



The Manila Galleon

THE BLUE WATERS of the bay of Acapulco lay like a piece of rumpled silk under the sun of mid-morning. It was a day in late summer, in the year 1630. Far out to the east, the sea glittered; there was no sight of boat or sail.

A tall, thin man, with a gentle worried face, dressed all in black save for the flash of white lace at his wrists, stood looking out toward the empty horizon. He was the Viceroy of Mexico, representative of the King of Spain, and he had come down to Acapulco from his cool stone palace in Mexico City to await the Manila galleon, which was long overdue.

In those times the oceans were lonely and dangerous. A ship might sail for weeks without ever sighting another vessel, and if one did heave into view, it might be flaunting a pirate's flag from the main mast.

The Manila galleon was a huge ship which crossed the Pacific Ocean twice a year, bringing spices and silks and jewels from the Orient to Mexico, and taking back

silver from Mexican mines to possessions of the King of Spain in the East. Often the galleon had foundered on some uncharted rocks. Sometimes it had been captured by pirates. Once it had floated into Acapulco Bay with all the men on board dead save one, and he was dying of the plague.

Now the Viceroy was uneasy because the galleon should have come into port a full month ago. Merchants in Mexico City were anxious. The pack mules which were to be loaded with treasures from the galleon, then to cross the mountains to the other side of Mexico, had grown fat and lazy, waiting. In Veracruz, the ships destined to carry the galleon's cargo to Spain rode the waters of the bay, idle. The captains fretted, for further delay would mean that they must make their voyage across the Atlantic when the storms of autumn and winter were raging.

This time the galleon was to carry exceptional riches in her holds, and a letter had informed the Viceroy that the galleon would also bring a curious animal: a pure white deer with pink eyes and horns and hooves like pearl. This beautiful creature had been captured in the mountains of the Philippines, and it was being sent as a present for the King of Spain. The Governor of the Philippines was also sending a golden collar studded with pearls and rubies, which was to be put on the animal when it was led forward and presented to the King.

The Viceroy was fond of animals, and, remember-

ing how his horses had sickened on the long sea trip from Spain, he worried about the white deer.

The morning hours passed away and the day grew hot. The Viceroy went to sit in the shade of some palm trees and ordered that refreshments be brought him, but he did not eat. He called the young commander of his guard, Captain Diaz, and offered him a bowl of coconut milk. "I have little appetite until I know that the galleon is safely here in port with all her cargo."

"Then you may order your baked fish and roast pheasant at once," answered the gay young Captain, "for just now they are sighting the sails!"

The Viceroy stood up hastily. Yes! There was a long drawn-out "Hallooooooooooooo!" from one of the guardsmen posted to watch on the cliff. In a few moments more, the Viceroy could make out the tip of a sail coming from beyond the horizon. Higher it rose and higher, and then he saw the whole brave ship, all sails out in the breeze. It was coming in swiftly, and very soon it slipped between the land arms which reached out into the sea, forming the bay of Acapulco.

The Viceroy had loosened the collar of his black velvet coat because of the heat, but now he hastily buttoned it and shook out his white lace cuffs. He dusted his tall black hat and put it on. The arrival of the galleon was a time of great ceremony and great rejoicing.

Already the waters in the bay were bobbing with dozens of little boats going out to meet the galleon. From the shore all round about there came the hissing and booming of rockets, and the Viceroy himself gave orders that the galleon should be saluted with a cannonade. As the great ship drew nearer, the cannons sent forth their triumphal roars. The galleon had a high-riding hull and quantities of great brown sails. Now sailors were running up and down, moving these and reefing them in. Standing at full attention on the poop of the ship was the ship's Master, in his best uniform, for he was an Admiral in the King's fleet. At last all sails were in and the anchor dropped. The galleon had come in safely from its months-long journey through many dangers and had brought its cargo of riches home.

A small boat was made ready for the Viceroy. With a few attendants, and accompanied by Captain Diaz, he went out to the galleon. There he would receive the ship's papers and invite all the officers to a great feast that evening. Even the common sailors would be given a party on the beach with all sorts of fresh roasted meats and cool fruits, the things they most craved after so many days at sea on hard bread and salt meat, and with water from the precious casks rationed severely.

The Viceroy climbed up the rope ladder let down along the galleon's side and accepted the strong arm of one of the ship's young officers, for he was growing old. The meeting of the Viceroy and the Admiral was

formal and courteous. First they bowed to each other ceremoniously; then they embraced in the Spanish fashion. The ship's papers were passed to the Viceroy. He extended the invitations for the evening festivities. Words of welcome were said and speeches of congratulation made.

After all formalities had been observed, the Viceroy spoke of what had been much in his mind.

"I have had word that you are bringing a fair creature from the Orient," he said. "A white deer. I am most eager to see him. Could he be brought up on deck now?"

The Admiral's face fell.

"I am not sure that the poor thing can walk," he answered sadly. "We had a terrible storm not many days out from the Philippines, and we had to tie the deer down, so that it should not fall and break a leg. Then it became very seasick. To make matters worse, its keeper, who spoke to it in some foreign tongue and knew how to soothe it, took a fever and died a month ago. We buried him at sea. Since then the white deer has been very sad and listless, and it is weak and thin because it scarcely eats. I very much doubt that it will arrive alive in Spain."

The Viceroy was very much disturbed by these words. "Then, if the white deer cannot be brought up, may I go down to see him?" he asked.

