decoy worked. The native did his work. The troopers, and every able-bodied man in the *pueblo*, have ridden twenty miles for nothing. Before they can return—"

"Let us waste no time," one of the others growled.

They started through the brush, guided by the one who had been waiting, going toward the distant town.

"Where is the ship?"

"Just outside the bay. She will put in to pick us up at dawn."

On they went, their manner furtive. Through a patch of moonlight they darted swiftly, and the moonlight glinted from weapons they carried. They were big men, fierce men, wearing sashes in which knives and pistols were thrust, with handker-

chiefs wrapped around their heads, and big rings in their ears. They were pirates.

Some weeks before, they had looted San Juan Capistrano, and had sailed away. There was no ship in the vicinity to pursue. Now they were back, farther south. The troopers had been decoyed away, and the town's fighting men with them. San Diego de Alcala was at their mercy.

Not far from a corner of the plaza, they stopped in a jumble of brush and rocks. The leader spoke:

"Stand together. Let no man get away alone. Surprise will wreck them. Loot the richer houses, and get wine-skins at the inn. We brought the big boat. There will be room in it for all we take."

Forward they went again, the nine who had come from the sea and the one who had awaited them. They slipped through the shadows and approached the plaza. It was a scene of peace. Musical instruments were tinkling, soft voices were calling.

"Do not all be found at once with empty pistols," the leader warned. "Use the cutlass. Strike down a couple for effect. And do not loot the chapel or attack a *fray*, since it brings ill luck."

Then there was a bedlam of shouts that startled the town. Into the plaza the pirates poured, howling, brandishing their weapons, making known their identity.

Natives scurried before them. Two luckless ones were caught, and blood-wet blades answered their dying screams. Doors everywhere were slammed and bolted.

"PIRATES!" cried Lazaga, at the inn. "My money chest!"

"Your daughter, Juanita," Pedro Garzo reminded him.

"Juanita! Hide at once!" her father cried. "Ah, if only the troopers were here!"

Pedro Garzo guessed that the

troopers had been decoyed away purposely. The pirates would work their will on the town. If fired upon, they would only become the more infuriated and ruthless.

White-faced, Lazaga rushed Juanita back into the *patio*, and bade her hide in a storeroom at the end. The innkeeper rushed on to get his money box.

He took one small bag of gold from it, and put the box in a safe hiding place in the *patio* well.

SHRIEKS and cries were coming from every part of the town now. The pirates were bellowing and laughing. Sounds told that they had smashed in the door of a house. A pistol shot cracked through the night.

From the first house, having taken what they wished, they went to a second, to batter at the door. A pistol flamed in a window, and one of the pirates howled curses as he clutched at a wounded arm.

"Use the torch here!" their leader shouted.

Inside, they had swift vengeance. Women screamed. An old man died fighting in a corner. A strong box was rifled, and jewels and gold taken. Rich hangings were torn from the windows and walls, and a torch tossed among them. Smoke billowed up, flames ran around the room.

The pirates went on. People were fleeing from the houses now, seeking sanctuary in the darkness away from the town. It was death to remain and make resistance. Dainty women were rushed to safety. Valuables were left behind. Natives were running from their huts, knowing the pirates might slay them for the sport of it.

The burning house made the plaza as light as day. The blood-thirsty crew went on, looting at their leisure, making bales of what they took. The leader howled his orders. And

finally they swept around the plaza and to the inn.

Lazaga was waiting for them alone. His daughter was in hiding. Pedro Garzo, the man-of-all-work, evidently had run away. Alone and white of face, Lazaga waited in the kitchen door.

"Ho, landlord!" the pirate leader barked. "Serve us your very best wine!"

THEY sprawled on the benches, their loot beside them. Lazaga hurried forward with a wine-skin and mugs.

"'Tis watery stuff," one roared. "If he drinks such himself, his blood must be thin."

"That is a thing easily decided," another said, getting to his feet and drawing his cutlass.

"Mercy, señores!" Lazaga cried. "I am but a poor old man. That wine is the best I have for sale."

"And have you any gold?" the leader asked.

"This one small pouch, señor. I just brought it from my sleeping place."

"One small pouch, and you the owner of an inn?"

"The tax gatherer was here but yesterday, señores. And recently I made heavy purchases of provisions for cash. This is all I have left. These are lean times, señores."

"I think you are lying," the leader said. "However, fetch more wine!"

