The Splendid Idle Forties eBook

The Splendid Idle Forties by Gertrude Atherton

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THE PEARLS OF LORETO

I

Within memory of the most gnarled and coffee-coloured Montereno never had there been so exciting a race day. All essential conditions seemed to have held counsel and agreed to combine. Not a wreath of fog floated across the bay to dim the sparkling air. Every horse, every vaquero, was alert and physically perfect. The rains were over; the dust was not gathered. Pio Pico, Governor of the Californias, was in Monterey on one of his brief infrequent visits. Clad in black velvet, covered with jewels and ropes of gold, he sat on his big chestnut horse at the upper end of the field, with General Castro, Dona Modeste Castro, and other prominent Monterenos, his interest so keen that more than once the official dignity relaxed, and he shouted “Brava!” with the rest.

And what a brilliant sight it was! The flowers had faded on the hills, for June was upon them; but gayer than the hills had been was the race-field of Monterey. Caballeros, with silver on their wide gray hats and on their saddles of embossed leather, gold and silver embroidery on their velvet serapes, crimson sashes about their slender waists, silver spurs and buckskin botas, stood tensely in their stirrups as the racers flew by, or, during the short intervals, pressed each other with eager wagers. There was little money in that time. The golden skeleton within the sleeping body of California had not yet been laid bare. But ranchos were lost and won; thousands of cattle would pass to other hands at the next rodeo; many a superbly caparisoned steed would rear and plunge between the spurs of a new master.

And caballeros were not the only living pictures of that memorable day of a time for ever gone. Beautiful women in silken fluttering gowns, bright flowers holding the mantilla from flushed awakened faces, sat their impatient horses as easily as a gull rides a wave. The sun beat down, making dark cheeks pink and white cheeks darker, but those great eyes, strong with their own fires, never faltered. The old women in attendance grumbled vague remonstrances at all things, from the heat to intercepted coquetries. But their charges gave the good duenas little heed. They shouted until their little throats were hoarse, smashed their fans, beat the sides of their mounts with their tender hands, in imitation of the vaqueros.

“It is the gayest, the happiest, the most careless life in the world,” thought Pio Pico, shutting his teeth, as he looked about him. “But how long will it last? Curse the Americans! They are coming.”

But the bright hot spark that convulsed assembled Monterey shot from no ordinary condition. A stranger was there, a guest of General Castro, Don Vicente de la Vega y Arillaga, of Los Angeles. Not that a stranger was matter for comment in Monterey, capital of California, but this stranger had brought with him horses which threatened to

disgrace the famous winners of the North. Two races had been won already by the black Southern beasts.

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“Dios de mi alma!” cried the girls, one to the other, “their coats are blacker than our hair! Their nostrils pulse like a heart on fire! Their eyes flash like water in the sun! Ay! the handsome stranger, will he roll us in the dust? Ay! our golden horses, with the tails and manes of silver—how beautiful is the contrast with the vaqueros in their black and silver, their soft white linen! The shame! the shame!—if they are put to shame! Poor Guido! Will he lose this day, when he has won so many? But the stranger is so handsome! Dios de mi vida! his eyes are like dark blue stars. And he is so cold! He alone—he seems not to care. Madre de Dios! Madre de Dios! he wins again! No! no! no! Yes! Ay! yi! yi! B-r-a-v-o!”

Guido Cabanares dug his spurs into his horse and dashed to the head of the field, where Don Vicente sat at the left of General Castro. He was followed hotly by several friends, sympathetic and indignant. As he rode, he tore off his serape and flung it to the ground; even his silk riding-clothes sat heavily upon his fury. Don Vicente smiled, and rode forward to meet him.

“At your service, senor,” he said, lifting his sombrero.

“Take your mustangs back to Los Angeles!” cried Don Guido, beside himself with rage, the politeness and dignity of his race routed by passion. “Why do you bring your hideous brutes here to shame me in the eyes of Monterey? Why—”

“Yes! Why? Why?” demanded his friends, surrounding De la Vega. “This is not the humiliation of a man, but of the North by the accursed South! You even would take our capital from us! Los Angeles, the capital of the Californias!”

“What have politics to do with horse-racing?” asked De la Vega, coldly. “Other strangers have brought their horses to your field, I suppose.”

“Yes, but they have not won. They have not been from the South.”

By this time almost every caballero on the field was wheeling about De la Vega. Some felt with Cabanares, others rejoiced in his defeat, but all resented the victory of the South over the North.

“Will you run again?” demanded Cabanares.

“Certainly. Do you think of putting your knife into my neck?”

Cabanares drew back, somewhat abashed, the indifference of the other sputtering like water on his passion.

“It is not a matter for blood,” he said sulkily; “but the head is hot and words are quick when horses run neck to neck. And, by the Mother of God, you shall not have the last race. My best horse has not run. Viva El Rayo!”

“Viva El Rayo!” shouted the caballeros.

“And let the race be between you two alone,” cried one. “The North or the South! Los Angeles or Monterey! It will be the race of our life.”

“The North or the South!” cried the caballeros, wheeling and galloping across the field to the donas. “Twenty leagues to a real for Guido Cabanares.”

“What a pity that Ysabel is not here!” said Dona Modeste Castro to Pio Pico. “How those green eyes of hers would flash to-day!”

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“She would not come,” said the Governor. “She said she was tired of the race.”

“Of whom do you speak?” asked De la Vega, who had rejoined them.

“Of Ysabel Herrera, La Favorita of Monterey,” answered Pio Pico. “The most beautiful woman in the Californias, since Chonita Iturbi y Moncada, my Vicente. It is at her uncle’s that I stay. You have heard me speak of my old friend; and surely you have heard of her.”

“Ay!” said De la Vega. “I have heard of her.”

“Viva El Rayo!”

“Ay, the ugly brute!”

“What name? Vitriolo? Mother of God! Diablo or Demonio would suit him better. He looks as if he had been bred in hell. He will not stand the quirto; and El Rayo is more lightly built. We shall beat by a dozen lengths.”

The two vaqueros who were to ride the horses had stripped to their soft linen shirts and black velvet trousers, cast aside their sombreros, and bound their heads with tightly knotted handkerchiefs. Their spurs were fastened to bare brown heels; the cruel quirto was in the hand of each; they rode barebacked, winding their wiry legs in and out of a horse-hair rope encircling the body of the animal. As they slowly passed the crowd on their way to the starting-point at the lower end of the field, and listened to the rattling fire of wagers and comments, they looked defiant, and alive to the importance of the coming event.

El Rayo shone like burnished copper, his silver mane and tail glittering as if powdered with diamond-dust. He was long and graceful of body, thin of flank, slender of leg. With arched neck and flashing eyes, he walked with the pride of one who was aware of the admiration he excited.

Vitriolo was black and powerful. His long neck fitted into well-placed shoulders. He had great depth of girth, immense length from shoulder-points to hips, big cannon-bones, and elastic pasterns. There was neither amiability nor pride in his mien; rather a sullen sense of brute power, such as may have belonged to the knights of the Middle Ages. Now and again he curled his lips away from the bit and laid his ears back as if he intended to eat of the elegant Beau Brummel stepping so daintily beside him. Of the antagonistic crowd he took not the slightest notice.

“The race begins! Holy heaven!” The murmur rose to a shout—a deep hoarse shout strangely crossed and recrossed by long silver notes; a thrilling volume of sound rising above a sea of flashing eyes and parted lips and a vivid moving mass of colour.

Twice the horses scored, and were sent back. The third time they bounded by the starting-post neck and neck, nose to nose. Jose Abrigo, treasurer of Monterey, dashed his sombrero, heavy with silver eagles, to the ground, and the race was begun.

