

**DON BALASCO OF
KEY
WEST; A NOVEL**

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Don Balasco of Key West; a novel by Archibald Clavering Gunter

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ARCHIBALD CLAVERING GUNTER

**DON BALASCO OF
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WEST; A NOVEL**

DON BALASCO
OF KEY WEST

A NOVEL

BY
ARCHIBALD CLAVERING GUNTER

AUTHOR OF
"MR. BARNES OF NEW YORK," ETC., ETC.

UNIV. OF
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TO MIND
ANNO 1896

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AN AGENT OF SPAIN.

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APR 10 1896
CALIFORNIA

Don Balasco of Key West.

BOOK I. AN AGENT OF SPAIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE UNITED STATES REVENUE DETECTIVE.

TAMPA is sleeping in the sun one hot April day of the year 1896. Always a lazy town, this afternoon it is more trance-like than ever. The only man thoroughly awake in the City Hotel is Thomas Duff Mastic, of the United States Revenue Service, and he has just roused himself to mutter curses under his breath at a letter he holds in his hand.

It is from an officer of the Treasury, under whose orders Mastic at present is, and directs him to take steamer this day for Key West and place himself under the directions of Señor Estrabon Balasco, a cigarmaker of that city.

"Hang me if I understand this!" mutters the United States detective to himself, for it is in this capacity Mastic is attached to the Revenue Depart-

ment. "Now, if I had been told to shadow and track Mr. Estrabon Balasco, who is the most outspoken Cuban sympathizer in that nest of Cuban patriots, and prevent his sending a filibustering expedition with arms and explosives to Gomez or Maceo, I would have understood it quick enough—but to place myself under the orders of Don Balasco—that's what he's called down there. Great Scottie! Is the State Department becoming a lover of patriots? Is Grover going to give those poor devils of Cubans a chance, now that the American people have, by their Congress, told him to do so? If I thought that I'd drink his health."

With this, uttering a prolonged whistle and scratching his short, straight, shock hair in a dazed kind of way, Mr. Tom Mastic strolls slowly out of the hotel, and after a short but contemplative walk on Main street, steps into the office of the Plant Steamship Company and procures transportation on the fast liner *Olivette*, which leaves Port Tampa for Havana, touching at Key West on her way to the Cuban capital.

This finished, Mr. Thomas Duff Mastic has nothing to do but drink, ruminate, and smoke till the evening, when he will take the train from the town proper to Port Tampa, which, some eighteen miles away, is situated at the end of a long wharf upon which the railroad extends to deep water, and consists of a terminus made up of a gigantic platform, and a hotel yclept "The Inn," from whose balconies sea-trout, bass, and other ocean fish may be caught by passengers waiting for steamers bound for Mobile or Havana and Key West, which big craft find plenty of water

alongside of this platform and artificial dock created by enterprising Americans upon the deep channel of Tampa Bay, which is, in other parts, shallow and pertaining to mud flats.

Mr. Mastic has been quite often called by his enemies a hard man ; and of these enemies, in the pursuit of his duties, capturing illicit stills in the mountains of Georgia and North Carolina, and nosing out smugglers in the Florida Keys, he has made a great many. Still, no one has ever called him an unjust man, or a timid man. Perchance a little girl whose blue eyes and soft Southern voice had persuaded Mr. Mastic one day to turn his eyes away from her mother's illicit distillery of "mountain dew" in a backwoods nook by the French Broad River, "'cause dad has just been lynched"; and perhaps a Spanish *muchachito* with soft dark eyes, caught by the protector of Federal Revenue peddling unstamped cigars in the streets of St. Augustine at five cents a piece, and let go with a quarter in his hand and the remark, "You sell these clear Havanas too cheap, sonny," thought him a tender one. But generally against man in his strength, and defying Federal Revenue, Tom Mastic is a sleuthhound to follow, and no more to be turned back than a grizzly bear, even by the unerring rifles of Georgia crackers, or revolvers held in the desperate hands of Florida smugglers. He has defied ambush and assassination, and has turned his back on bribery, and as such is trusted by the United States Treasury Department.

For five hours there is nothing to do, and Mr. Mastic does it grandly. His feet are cocked