Lazaga hurried to the kitchen, and returned with another wine-skin.

"This bag of gold is not enough," the leader told him.

"But it is all—"

"Perhaps you may remember where there is more, were we to toast your toes."

"Mercy, señor!"

Two grasped him, held him, compelled him to stretch on a bench. Another wrenched off Lazaga's boots. Still another hurried to the fireplace,

and returned with a flaming bit of wood.

"Toast his toes!" the leader cried. "Make him remember where he has hidden his gold."

Lazaga screamed as the flame touched the sole of his foot. The pirate on guard at the door turned and laughed. Those in the room roared.

"Broil him well!" the leader shouted. "It is a sweet song he sings."

"For the love of the saints, señores—" Lazaga begged.

The landlord screeched again. Once more the pirate crew laughed. Then a pistol barked, and a ball crashed against the adobe wall.

THEY whirled, astounded, weapons coming up. In the kitchen door stood *Señorita* Juanita Yazaga, a smoking and empty weapon in her hand. Her shot had missed.

"Juanita—" Lazaga cried. "Run!"

"Let my father go!" the girl ordered. Her face was white, but she stood bravely beside the door.

"Ha! A dainty young one!" the leader said.

"There is perhaps room in the boat?" another asked.

"Ample room. A pretty one, to take to our captain. He will give us double shares of the loot."

One dashed toward her. The girl screamed and turned to flee. But she tripped, fell, and the man was at her. He grasped her arm and swung her clear of the floor. He held her against his chest, carried her back across the room as she kicked and tried to fight, and sat her upon a table.

"Señores—" Lazaga begged.

"This is the gold you had hidden, eh?" the leader asked. "We drink to you, *señorita*, with your father's wine. Tomorrow, all of us will bow before you. We'll sprawl and let you wipe your dainty feet upon our

bodies—for you will be our captain's lady."

Juanita's face grew white again. She realized to what her fear for her father had brought her. She knew she should have remained in hiding, but her father's screams had induced her to appear. It had been useless, and she was in desperate danger herself now.

The pirates were surrounding the table, wine mugs lifted high as they toasted her.

"The captain's lady!" the leader cried. And they drank.

She screeched at them like a mad woman, kicked at them, and they laughed raucously at her efforts. The leader spoke again:

"Enough! Bind her arms behind her back. As for this keeper of the inn—"

"Spare my father!" the girl cried.

"Bind him, and leave him on the floor," the leader said. "He is harmless. Let us be gone."

"Is there not more room in the boat?" one asked.

"More room, but not more women. They have scampered into the brush like rabbits, dolt! Even the bronze native wenches."

"It does not seem we have done enough here," another suggested. "They will not remember our visit."

"Use the torch on a few more of the houses. Burn the shops. But do it quickly."

FOUR rushed out, roaring aloud to frighten any of the citizenry who might have returned to the plaza. Other fires were started. The black smoke poured toward the sky and the flames sprang up as the adobe buildings were gutted.

The leader called again. The crew picked up their loot. One tossed the girl over his shoulder, like a bag of meal. Lazaga, moaning because of lousy kicks he had received in his ribs, and with the agony of Juanita's

fate, was left behind, bound, stretched on the floor.

As they reached the door, they recoiled. Walking toward them was a silvery-haired *fray*, a robed Franciscan. Reflections from the leaping flames flashed across his stern face. He lifted an arm in a gesture for them to stop.

"Murderers and thieves!" he cried. "Release that girl! Do not add this to your other sins."

"One side!" a pirate cried—and struck him.

Old *Fray Felipe* crumpled senseless from the force of the blow. The pirate leader whirled furiously upon the other.

"You struck a *fray*, you fool! That is ill luck."

III

OUT of the darkness came a pistol ball. It thudded home in the breast of one of the crew. The pirate sprawled on the ground, staining it with his blood.

"He's done," the leader snarled. "Pick up his loot. Come! Get out of the light of the fire. They can pick us off here."

Two pistols were discharged, the marksmen aiming into the distant dark from whence the shot had come. The pirates rushed toward the corner of the plaza. They had nothing to fear, they judged, once they were out of the light zone caused by the burning houses. No one would have courage to follow and attack.

But there was a tumult on the other side of the burning buildings.

"El Torbellino! El Torbellino!" some voice roared.