Almost at once the black began to gain. Inch by inch he fought his way to the front, and the roar with which the crowd had greeted the start dropped into the silence of apprehension.

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El Rayo was not easily to be shaken off. A third of the distance had been covered, and his nose was abreast of Vitriolo's flank. The vaqueros sat as if carved from sun-baked clay, as lightly as if hollowed, watching each other warily out of the corners of their eyes.

The black continued to gain. Halfway from home light was visible between the two horses. The pace became terrific, the excitement so intense that not a sound was heard but that of racing hoofs. The horses swept onward like projectiles, the same smoothness, the same suggestion of eternal flight. The bodies were extended until the tense muscles rose under the satin coats. Vitriolo's eyes flashed viciously; El Rayo's strained with determination. Vitriolo's nostrils were as red as angry craters; El Rayo's fluttered like paper in the wind.

Three-quarters of the race was run, and the rider of Vitriolo could tell by the sound of the hoof-beats behind him that he had a good lead of at least two lengths over the Northern champion. A smile curled the corners of his heavy lips; the race was his already.

Suddenly El Rayo's vaquero raised his hand, and down came the maddening quirto, first on one side, then on the other. The spurs dug; the blood spurted. The crowd burst into a howl of delight as their favourite responded. Startled by the sound, Vitriolo's rider darted a glance over his shoulder, and saw El Rayo bearing down upon him like a thunder-bolt, regaining the ground that he had lost, not by inches, but by feet. Two hundred paces from the finish he was at the black's flanks; one hundred and fifty, he was at his girth; one hundred, and the horses were neck and neck; and still the quirto whirred down on El Rayo's heaving flanks, the spurs dug deeper into his quivering flesh.

The vaquero of Vitriolo sat like an image, using neither whip nor spur, his teeth set, his eyes rolling from the goal ahead to the rider at his side.

The breathless intensity of the spectators had burst. They had begun to click their teeth, to mutter hoarsely, then to shout, to gesticulate, to shake their fists in each other's face, to push and scramble for a better view.

"Holy God!" cried Pio Pico, carried out of himself, "the South is lost! Vitriolo the magnificent! Ah, who would have thought? The black by the gold! Ay! What! No! Holy Mary! Holy God!—"

Six strides more and the race is over. With the bark of a coyote the vaquero of the South leans forward over Vitriolo's neck. The big black responds like a creature of reason. Down comes the quirto once—only once. He fairly lifts his horse ahead and shoots into victory, winner by a neck. The South has vanquished the North.

The crowd yelled and shouted until it was exhausted. But even Cabanares made no further demonstration toward De la Vega. Not only was he weary and depressed, but the victory had been nobly won.

It grew late, and they rode to the town, caballeros pushing as close to donas as they dared, duenas in close attendance, one theme on the lips of all. Anger gave place to respect; moreover, De la Vega was the guest of General Castro, the best-beloved man in California. They were willing to extend the hand of friendship; but he rode last, between the General and Dona Modeste, and seemed to care as little for their good will as for their ill.

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Pio Pico rode ahead, and as the cavalcade entered the town he broke from it and ascended the hill to carry the news to Ysabel Herrera.

Monterey, rising to her pine-spiked hills, swept like a crescent moon about the sapphire bay. The surf roared and fought the white sand hills of the distant horn; on that nearest the town stood the fort, grim and rude, but pulsating with military life, and alert for American onslaught. In the valley the red-tiled white adobe houses studded a little city which was a series of corners radiating from a central irregular street. A few mansions were on the hillside to the right, brush-crowded sand banks on the left; the perfect curve of hills, thick with pine woods and dense green undergrowth, rose high above and around all, a rampart of splendid symmetry.

“Ay! Ysabel! Ysabel!” cried the young people, as they swept down the broad street. “Bring her to us, Excellency. Tell her she shall not know until she comes down. We will tell her. Ay! poor Guido!”

The Governor turned and waved his hand, then continued the ascent of the hill, toward a long low house which showed no sign of life.

He alighted and glanced into a room opening upon the corridor which traversed the front. The room was large and dimly lighted by deeply set windows. The floor was bare, the furniture of horse-hair; saints and family portraits adorned the white walls; on a chair lay a guitar; it was a typical Californian sala of that day. The ships brought few luxuries, beyond raiment and jewels, to even the wealthy of that isolated country.

“Ysabel,” called the Governor, “where art thou? Come down to the town and hear the fortune of the races. Alvarado Street streams like a comet. Why should the Star of Monterey withhold her light?”

A girl rose from a sofa and came slowly forward to the corridor. Discontent marred her face as she gave her hand to the Governor to kiss, and looked down upon the brilliant town. The Senorita Dona Ysabel Herrera was poor. Were it not for her uncle she would not have where to lay her stately head—and she was La Favorita of Monterey, the proudest beauty in California! Her father had gambled away his last acre, his horse, his saddle, the serape off his back; then sent his motherless girl to his brother, and buried himself in Mexico. Don Antonio took the child to his heart, and sent for a widowed cousin to be her duena. He bought her beautiful garments from the ships that touched the port, but had no inclination to gratify her famous longing to hang ropes of pearls in her soft black hair, to wind them about her white neck, and band them above her green resplendent eyes.

“Unbend thy brows,” said Pio Pico. “Wrinkles were not made for youth.”

Ysabel moved her brows apart, but the clouds still lay in her eyes.

“Thou dost not ask of the races, O thou indifferent one! What is the trouble, my Ysabel? Will no one bring the pearls? The loveliest girl in all the Californias has said, ’I will wed no man who does not bring me a lapful of pearls,’ and no one has filled the front of that pretty flowered gown. But have reason, nina. Remember that our Alta California has no pearls on its shores, and that even the pearl fisheries of the terrible lower country are almost worn out. Will nothing less content thee?”

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“No, senor.”

“Dios de mi alma! Thou hast ambition. No woman has had more offered her than thou. But thou art worthy of the most that man could give. Had I not a wife myself, I believe I should throw my jewels and my ugly old head at thy little feet.”

Ysabel glanced with some envy at the magnificent jewels with which the Governor of the Californias was hung, but did not covet the owner. An uglier man than Pio Pico rarely had entered this world. The upper lip of his enormous mouth dipped at the middle; the broad thick underlip hung down with its own weight. The nose was big and coarse, although there was a certain spirited suggestion in the cavernous nostrils. Intelligence and reflectiveness were also in his little eyes, and they were far apart. A small white mustache grew above his mouth; about his chin, from ear to ear, was a short stubby beard, whiter by contrast with his copper-coloured skin. He looked much like an intellectual bear.

And Ysabel? In truth, she had reason for her pride. Her black hair, unblemished by gloss or tinge of blue, fell waving to her feet. California, haughty, passionate, restless, pleasure-loving, looked from her dark green eyes; the soft black lashes dropped quickly when they became too expressive. Her full mouth was deeply red, but only a faint pink lay in her white cheeks; the nose curved at bridge and nostrils. About her low shoulders she held a blue reboso, the finger-tips of each slim hand resting on the opposite elbow. She held her head a little back, and Pio Pico laughed as he looked at her.

“Dios!” he said, “but thou might be an Estenega or an Iturbi y Moncada. Surely that lofty head better suits old Spain than the republic of Mexico. Draw the reboso about thy head now, and let us go down. They expect thee.”

She lifted the scarf above her hair, and walked down the steep rutted hill with the Governor, her flowered gown floating with a silken rustle about her. In a few moments she was listening to the tale of the races.