The Admiral immediately summoned one of his

officers to show the Viceroy down into the ship's hold. They went down many steep narrow stairways, the Viceroy clinging carefully to the handrails and ropes, for the galleon rocked a little, even at rest on the calm waters of the bay.

At last they came to where the animals were kept. The air in the dark hold was hot and foul. No animals were left; all had been killed and eaten on the long voyage across the Pacific except the white deer, which lay on a pallet of dirty straw, its sides heaving, its neck stretched out, and its pale pink muzzle open. Its tongue hung out a little way as it panted for breath. The deer was pure white, with high spiked antlers.

The Viceroy stooped down and spoke gently to the deer, as he might to his own pet saddle-horse, and stroked it softly with his hand.

"Poor fellow," he crooned, "so sad and so far from home. And how frightened you must have been by the storm, and by the crying of the other animals, and by the smell of blood when they were killed for the Admiral's table. Poor fellow."

The white deer trembled under his touch, and then, after a short while, it gathered strength and lifted its head to look at him. The deer's large ruby-colored eyes, shaded by long white lashes, were desperate and seemed to implore help. Then it laid its head down again and closed its eyes.

"Bring me a bowl of milk with brandy in it," ordered the Viceroy, "and see that there is plenty of fresh water here." One of the men went at once to carry out his orders. While the Viceroy waited, he stroked the deer and continued to speak to it.

"You are beautiful," the Viceroy told the deer. "Your hooves and horns are like pearl, like *concha nacar*, the pearly inside of a shell. I shall name you Nacar."

When the milk and stimulant had been brought, the Viceroy lifted Nacar's head and, with gentle hands, persuaded the deer to sup a little of it.

"We must build up its strength with this," he said, leaving instructions. "And as soon as it is able to stand, it must be brought out into the fresh air and allowed to crop grass."

All during the evening celebrations, while eating the wonderful feast that had been prepared and exchanging gifts with the Admiral and the ship's officers, the Viceroy's heart was heavy, for he feared that Nacar would die. Even the fireworks display, something he usually enjoyed, did not move him. He excused himself and went to his quarters before the last of the great flowers of light had bloomed in myriad colors against the black sky over the bay. But just before the Viceroy went to bed, Captain Diaz brought word that Nacar had taken another bowl of milk and seemed stronger.

The next day, before he ate his breakfast, the Vice-

roy sent for word of the white deer.

“He seems to be improving,” they told him, and so he turned to his many tasks, and the unloading of the galleon began.

All day long men climbed up and down the sides of the galleon, passing out the cargo through openings in the side of the ship. Rolls of silk and velvet and brocade were taken out, great packages of spices wrapped in cloth and bound with brass, boxes of tea, perfumes, ivory and jewelry from the Orient. Each box and package had to be checked off against the ship’s lists and assigned to a warehouse, while the mules were made ready.

The Viceroy had decided to divide the cargo into many sections to make the mule trains small and swift. He gave orders that the animals were to be lightly loaded so that they could make the journey across Mexico speedily, and he planned to send an armed guard of his own men with each caravan. Bandits had been bold in the mountain passes recently. They had set upon and killed and robbed merchants, and had waylaid the mule trains bringing silver out from the mines. Even passenger coaches had been assaulted.

“Captain Diaz,” he ordered, “you are to see to the safety of these caravans of the galleon’s treasure. Choose your best men to accompany each shipment to Veracruz. It is more expensive to send many small shipments,

but it is safer. I cannot risk losing any of this cargo."

He stopped speaking and stared out of the window in the little room where he had been working toward the nearly emptied galleon rocking on the bay. "I cannot possibly send the white deer yet," he murmured. "He would surely die on the way. Probably he could not even reach Veracruz. How shall I care for him in the meanwhile?"

Captain Diaz stepped forward, saluting.

"Have I your permission to make a suggestion?"

"You have."

"On my inspection trips to the various garrisons, I have often passed the slopes of the Sleeping Lady Mountain. There your flocks of sheep and goats are pastured. I have been told about a little Indian boy who is a goatherd and who seems to have some magical understanding of animals. They love him and come to his call. He carries a pouch full of little flutes and whistles that he makes himself, and each one has a different tone. With these he calls to his flocks and each separate animal has learned the tune that calls it. And he knows herbs and medicines and can cure the sick creatures. Even the best shepherds come to him when there is illness among the flocks. I believe this boy could care for Nacar and strengthen him, and prepare him for the journey across the sea to Spain."

The Viceroy had put down his quill pen and was

listening with interest.

"How old is this boy?" he asked.

"Perhaps ten. Perhaps twelve. He is very small. They call him Lalo."

"Send for him."

Captain Diaz hesitated.

"There is something more. . . ."

"Continue!"

"The child Lalo is a mute. He cannot speak."

"A deaf mute?"

"No, his hearing is exceptionally keen. It is just that he does not, cannot speak. He makes strange little sounds with his lips and throat, but never says words. I have been told that there is nothing the matter with him, but that the power of speech was frightened out of him."

"How did that happen?" asked the Viceroy.

"The shepherds told me that this Lalo, when he was about four years old, was watching goats on the hillside. His mother had stayed in their little hut with a newborn baby. The father had died of an illness shortly before. Toward afternoon, a wind came up and Lalo saw that a forest fire was sweeping toward the hut. He ran, screaming, trying to warn his mother, but he was not in time. The flames swept up to the hut and enclosed it, and his mother and the baby perished inside. From that moment, Lalo has been mute. The dreadful