The pirates whirled to see what was happening. Through the billows of smoke streaked with flame plunged a huge black horse. Mounted on him was a man who wore a black cloak and had a mask over his face. Straight at the pirates he rode.

"Shoot him down!" the leader bel-
lowed.

Pistols exploded, but the big black came on, the rider bent low in his saddle. He did not fire in return. They saw that he held a blade, a long sword which flashed in the light of the fire.

THEN the horse was upon them. They scattered, dropping their loot. More pistols exploded, but the Whirlwind miraculously rode unscathed. Then he was past them and in the darkness—and behind were two men on the ground, run through, their life blood ebbing away.

The leader swore. He began bel-
lowing orders. His men worked frantically to recharge their pistols. But they had no time. The Whirlwind was charging back at them from another direction. They scattered again. Their cutlasses were out, but his long sword parried the blows. He flashed past, swerving his black horse an instant—and two more wounded men were stretched on the ground.

"Into the inn!" the pirate leader cried.

Four of their party had been slain by this demon who rode the black horse; one had been killed by the shot from the dark; and another was wounded. Half of the ten were dead and one unable to do much fighting.

"Is one man to wreck us?" the leader cried. "Kill him, if he comes again! Into the inn!"

They abandoned their loot, but carried Juanita Lazaga as they retreated. Into the inn they rushed, slammed the heavy door and dropped the bar into place. Lazaga was still moaning and twisting about on the floor.

"If he comes again, pick him off!" the leader cried. "Let us get him alive, if we can. There are things I would do to him."

"What manner of man is he?" another asked.

The little *señorita* replied: "He is El Torbellino, the highway man."

"Then he is of our kidney. Why does he attack us? To get our loot?"

She did not reply to that. At the open window, one of the pirates gave a cry of alarm. The Whirlwind was coming back. The big black charged through the smoke again, straight at the inn.

Pistols were discharged, but the horse came on. The firearms were none too good, and the smoke and uncertain light of the flames served to make the target poor.

Now the Whirlwind used his own pistol, and a ball whistled through the window, narrowly missing the leader's head.

Then he was gone again. They heard the pounding of his horse's hoofs as he retreated. And then there was naught but silence, save for the crackling of the flames in the burning buildings.

THE pirates filled the wine mugs and drank deeply. The loss of their loot angered them more than the loss of their comrades. They unbound Lazaga and bade him get them cold meat, and one went with him to the kitchen.

"Play no tricks, landlord, or we harm the girl!" the pirate leader warned.

Lazaga brought in half of a cold roast mutton, and they cut off chunks of it with their knives. Wolfing down the food, gulping wine also, they meanwhile watched through the window. But they heard nothing of the Whirlwind.

"When we are ready, we go through the kitchen," the leader said. "We go into the coulée, and follow it to the shore."

"Spare my daughter," Lazaga moaned again.

One of them silenced him with a backhanded blow. Cautiously, the leader unbarred and opened the front

door. He saw nothing of their enemy, saw no human being at all.

"Two of you get some of the loot," he said.

The men rushed out, picked up some of the bundles, and hurried safely back into the inn. They waited a moment, and made another trip. Nobody bothered them.

The door was closed and barred again. The wounded man was given a small bundle to carry. Another was appointed to carry the girl. The remainder of the loot was distributed among the others. Four sound men and an injured one—and only one against them, as far as they knew!

"If this madman attacks again, he must be shot," the leader muttered repeatedly. "Is he to make fools of us all? Cut at his horse as he passes. Unsaddle the rogue and get him to the ground. We'll take him aboard the ship, for torture."

Lazaga was groaning, and one of the pirates kicked him. Juanita began fighting, but they quickly subdued her. They picked up the girl and the bundles of loot, and went into the kitchen of the inn. Leaving the building by the rear door, they went over rough ground toward the lip of the coulée, keeping to the shadows as much as possible.

THERE was no attack, no pursuit. The Whirlwind was not seen. On the pirates went, cursing as they stumbled over stones at the dark bottom of the gulch. And presently they emerged and started for the edge of the water, where they had left their boat.

The ground sloped to the bay, and was dotted with rocks and clumps of brush. Off to one side was a grove of stunted trees. Then, from the darkness of the shadows, there came a charging black horse.

"El Torbellino! El Torbellino!" the rider roared.

Dashing furiously through the

shadows and patches of moonlight, he made an elusive target. A pistol barked, and the ball missed. The horse swerved as another fired. Blades were out and loot was tossed to the ground, and the *señorita* also, as the pirates made ready to finish this business.