“Ay, Ysabel! Dios de mi alma! What a day! A young senor from Los Angeles won the race—almost all the races—the Senor Don Vicente de la Vega y Arillaga. He has never been here, before. His horses! Madre de Dios! They ran like hares. Poor Guido! Valgame Dios! Even thou wouldst have been moved to pity. But he is so handsome! Look! Look! He comes now, side by side with General Castro. Dios! his serape is as stiff with gold as the vestments of the padre.”

Ysabel looked up as a man rode past. His bold profile and thin face were passionate and severe; his dark blue eyes were full of power. Such a face was rare among the languid shallow men of her race.

“He rides with General Castro,” whispered Benicia Ortega. “He stays with him. We shall see him at the ball to-night.”

As Don Vicente passed Ysabel their eyes met for a moment. His opened suddenly with a bold eager flash, his arched nostrils twitching. The colour left her face, and her eyes dropped heavily.

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Love needed no kindling in the heart of the Californian.

II

The people of Monterey danced every night of their lives, and went nowhere so promptly as to the great sala of Dona Modeste Castro, their leader of fashion, whose gowns were made for her in the city of Mexico.

Ysabel envied her bitterly. Not because the Dona Modeste's skin was whiter than her own, for it could not be, nor her eyes greener, for they were not; but because her jewels were richer than Pio Pico's, and upon all grand occasions a string of wonderful pearls gleamed in her storm-black hair. But one feminine compensation had Ysabel: she was taller; Dona Modeste's slight elegant figure lacked Ysabel's graceful inches, and perhaps she too felt a pang sometimes as the girl undulated above her like a snake about to strike.

At the fashionable hour of ten Monterey was gathered for the dance. All the men except the officers wore black velvet or broadcloth coats and white trousers. All the women wore white, the waist long and pointed, the skirt full. Ysabel's gown was of embroidered crepe. Her hair was coiled about her head, and held by a tortoise comb framed with a narrow band of gold. Pio Pico, splendid with stars and crescents and rings and pins, led her in, and with his unique ugliness enhanced her beauty.

She glanced eagerly about the room whilst replying absently to the caballeros who surrounded her. Don Vicente de la Vega was not there. The thick circle about her parted, and General Castro bent over her hand, begging the honour of the contradanza. She sighed, and for the moment forgot the Southerner who had flashed and gone like the beginning of a dream. Here was a man—the only man of her knowledge whom she could have loved, and who would have found her those pearls. Californians had so little ambition! Then she gave a light audacious laugh. Governor Pico was shaking hands cordially with General Castro, the man he hated best in California.

No two men could have contrasted more sharply than Jose Castro and Pio Pico—with the exception of Alvarado the most famous men of their country. The gold trimmings of the general's uniform were his only jewels. His hair and beard—the latter worn *a la Basca*, a narrow strip curving from upper lip to ear—were as black as Pio Pico's once had been. The handsomest man in California, he had less consciousness than the least of the caballeros. His deep gray eyes were luminous with enthusiasm; his nose was sharp and bold; his firm sensitive mouth was cut above a resolute chin. He looked what he was, the ardent patriot of a doomed cause.

“Senorita,” he said, as he led Ysabel out to the sweet monotonous music of the contradanza, “did you see the caballero who rode with me to-day?”

A red light rose to Ysabel’s cheek. “Which one, commandante? Many rode with you.”

“I mean him who rode at my right, the winner of the races, Vicente, son of my old friend Juan Bautista de la Vega y Arillaga, of Los Angeles.”

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“It may be. I think I saw a strange face.”

“He saw yours, Dona Ysabel, and is looking upon you now from the corridor without, although the fog is heavy about him. Cannot you see him—that dark shadow by the pillar?”

Ysabel never went through the graceful evolutions of the contradanza as she did that night. Her supple slender body curved and swayed and glided; her round arms were like lazy snakes uncoiling; her exquisitely poised head moved in perfect concord with her undulating hips. Her eyes grew brighter, her lips redder. The young men who stood near gave as loud a vent to their admiration as if she had been dancing El Son alone on the floor. But the man without made no sign.

After the dance was over, General Castro led her to her duena, and handing her a guitar, begged a song.

She began a light love-ballad, singing with the grace and style of her Spanish blood; a little mocking thing, but with a wild break now and again. As she sang, she fixed her eyes coquettishly on the adoring face of Guido Cabanares, who stood beside her, but saw every movement of the form beyond the window. Don Guido kept his ardent eyes riveted upon her but detected no wandering in her glances. His lips trembled as he listened, and once he brushed the tears from his eyes. She gave him a little cynical smile, then broke her song in two. The man on the corridor had vaulted through the window.

Ysabel, clinching her hands the better to control her jumping nerves, turned quickly to Cabanares, who had pressed behind her, and was pouring words into her ear.

“Ysabel! Ysabel! hast thou no pity? Dost thou not see that I am fit to set the world on fire for love of thee? The very water boils as I drink it—”

She interrupted him with a scornful laugh, the sharper that her voice might not tremble. “Bring me my pearls. What is love worth when it will not grant one little desire?”

He groaned. “I have found a vein of gold on my rancho. I can pick the little shining pieces out with my fingers. I will have them beaten into a saddle for thee—”

But she had turned her back flat upon him, and was making a deep courtesy to the man whom General Castro presented.

“I appreciate the honour of your acquaintance,” she murmured mechanically.

“At your feet, senorita,” said Don Vicente.

The art of making conversation had not been cultivated among the Californians, and Ysabel plied her large fan with slow grace, at a loss for further remark, and wondering if her heart would suffocate her. But Don Vicente had the gift of words.

“Senorita,” he said, “I have stood in the chilling fog and felt the warmth of your lovely voice at my heart. The emotions I felt my poor tongue cannot translate. They swarm in my head like a hive of puzzled bees; but perhaps they look through my eyes,” and he fixed his powerful and penetrating gaze on Ysabel’s green depths.

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A waltz began, and he took her in his arms without asking her indulgence, and regardless of the indignation of the mob of men about her. Ysabel, whose being was filled with tumult, lay passive as he held her closer than man had ever dared before.

“I love you,” he said, in his harsh voice. “I wish you for my wife. At once. When I saw you to-day standing with a hundred other beautiful women, I said: ‘She is the fairest of them all. I shall have her.’ And I read the future in”—he suddenly dropped the formal “you”—“in thine eyes, carina. Thy soul sprang to mine. Thy heart is locked in my heart closer, closer than my arms are holding thee now.”

The strength of his embrace was violent for a moment; but Ysabel might have been cut from marble. Her body had lost its swaying grace; it was almost rigid. She did not lift her eyes. But De la Vega was not discouraged.

The music finished, and Ysabel was at once surrounded by a determined retinue. This intruding Southerner was welcome to the honours of the race-field, but the Star of Monterey was not for him. He smiled as he saw the menace of their eyes.

“I would have her,” he thought, “if they were a regiment of Castros—which they are not.” But he had not armed himself against diplomacy.

“Senor Don Vicente de la Vega y Arillaga,” said Don Guido Cabanares, who had been selected as spokesman, “perhaps you have not learned during your brief visit to our capital that the Senorita Dona Ysabel Herrera, La Favorita of Alta California, has sworn by the Holy Virgin, by the blessed Junipero Serra, that she will wed no man who does not bring her a lapful of pearls. Can you find those pearls on the sands of the South, Don Vicente? For, by the holy cross of God, you cannot have her without them!”

For a moment De la Vega was disconcerted.

“Is this true?” he demanded, turning to Ysabel.

“What, senor?” she asked vaguely. She had not listened to the words of her protesting admirer.