The horse was swerved again to avoid the *señorita*, as she scrambled to her feet and tried to get away, stumbling and lurching because her hands were tied behind her back. This sudden swerve caused the pirate leader to miss his shot. And then the Whirlwind was upon them.

THE moonlight flashed from the blades the pirates held, flashed also from that of the Whirlwind, and then the latter flashed no more, for it was stained. One pirate reeled aside, to sprawl lifeless as that blade found his heart. Another slashed furiously, to find his cutlass torn from his grasp, to have a single glimpse of a sword darting at him like the tongue of a serpent before life departed from him.

Three remained—the leader, one other whole, and the one injured. The big black horse charged away into the shadows again, and a pistol barked. The ball brushed the Whirlwind's hat from his head. He turned and rode back furiously, his sword held high above his head.

"El Torbellino! El Torbellino!" he cried, the words ringing like a battle cry.

Now he skidded his horse to a stop, and a robber came at him from either side. The Whirlwind slashed at one so that he retreated a step, brought his sword over to disarm the other and run him through. They were adept at rough fighting, these pirates; but the Whirlwind had skill at fence, and his thinking was much quicker, and he held the advantage also of fighting from a saddle.

"Foul scum!" he roared.

The pirate leader made a last attempt. The Whirlwind played with him a moment, glancing at the wounded man, who was crouching beside a rock and trying to recharge a pistol. Off guard an instant, the Whirlwind felt the breath of a cutlass slash as it narrowly missed his arm. His horse reared back, then sprang forward under the rider's urging, and the blade of the Whirlwind darted home.

"NOW, *señor*—" He wheeled the horse to make for the last man, the one who had been wounded in the shoulder by the shot from a house early in the night.

A woman's scream came to him. He saw that the wounded pirate had seized the *señorita*, and now was holding her before him.

"Back, *señor!*" the pirate cried. "Allow me to go, or the *señorita* dies!"

And the Whirlwind saw that he was holding the muzzle of his pistol against Juanita Lazaga's head.

"This is the end for you, scum!" the Whirlwind cried.

"Then the *señorita* dies also, *señor.*"

The Whirlwind laughed.

"What care I for her? Is she anything to me, this *señorita* behind whose skirts you hide? My object tonight is to slay pirates. Why do you not make a try at me, scum? Why do you not shoot your pistol, and send a ball tearing through my heart?"

"Return from whence you came," the pirate called. "Allow me to go my way. You have slain my mates."

"Where can you go, *Señor* Pirate? While you were at the inn, I smashed the bottom of your boat. You have a wounded shoulder, and could not oar it were it not smashed. Do you prefer that I run you through, *señor*, or keep you for the soldiery to hang?"

The pirate, clutching the struggling and screaming girl, started to withdraw into the darkness at the edge of the grove. The Whirlwind urged his horse forward again.

"I warn you, *señor*—" the pirate called.

"Get him, El Torbellino!" Juanita Lazaga shouted. "Do not fear for me."

She began twisting, squirming, kicking with renewed vigor. She wrenched the man's wounded shoulder, and he cried out with the pain. She kicked at his shins, so that he reeled aside. And then, finding her opportunity, she sank her tiny teeth into his wrist.

The pirate dropped the pistol, and his hands slipped to the *señorita*'s throat. But he had no chance to tighten his grip. The Whirlwind was upon him; the blade was darting again; and the pirate gave his last scream on earth. He fell to that same earth, to twitch a few times and then be still.

And the Whirlwind put blade in scabbard, jumped his horse forward once more, reached down and swept the *señorita* off her feet and into his left arm. Swiftly he rode back to the inn.

A FEW men had crept from the shadows. Lazaga was at the door, lamenting. The big black stopped before him.

"Here is your daughter, *señor*," the Whirlwind said.

"May the saints be praised!"

"The pirates are dead," the Whirlwind shouted into the night. "Come from hiding and fight the fire. Send men to bring back the pirates' loot, that it may be returned to its owners."

Somebody touched him on the leg, and he looked down into the face of old *Fray Felipe*.

"Though you have slain, my son, I thank you," the old *fray* said. Then

he turned swiftly away, nor once looked at the Whirlwind's head, acting as though he feared he might recognize him and have to answer questions later.

The big black was spurred again. Around behind the inn he rushed. In the darkness there, the Whirlwind dismounted, and left the horse, and entered the kitchen to pass through it and come to the big room.

"Wine, *señor*," he said to Lazaga, as he stood in the shadows at the end of the fireplace. "It has been a busy evening."

"Let me serve you, *Señor El Torbellino*," Juanita said. Her bonds had been removed and color was returning to her white face.

Her father nodded agreement, and she got a mug of the finest wine and carried it to him, curtsying low as she offered it. The Whirlwind bowed and accepted, and turned his back so he could lift his mask and drink.

"It is good wine," he said, as he returned the mug.

"I must thank you, *señor*—"

"Say nothing! It was a rare privilege to serve you."

"My own folly caused me to be captured."

"You but ran to the assistance of your father. That were a natural thing to do. And now, I must leave your gracious hospitality. It is time for me to be elsewhere."

Thundering hoofs! Wild cries! In from the highway swept Sergeant Juan Cassara and his troopers, and the *caballeros* and men of San Diego de Alcala were with them.

IV

INTO the night the cavalcade had ridden, along the dusty highway, to turn into a side road after a time, where the going was slower, and make for the scene of the tragedy.

But, some twelve miles from San

Diego de Alcala, they met a carriage rolling toward the town. In the carriage was Don Juan Sandoval, a man of parts, starting a trip of business to San Juan Capistrano.

He heard their wild tale, and laughed.

"'Tis a falsehood!" he cried. "I left the *hacienda* of Don Pedro but a short time ago. I dined with him and his charming daughter. There has been no trouble. It is a mistake—else a trick of some sort."

SERGEANT JUAN CASSARA swore. The men began muttering. They remembered that the native who had ridden the mule was a total stranger to them.

"A trick—" Cassara began. Then he shouted, pointed.

All turned to look. Far away, a red glow tinged the sky. It grew in volume.

"The town is afire," somebody shouted.

"To horse!" Cassara bellowed. "Follow me!"

Back toward the town they rode, not sparing their mounts. Mile after mile they covered, some dropping behind as the pace began telling. Over the last hill they swept, to see the leaping flames and the billows of black smoke rolling up against the moon.

Then it became a race, with an infuriated sergeant leading the way, a sergeant who feared that he had erred in being led away. To the inn they dashed, some to spring from their saddles, the sergeant shouting a demand for a meaning to this, the stragglers galloping across the plaza and joining the others as rapidly as possible.

Men barked the news at the sergeant. In the midst of their howls he caught one word: *El Torbellino*.

"So that rogue hath done this!" Cassara cried. He happened to glance through the open door of the inn.

"He is there! El Torbellino is in the inn! Capture him!" he shrieked.

There was no time for explanations, no time for Lazaga and his daughter, or any of the others, to tell what El Torbellino had done, how he had punished the rogues from the sea. Fray Felipe tried to speak, but none would listen. The Whirlwind dashed through the kitchen and into the night, caught his horse and vaulted to saddle, and was away in a cloud of flying dust and sand.

They pursued, but their horses were jaded after their long run. Back to them floated the mocking laugh of the Whirlwind. At a safe distance, he stopped his horse, knowing that the troopers were returning to help fight the flames.

He rode back, down into the cou-lée behind the inn, and stripped the gear from his horse, to hide it among the rocks. He slapped the big black on his rump, and the animal trotted away, to go to the pasture where he belonged. He was Lazaga's, this big black, and men thought he could not be ridden. Only the Whirlwind had made friends with him and taught him to obey a master's commands.

And now the Whirlwind stripped off his cloak and mask, and his weapons, and hid them safely among the rocks also. And it was Pedro Garzo, man-of-all-work at the inn, who slipped through the shadows and got to the plaza, to mingle with the others as they sought to stop the progress of the flames.

A little later, he was at the inn again.

"SO you ran, eh?" Lazaga stormed at him. "A brave *señor*, you!"

"I do not like pirates," Pedro Garzo said.

"You ran like a craven. You hid with the others in the dark. You did nothing to protect me, or my property, or my daughter."

"Others ran also," Pedro Garzo said.

"That has nothing to do with you. Get wine for these brave troopers. Let us all drink a toast to that rogue, El Torbellino, who, for some strange reason, was of service to us tonight. Even you may drink this once, craven one!"

But Pedro Garzo managed to evade drinking. A gentleman does not drink a toast to himself.