A sneer bent his mouth. “That you have put a price upon yourself? That the man who ardently wishes to be your husband, who has even won your love, must first hang you with pearls like—” He stopped suddenly, the blood burning his dark face, his eyes opening with an expression of horrified hope. “Tell me! Tell me!” he exclaimed. “Is this true?”

For the first time since she had spoken with him Ysabel was herself. She crossed her arms and tapped her elbows with her pointed fingers.

“Yes,” she said, “it is true.” She raised her eyes to his and regarded him steadily. They looked like green pools frozen in a marble wall.

The harp, the flute, the guitar, combined again, and once more he swung her from a furious circle. But he was safe; General Castro had joined it. He waltzed her down the long room, through one adjoining, then into another, and, indifferent to the iron conventions of his race, closed the door behind them. They were in the sleeping-room of Dona Modeste. The bed with its rich satin coverlet, the bare floor, the simple furniture, were in semi-darkness; only on the altar in the corner were candles burning. Above it hung paintings of saints, finely executed by Mexican hands; an ebony cross spread its black arms against the white wall; the candles flared to a golden Christ. He caught her hands and led her over to the altar.

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“Listen to me,” he said. “I will bring you those pearls. You shall have such pearls as no queen in Europe possesses. Swear to me here, with your hands on this altar, that you will wed me when I return, no matter how or where I find those pearls.”

He was holding her hands between the candelabra. She looked at him with eyes of passionate surrender; the man had conquered worldly ambitions. But he answered her before she had time to speak.

“You love me, and would withdraw the conditions. But I am ready to do a daring and a terrible act. Furthermore, I wish to show you that I can succeed where all other men have failed. I ask only two things now. First, make me the vow I wish.”

“I swear it,” she said.

“Now,” he said, his voice sinking to a harsh but caressing whisper, “give me one kiss for courage and hope.”

She leaned slowly forward, the blood pulsing in her lips; but she had been brought up behind grated windows, and she drew back. “No,” she said, “not now.”

For a moment he looked rebellious; then he laid his hands on her shoulders and pressed her to her knees. He knelt behind her, and together they told a rosary for his safe return.

He left her there and went to his room. From his saddle-bag he took a long letter from an intimate friend, one of the younger Franciscan priests of the Mission of Santa Barbara, where he had been educated. He sought this paragraph:—

“Thou knowest, of course, my Vicente, of the pearl fisheries of Baja California. It is whispered—between ourselves, indeed, it is quite true—that a short while ago the Indian divers discovered an extravagantly rich bed of pearls. Instead of reporting to any of the companies, they have hung them all upon our Most Sacred Lady of Loreto, in the Mission of Loreto; and there, by the grace of God, they will remain. They are worth the ransom of a king, my Vicente, and the Church has come to her own again.”

III

The fog lay thick on the bay at dawn next morning. The white waves hid the blue, muffled the roar of the surf. Now and again a whale threw a volume of spray high in the air, a geyser from a phantom sea. Above the white sands straggled the white town, ghostly, prophetic.

De la Vega, a dark sombrero pulled over his eyes, a dark serape enveloping his tall figure, rode, unattended and watchful, out of the town. Not until he reached the narrow

road through the brush forest beyond did he give his horse rein. The indolence of the Californian was no longer in his carriage; it looked alert and muscular; recklessness accentuated the sternness of his face.

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As he rode, the fog receded slowly. He left the chaparral and rode by green marshes cut with sloughs and stained with vivid patches of orange. The frogs in the tules chanted their hoarse matins. Through brush-covered plains once more, with sparsely wooded hills in the distance, and again the tules, the marsh, the patches of orange. He rode through a field of mustard; the pale yellow petals brushed his dark face, the delicate green leaves won his eyes from the hot glare of the ascending sun, the slender stalks, rebounding, smote his horse's flanks. He climbed hills to avoid the wide marshes, and descended into willow groves and fields of daisies. Before noon he was in the San Juan Mountains, thick with sturdy oaks, bending their heads before the madrono, that belle of the forest, with her robes of scarlet and her crown of bronze. The yellow lilies clung to her skirts, and the buckeye flung his flowers at her feet. The last redwoods were there, piercing the blue air with their thin inflexible arms, gray as a dusty band of friars. Out by the willows, whereunder crept the sluggish river, then between the hills curving about the valley of San Juan Bautista.

At no time is California so beautiful as in the month of June. De la Vega's wild spirit and savage purpose were dormant for the moment as he rode down the valley toward the mission. The hills were like gold, like mammoth fawns veiled with violet mist, like rich tan velvet. Afar, bare blue steeps were pink in their chasms, brown on their spurs. The dark yellow fields were as if thick with gold-dust; the pale mustard was a waving yellow sea. Not a tree marred the smooth hills. The earth sent forth a perfume of its own. Below the plateau from which rose the white walls of the mission was a wide field of bright green corn rising against the blue sky.

The padres in their brown hooded robes came out upon the long corridor of the mission and welcomed the traveller. Their lands had gone from them, their mission was crumbling, but the spirit of hospitality lingered there still. They laid meat and fruit and drink on a table beneath the arches, then sat about him and asked him eagerly for news of the day. Was it true that the United States of America were at war with Mexico, or about to be? True that their beloved flag might fall, and the stars and stripes of an insolent invader rise above the fort of Monterey?

De la Vega recounted the meagre and conflicting rumours which had reached California, but, not being a prophet, could not tell them that they would be the first to see the red-white-and-blue fluttering on the mountain before them. He refused to rest more than an hour, but mounted the fresh horse the padres gave him and went his way, riding hard and relentlessly, like all Californians.

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He sped onward, through the long hot day, leaving the hills for the marshes and a long stretch of ugly country, traversing the beautiful San Antonio Valley in the night, reaching the Mission of San Miguel at dawn, resting there for a few hours. That night he slept at a hospitable ranch-house in the park-like valley of Paso des Robles, a grim silent figure amongst gay-hearted people who delighted to welcome him. The early morning found him among the chrome hills; and at the Mission of San Luis Obispo the good padres gave him breakfast. The little valley, round as a well, its bare hills red and brown, gray and pink, violet and black, from fire, sloping steeply from a dizzy height, impressed him with a sense of being prisoned in an enchanted vale where no message of the outer world could come, and he hastened on his way.

Absorbed as he was, he felt the beauty he fled past. A line of golden hills lay against sharp blue peaks. A towering mass of gray rocks had been cut and lashed by wind and water, earthquake and fire, into the semblance of a massive castle, still warlike in its ruin. He slept for a few hours that night in the Mission of Santa Ynes, and was high in the Santa Barbara Mountains at the next noon. For brief whiles he forgot his journey's purpose as his horse climbed slowly up the steep trails, knocking the loose stones down a thousand feet and more upon a roof of tree-tops which looked like stunted brush. Those gigantic masses of immense stones, each wearing a semblance to the face of man or beast; those awful chasms and stupendous heights, densely wooded, bare, and many-hued, rising above, beyond, peak upon peak, cutting through the visible atmosphere—was there no end? He turned in his saddle and looked over low peaks and canons, rivers and abysms, black peaks smiting the fiery blue, far, far, to the dim azure mountains on the horizon.

"Mother of God!" he thought. "No wonder California still shakes! I would I could have stood upon a star and beheld the awful throes of this country's birth." And then his horse reared between the sharp spurs and galloped on.

He avoided the Mission of Santa Barbara, resting at a rancho outside the town. In the morning, supplied as usual with a fresh horse, he fled onward, with the ocean at his right, its splendid roar in his ears. The cliffs towered high above him; he saw no man's face for hours together; but his thoughts companioned him, savage and sinister shapes whirling about the figure of a woman. On, on, sleeping at ranchos or missions, meeting hospitality everywhere, avoiding Los Angeles, keeping close to the ponderous ocean, he left civilization behind him at last, and with an Indian guide entered upon that desert of mountain-tops, Baja California.

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Rapid travelling was not possible here. There were no valleys worthy the name. The sharp peaks, multiplying mile after mile, were like teeth of gigantic rakes, black and bare. A wilderness of mountain-tops, desolate as eternity, arid, parched, baked by the awful heat, the silence never broken by the cry of a bird, a hut rarely breaking the barren monotony, only an infrequent spring to save from death. It was almost impossible to get food or fresh horses. Many a night De la Vega and his stoical guide slept beneath a cactus, or in the mocking bed of a creek. The mustangs he managed to lasso were almost unridable, and would have bucked to death any but a Californian. Sometimes he lived on cactus fruit and the dried meat he had brought with him; occasionally he shot a rabbit. Again he had but the flesh of the rattlesnake roasted over coals. But honey-dew was on the leaves.

He avoided the beaten trail, and cut his way through naked bushes spiked with thorns, and through groves of cacti miles in length. When the thick fog rolled up from the ocean he had to sit inactive on the rocks, or lose his way. A furious storm dashed him against a boulder, breaking his mustang's leg; then a torrent, rising like a tidal wave, thundered down the gulch, and catching him on its crest, flung him upon a tree of thorns. When dawn came he found his guide dead. He cursed his luck, and went on.

Lassoing another mustang, he pushed on, having a general idea of the direction he should take. It was a week before he reached Loreto, a week of loneliness, hunger, thirst, and torrid monotony. A week, too, of thought and bitterness of spirit. In spite of his love, which never cooled, and his courage, which never quailed, Nature, in her guise of foul and crooked hag, mocked at earthly happiness, at human hope, at youth and passion.

If he had not spent his life in the saddle, he would have been worn out when he finally reached Loreto, late one night. As it was, he slept in a hut until the following afternoon. Then he took a long swim in the bay, and, later, sauntered through the town.

The forlorn little city was hardly more than a collection of Indians' huts about a church in a sandy waste. No longer the capital, even the barracks were toppling. When De la Vega entered the mission, not a white man but the padre and his assistant was in it; the building was thronged with Indian worshippers. The mission, although the first built in California, was in a fair state of preservation. The Stations in their battered frames were mellow and distinct. The gold still gleamed in the vestments of the padre.

For a few moments De la Vega dared not raise his eyes to the Lady of Loreto, standing aloft in the dull blaze of adamantine candles. When he did, he rose suddenly from his knees and left the mission. The pearls were there.

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It took him but a short time to gain the confidence of the priest and the little population. He offered no explanation for his coming, beyond the curiosity of the traveller. The padre gave him a room in the mission, and spent every hour he could spare with the brilliant stranger. At night he thanked God for the sudden oasis in his life's desolation. The Indians soon grew accustomed to the lonely figure wandering about the sand plains, or kneeling for hours together before the altar in the church. And whom their padre trusted was to them as sacred and impersonal as the wooden saints of their religion.

IV

The midnight stars watched over the mission. Framed by the cross-shaped window sunk deep in the adobe wall above the entrance, a mass of them assumed the form of the crucifix, throwing a golden trail full upon the Lady of Loreto, proud in her shining pearls. The long narrow body of the church seemed to have swallowed the shadows of the ages, and to yawn for more.

De la Vega, booted and spurred, his serape folded about him, his sombrero on his head, opened the sacristy door and entered the church. In one hand he held a sack; in the other, a candle sputtering in a bottle. He walked deliberately to the foot of the altar. In spite of his intrepid spirit, he stood appalled for a moment as he saw the dim radiance enveloping the Lady of Loreto. He scowled over his shoulder at the menacing emblem of redemption and crossed himself. But had it been the finger of God, the face of Ysabel would have shone between. He extinguished his candle, and swinging himself to the top of the altar plucked the pearls from the Virgin's gown and dropped them into the sack. His hand trembled a little, but he held his will between his teeth.

How quiet it was! The waves flung themselves upon the shore with the sullen wrath of impotence. A seagull screamed now and again, an exclamation-point in the silence above the waters. Suddenly De la Vega shook from head to foot, and snatched the knife from his belt. A faint creaking echoed through the hollow church. He strained his ears, holding his breath until his chest collapsed with the shock of outrushing air. But the sound was not repeated, and he concluded that it had been but a vibration of his nerves. He glanced to the window above the doors. The stars in it were no longer visible; they had melted into bars of flame. The sweat stood cold on his face, but he went on with his work.

A rope of pearls, cunningly strung together with strands of sea-weed, was wound about the Virgin's right arm. De la Vega was too nervous to uncoil it; he held the sack beneath, and severed the strands with his knife. As he finished, and was about to stoop and cut loose the pearls from the hem of the Virgin's gown, he uttered a hoarse cry and stood rigid. A cowled head, with thin lips drawn over yellow teeth, furious eyes burning

deep in withered sockets, projected on its long neck from the Virgin's right and confronted him. The body was unseen.

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“Thief!” hissed the priest. “Dog! Thou wouldst rob the Church? Accursed! accursed!”

There was not one moment for hesitation, one alternative. Before the priest could complete his malediction, De la Vega’s knife had flashed through the fire of the cross. The priest leaped, screeching, then rolled over and down, and rebounded from the railing of the sanctuary.

V

Ysabel sat in the low window-seat of her bedroom, pretending to draw the threads of a cambric handkerchief. But her fingers twitched, and her eyes looked oftener down the hill than upon the delicate work which required such attention. She wore a black gown flowered with yellow roses, and a slender ivory cross at her throat. Her hair hung in two loose braids, sweeping the floor. She was very pale, and her pallor was not due to the nightly entertainments of Monterey.

Her duena sat beside her. The old woman was the colour of strong coffee; but she, too, looked as if she had not slept, and her straight old lips curved tenderly whenever she raised her eyes to the girl’s face.

There was no carpet on the floor of the bedroom of La Favorita of Monterey, the heiress of Don Antonio Herrera, and the little bedstead in the corner was of iron, although a heavy satin coverlet trimmed with lace was on it. A few saints looked down from the walls; the furniture was of native wood, square and ugly; but it was almost hidden under fine linen elaborately worked with the deshalados of Spain.

The supper hour was over, and the light grew dim. Ysabel tossed the handkerchief into Dona Juana’s lap, and stared through the grating. Against the faded sky a huge cloud, shaped like a fire-breathing dragon, was heavily outlined. The smoky shadows gathered in the woods. The hoarse boom of the surf came from the beach; the bay was uneasy, and the tide was high: the earth had quaked in the morning, and a wind-storm fought the ocean. The gay bright laughter of women floated up from the town. Monterey had taken her siesta, enjoyed her supper, and was ready to dance through the night once more.

“He is dead,” said Ysabel.

“True,” said the old woman.

“He would have come back to me before this.”

“True.”

“He was so strong and so different, mamita.”

“I never forget his eyes. Very bold eyes.”

“They could be soft, macheppa.”

“True. It is time thou dressed for the ball at the Custom-house, ninita.”

Ysabel leaned forward, her lips parting. A man was coming up the hill. He was gaunt; he was burnt almost black. Something bulged beneath his serape.

Dona Juana found herself suddenly in the middle of the room. Ysabel darted through the only door, locking it behind her. The indignant duena also recognized the man, and her position. She trotted to the door and thumped angrily on the panel; sympathetic she was, but she never could so far forget herself as to permit a young girl to talk with a man unattended.

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“Thou shalt not go to the ball to-night,” she cried shrilly. “Thou shalt be locked in the dark room. Thou shalt be sent to the rancho. Open! open! thou wicked one. Madre de Dios! I will beat thee with my own hands.”

But she was a prisoner, and Ysabel paid no attention to her threats. The girl was in the sala, and the doors were open. As De la Vega crossed the corridor and entered the room she sank upon a chair, covering her face with her hands.

He strode over to her, and flinging his serape from his shoulder opened the mouth of a sack and poured its contents into her lap. Pearls of all sizes and shapes—pearls black and pearls white, pearls pink and pearls faintly blue, pearls like globes and pearls like pears, pearls as big as the lobe of Pio Pico’s ear, pearls as dainty as bubbles of frost—a lapful of gleaming luminous pearls, the like of which caballero had never brought to dona before.

For a moment Ysabel forgot her love and her lover. The dream of a lifetime was reality. She was the child who had cried for the moon and seen it tossed into her lap.

She ran her slim white fingers through the jewels. She took up handfuls and let them run slowly back to her lap. She pressed them to her face; she kissed them with little rapturous cries. She laid them against her breast and watched them chase each other down her black gown. Then at last she raised her head and met the fierce sneering eyes of De la Vega.

“So it is as I might have known. It was only the pearls you wanted. It might have been an Indian slave who brought them to you.”

She took the sack from his hand and poured back the pearls. Then she laid the sack on the floor and stood up. She was no longer pale, and her eyes shone brilliantly in the darkening room.

“Yes,” she said; “I forgot for a moment. But during many terrible weeks, senor, my tears have not been for the pearls.”

The sudden light that was De la Vega’s chiefest charm sprang to his eyes. He took her hands and kissed them passionately.

“That sack of pearls would be a poor reward for one tear. But thou hast shed them for me? Say that again. Mi alma! mi alma!”

“I never thought of the pearls—at least not often. At last, not at all. I have been very unhappy, senor. Ay!”

The maiden reserve which had been knit like steel about her plastic years burst wide. “Thou art ill! What has happened to thee? Ay, Dios! what it is to be a woman and to suffer! Thou wilt die! Oh, Mother of God!”

“I shall not die. Kiss me, Ysabel. Surely it is time now.”

But she drew back and shook her head.

He exclaimed impatiently, but would not release her hand. “Thou meanest that, Ysabel?”

“We shall be married soon—wait.”

“I had hoped you would grant me that. For when I tell you where I got those pearls you may drive me from you in spite of your promise—drive me from you with the curse of the devout woman on your lips. I might invent some excuse to persuade you to fly with me from California to-night, and you would never know. But I am a man—a Spaniard—-and a De la Vega. I shall not lie to you.”

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She looked at him with wide eyes, not understanding, and he went on, his face savage again, his voice harsh. He told her the whole story of that night in the mission. He omitted nothing—the menacing cross, the sacrilegious theft, the deliberate murder; the pictures were painted with blood and fire. She did not interrupt him with cry or gasp, but her expression changed many times. Horror held her eyes for a time, then slowly retreated, and his own fierce pride looked back at him. She lifted her head when he had finished, her throat throbbing, her nostrils twitching.

“Thou hast done that—for me?”

“Ay, Ysabel!”

“Thou hast murdered thy immortal soul—for me?”

“Ysabel!”

“Thou lovest me like that! O God, in what likeness hast thou made me? In whatsoever image it may have been, I thank Thee—and repudiate Thee!”

She took the cross from her throat and broke it in two pieces with her strong white fingers.

“Thou art lost, eternally damned: but I will go down to hell with thee.” And she threw herself upon him and kissed him on the mouth.

For a moment he forgot the lesson thrust into his brain by the hideous fingers of the desert. He was almost happy. He put his hands about her warm face after a time. “We must go to-night,” he said. “I went to General Castro’s to change my clothes, and learned that a ship sails for the United States to-night. We will go on that. I dare not delay twenty-four hours. It may be that they are upon my heels now. How can we meet?”

Her thoughts had travelled faster than his words, and she answered at once: “There is a ball at the Custom-house to-night. I will go. You will have a boat below the rocks. You know that the Custom-house is on the rocks at the end of the town, near the fort. No? It will be easier for me to slip from the ball-room than from this house. Only tell me where you will meet me.”

“The ship sails at midnight. I too will go to the ball; for with me you can escape more easily. Have you a maid you can trust?”

“My Luisa is faithful.”

“Then tell her to be on the beach between the rocks of the Custom-house and the Fort with what you must take with you.”

Again he kissed her many times, but softly. “Wear thy pearls to-night. I wish to see thy triumphant hour in Monterey.”

“Yes,” she said, “I shall wear the pearls.”

VI

The corridor of the Custom-house had been enclosed to protect the musicians and supper table from the wind and fog. The store-room had been cleared, the floor scrubbed, the walls hung with the colours of Mexico. All in honour of Pio Pico, again in brief exile from his beloved Los Angeles. The Governor, blazing with diamonds, stood at the upper end of the room by Dona Modeste Castro’s side. About them were Castro and other prominent men of

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Monterey, all talking of the rumoured war between the United States and Mexico and prophesying various results. Neither Pico nor Castro looked amiable. The Governor had arrived in the morning to find that the General had allowed pasquinades representing his Excellency in no complimentary light to disfigure the streets of Monterey. Castro, when taken to task, had replied haughtily that it was the Governor's place to look after his own dignity; he, the Commandante-General of the army of the Californias, had more important matters to attend to. The result had been a furious war of words, ending in a lame peace.

"Tell us, Excellency," said Jose Abrigo, "what will be the outcome?"

"The Americans can have us if they wish," said Pio Pico, bitterly. "We cannot prevent."

"Never!" cried Castro. "What? We cannot protect ourselves against the invasion of bandoleros? Do you forget what blood stings the veins of the Californian? A Spaniard stand with folded arms and see his country plucked from him! Oh, sacrilege! They will never have our Californias while a Californian lives to cut them down!"

"Bravo! bravo!" cried many voices.

"I tell you—" began Pio Pico, but Dona Modeste interrupted him. "No more talk of war to-night," she said peremptorily. "Where is Ysabel?"

"She sent me word by Dona Juana that she could not make herself ready in time to come with me, but would follow with my good friend, Don Antonio, who of course had to wait for her. Her gown was not finished, I believe. I think she had done something naughty, and Dona Juana had tried to punish her, but had not succeeded. The old lady looked very sad. Ah, here is Dona Ysabel now!"

"How lovely she is!" said Dona Modeste. "I think—What! what!—"

"Dios de mi Alma!" exclaimed Pio Pico, "where did she get those pearls?"

The crowd near the door had parted, and Ysabel entered on the arm of her uncle. Don Antonio's form was bent, and she looked taller by contrast. His thin sharp profile was outlined against her white neck, bared for the first time to the eyes of Monterey. Her shawl had just been laid aside, and he was near-sighted and did not notice the pearls.

She had sewn them all over the front of her white silk gown. She had wound them in the black coils of her hair. They wreathed her neck and roped her arms. Never had she looked so beautiful. Her great green eyes were as radiant as spring. Her lips were redder than blood. A pink flame burned in her oval cheeks. Her head moved like a Californian lily on its stalk. No Montereno would ever forget her.

“El Son!” cried the young men, with one accord. Her magnificent beauty extinguished every other woman in the room. She must not hide her light in the contradanza. She must madden all eyes at once.

Ysabel bent her head and glided to the middle of the room. The other women moved back, their white gowns like a snowbank against the garish walls. The thin sweet music of the instruments rose above the boom of the tide. Ysabel lifted her dress with curving arms, displaying arched feet clad in flesh-coloured stockings and white slippers, and danced El Son.

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Her little feet tapped time to the music; she whirled her body with utmost grace, holding her head so motionless that she could have balanced a glass of water upon it. She was inspired that night; and when, in the midst of the dance, De la Vega entered the room, a sort of madness possessed her. She invented new figures. She glided back and forth, bending and swaying and doubling until to the eyes of her bewildered admirers the outlines of her lovely body were gone. Even the women shouted their approval, and the men went wild. They pulled their pockets inside out and flung handfuls of gold at her feet. Those who had only silver cursed their fate, but snatched the watches from their pockets, the rings from their fingers, and hurled them at her with shouts and cheers. They tore the lace ruffles from their shirts; they rushed to the next room and ripped the silver eagles from their hats. Even Pio Pico flung one of his golden ropes at her feet, a hot blaze in his old ugly face, as he cried:—

“Brava! brava! thou Star of Monterey!”

Guido Cabanares, desperate at having nothing more to sacrifice to his idol, sprang upon a chair, and was about to tear down the Mexican flag, when the music stopped with a crash, as if musicians and instruments had been overturned, and a figure leaped into the room.

The women uttered a loud cry and crossed themselves. Even the men fell back. Ysabel’s swaying body trembled and became rigid. De la Vega, who had watched her with folded arms, too entranced to offer her anything but the love that shook him, turned livid to his throat. A friar, his hood fallen back from his stubbled head, his brown habit stiff with dirt, smelling, reeling with fatigue, stood amongst them. His eyes were deep in his ashen face. They rolled about the room until they met De la Vega’s.

General Castro came hastily forward. “What does this mean?” he asked. “What do you wish?”

The friar raised his arm, and pointed his shaking finger at De la Vega.

“Kill him!” he said, in a loud hoarse whisper. “He has desecrated the Mother of God!”

Every caballero in the room turned upon De la Vega with furious satisfaction. Ysabel had quickened their blood, and they were willing to cool it in vengeance on the man of whom they still were jealous, and whom they suspected of having brought the wondrous pearls which covered their Favorita to-night.

“What? What?” they cried eagerly. “Has he done this thing?”

“He has robbed the Church. He has stripped the Blessed Virgin of her jewels. He—has—murdered—a—priest of the Holy Catholic Church.”

Horror stayed them for a moment, and then they rushed at De la Vega. “He does not deny it!” they cried. “Is it true? Is it true?” and they surged about him hot with menace.

“It is quite true,” said De la Vega, coldly. “I plundered the shrine of Loreto and murdered its priest.”

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The women panted and gasped; for a moment even the men were stunned, and in that moment an ominous sound mingled with the roar of the surf. Before the respite was over Ysabel had reached his side.

“He did it for me!” she cried, in her clear triumphant voice. “For me! And although you kill us both, I am the proudest woman in all the Californias, and I love him.”

“Good!” cried Castro, and he placed himself before them. “Stand back, every one of you. What? are you barbarians, Indians, that you would do violence to a guest in your town? What if he has committed a crime? Is he not one of you, then, that you offer him blood instead of protection? Where is your pride of caste? your *hospitality*? Oh, perfidy! Fall back, and leave the guest of your capital to those who are compelled to judge him.”

The caballeros shrank back, sullen but abashed. He had touched the quick of their pride.

“Never mind!” cried the friar. “You cannot protect him from *that*. Listen!”

Had the bay risen about the Custom-house?

“What is that?” demanded Castro, sharply.

“The poor of Monterey; those who love their Cross better than the aristocrats love their caste. They know.”

De la Vega caught Ysabel in his arms and dashed across the room and corridor. His knife cut a long rift in the canvas, and in a moment they stood upon the rocks. The shrieking crowd was on the other side of the Custom-house.

“Marcos!” he called to his boatman, “Marcos!”

No answer came but the waves tugging at the rocks not two feet below them. He could see nothing. The fog was thick as night.

“He is not here, Ysabel. We must swim. Anything but to be torn to pieces by those wild-cats. Are you afraid?”

“No,” she said.

He folded her closely with one arm, and felt with his foot for the edge of the rocks. A wild roar came from behind. A dozen pistols were fired into the air. De la Vega reeled suddenly. “I am shot, Ysabel,” he said, his knees bending. “Not in this world, my love!”

She wound her arms about him, and dragging him to the brow of the rocks, hurled herself outward, carrying him with her. The waves tossed them on high, flung them against the rocks and ground them there, playing with them like a lion with its victim, then buried them.

THE EARS OF TWENTY AMERICANS

I

“God of my soul! Do not speak of hope to me. Hope? For what are those three frigates, swarming with a horde of foreign bandits, creeping about our bay? For what have the persons of General Vallejo and Judge Leese been seized and imprisoned? Why does a strip of cotton, painted with a gaping bear, flaunt itself above Sonoma? Oh, abomination! Oh, execrable profanation! Mother of God, open thine ocean and suck them down! Smite them with

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pestilence if they put foot in our capital! Shrivel their fingers to the bone if they dethrone our Aztec Eagle and flourish their stars and stripes above our fort! O California! That thy sons and thy daughters should live to see thee plucked like a rose by the usurper! And why? Why? Not because these piratical Americans have the right to one league of our land; but because, Holy Evangelists! they want it! Our lands are rich, our harbours are fine, gold veins our valleys, therefore we must be plucked. The United States of America are mightier than Mexico, therefore they sweep down upon us with mouths wide open. Holy God! That I could choke but one with my own strong fingers. Oh!" Dona Eustaquia paused abruptly and smote her hands together,—"O that I were a man! That the women of California were men!"

On this pregnant morning of July seventh, eighteen hundred and forty-six, all aristocratic Monterey was gathered in the sala of Dona Modeste Castro. The hostess smiled sadly. "That is the wish of my husband," she said, "for the men of our country want the Americans."

"And why?" asked one of the young men, flicking a particle of dust from his silken riding jacket. "We shall then have freedom from the constant war of opposing factions. If General Castro and Governor Pico are not calling Juntas in which to denounce each other, a Carillo is pitting his ambition against an Alvarado. The Gringos will rule us lightly and bring us peace. They will not disturb our grants, and will give us rich prices for our lands—"

"Oh, fool!" interrupted Dona Eustaquia. "Thrice fool! A hundred years from now, Fernando Altimira, and our names will be forgotten in California. Fifty years from now and our walls will tumble upon us whilst we cook our beans in the rags that charity—-American charity—has flung us! I tell you that the hour the American flag waves above the fort of Monterey is the hour of the Californians' doom. We have lived in Arcadia—-ingrates that you are to complain—they will run over us like ants and sting us to death!"

"That is the prediction of my husband," said Dona Modeste. "Liberty, Independence, Decency, Honour, how long will they be his watch-words?"

"Not a day longer!" cried Dona Eustaquia, "for the men of California are cowards."

"Cowards! We? No man should say that to us!" The caballeros were on their feet, their eyes flashing, as if they faced in uniform the navy of the United States, rather than confronted, in lace ruffles and silken smallclothes, an angry scornful woman.

"Cowards!" continued Fernando Altimira. "Are not men flocking about General Castro at San Juan Bautista, willing to die in a cause already lost? If our towns were sacked or our women outraged would not the weakest of us fight until we died in our blood? But

what is coming is for the best, Dona Eustaquia, despite your prophecy; and as we cannot help it—we, a few thousand men against a great nation—we resign ourselves because we are governed by reason instead of by passion. No one reverences our General more than Fernando Altimira. No grander man ever wore a uniform! But he is fighting in a hopeless cause, and the fewer who uphold him the less blood will flow, the sooner the struggle will finish."

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Dona Modeste covered her beautiful face and wept. Many of the women sobbed in sympathy. Bright eyes, from beneath gay rebosas or delicate mantillas, glanced approvingly at the speaker. Brown old men and women stared gloomily at the floor. But the greater number followed every motion of their master-spirit, Dona Eustaquia Ortega.

She walked rapidly up and down the long room, too excited to sit down, flinging the mantilla back as it brushed her hot cheek. She was a woman not yet forty, and very handsome, although the peachness of youth had left her face. Her features were small but sharply cut; the square chin and firm mouth had the lines of courage and violent emotions, her piercing intelligent eyes interpreted a terrible power of love and hate. But if her face was so strong as to be almost unfeminine, it was frank and kind.

Dona Eustaquia might watch with joy her bay open and engulf the hated Americans, but she would nurse back to life the undrowned bodies flung upon the shore. If she had been born a queen she would have slain in anger, but she would not have tortured. General Castro had flung his hat at her feet many times, and told her that she was born to command. Even the nervous irregularity of her step to-day could not affect the extreme elegance of her carriage, and she carried her small head with the imperious pride of a sovereign. She did not speak again for a moment, but as she passed the group of young men at the end of the room her eyes flashed from one languid face to another. She hated their rich breeches and embroidered jackets buttoned with silver and gold, the lace handkerchiefs knotted about their shapely throats. No man was a man who did not wear a uniform.

Don Fernando regarded her with a mischievous smile as she approached him a second time.

“I predict, also,” he said, “I predict that our charming Dona Eustaquia will yet wed an American—”

“What!” she turned upon him with the fury of a lioness. “Hold thy prating tongue! I marry an American? God! I would give every league of my ranchos for a necklace made from the ears of twenty Americans. I would throw my jewels to the pigs, if I could feel here upon my neck the proof that twenty American heads looked ready to be fired from the cannon on the hill!”

Everybody in the room laughed, and the atmosphere felt lighter. Muslin gowns began to flutter, and the seal of disquiet sat less heavily upon careworn or beautiful faces. But before the respite was a moment old a young man entered hastily from the street, and throwing his hat on the floor burst into tears.

“What is it?” The words came mechanically from every one in the room.

The herald put his hand to his throat to control the swelling muscles. “Two hours ago,” he said, “Commander Sloat sent one Captain William Mervine on shore to demand of our Commandante the surrender of the town. Don Mariano walked the floor, wringing his hands, until a quarter of an hour ago, when he sent word to the insolent servant of a pirate-republic that he had no authority to deliver up the capital, and bade him go to San Juan Bautista and confer with General Castro. Whereupon the American thief ordered two hundred and fifty of his men to embark in boats—do not you hear?”

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A mighty cheer shook the air amidst the thunder of cannon; then another, and another.

Every lip in the room was white.

“What is that?” asked Dona Eustaquia. Her voice was hardly audible.

“They have raised the American flag upon the Custom-house,” said the herald.

For a moment no one moved; then as by one impulse, and without a word, Dona Modeste Castro and her guests rose and ran through the streets to the Custom-house on the edge of the town.

In the bay were three frigates of twenty guns each. On the rocks, in the street by the Custom-house and on its corridors, was a small army of men in the naval uniform of the United States, respectful but determined. About them and the little man who read aloud from a long roll of paper, the aristocrats joined the rabble of the town. Men with sunken eyes who had gambled all night, leaving even serape and sombrero on the gaming table; girls with painted faces staring above cheap and gaudy satins, who had danced at fandangos in the booths until dawn, then wandered about the beach, too curious over the movements of the American squadron to go to bed; shopkeepers, black and rusty of face, smoking big pipes with the air of philosophers; Indians clad in a single garment of calico, falling in a straight line from the neck; eagle-beaked old crones with black shawls over their heads; children wearing only a smock twisted about their little waists and tied in a knot behind; a few American residents, glancing triumphantly at each other; caballeros, gay in the silken attire of summer, sitting in angry disdain upon their plunging, superbly trapped horses; last of all, the elegant women in their lace mantillas and flowered rebosas, weeping and clinging to each other. Few gave ear to the reading of Sloat’s proclamation.

Benicia, the daughter of Dona Eustaquia, raised her clasped hands, the tears streaming from her eyes. “Oh, these Americans! How I hate them!” she cried, a reflection of her mother’s violent spirit on her sweet face.

Dona Eustaquia caught the girl’s hands and flung herself upon her neck. “Ay! California! California!” she cried wildly. “My country is flung to its knees in the dirt.”

A rose from the upper corridor of the Custom-house struck her daughter full in the face.

II

The same afternoon Benicia ran into the sala where her mother was lying on a sofa, and exclaimed excitedly: “My mother! My mother! It is not so bad. The Americans are not so wicked as we have thought. The proclamation of the Commodore Sloat has been pasted on all the walls of the town and promises that our grants shall be secured

to us under the new government, that we shall elect our own alcaldes, that we shall continue to worship God in our own religion, that our priests shall be protected, that we shall have all the rights and advantages of the American citizen—”

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“Stop!” cried Dona Eustaquia, springing to her feet. Her face still burned with the bitter experience of the morning. “Tell me of no more lying promises! They will keep their word! Ay, I do not doubt but they will take advantage of our ignorance, with their Yankee sharpness! I know them! Do not speak of them to me again. If it must be, it must; and at least I have thee.” She caught the girl in her arms, and covered the flower-like face with passionate kisses. “My little one! My darling! Thou lovest thy mother—better than all the world? Tell me!”

The girl pressed her soft, red lips to the dark face which could express such fierceness of love and hate.

“My mother! Of course I love thee. It is because I have thee that I do not take the fate of my country deeper heart. So long as they do not put their ugly bayonets between us, what difference whether the eagle or the stars wave above the fort?”

“Ah, my child, thou hast not that love of country which is part of my soul! But perhaps it is as well, for thou lovest thy mother the more. Is it not so, my little one?”

“Surely, my mother; I love no one in the world but you.”

Dona Eustaquia leaned back and tapped the girl’s fair cheek with her finger.

“Not even Don Fernando Altimira?”

“No, my mother.”

“Nor Flujencio Hernandez? Nor Juan Perez? Nor any of the caballeros who serenade beneath thy window?”

“I love their music, but it comes as sweetly from one throat as from another.”

Her mother gave a long sigh of relief. “And yet I would have thee marry some day, my little one. I was happy with thy father—thanks to God he did not live to see this day—I was as happy, for two little years, as this poor nature of ours can be, and I would have thee be the same. But do not hasten to leave me alone. Thou art so young! Thine eyes have yet the roguishness of youth; I would not see love flash it aside. Thy mouth is like a child’s; I shall shed the saddest tears of my life the day it trembles with passion. Dear little one! Thou hast been more than a daughter to me; thou hast been my only companion. I have striven to impart to thee the ambition of thy mother and the intellect of thy father. And I am proud of thee, very, very proud of thee!”

Benicia pinched her mother’s chin, her mischievous eyes softening. “Ay, my mother, I have done my little best, but I never shall be you. I am afraid I love to dance through the night and flirt my breath away better than I love the intellectual conversation of the

few people you think worthy to sit about you in the evenings. I am like a little butterfly sitting on the mane of a mountain lion—"

"Tush! Tush! Thou knowest more than any girl in Monterey, and I am satisfied with thee. Think of the books thou hast read, the languages thou hast learned from the Senor Hartnell. Ay, my little one, nobody but thou wouldst dare to say thou cared for nothing but dancing and flirting, although I will admit that even Ysabel Herrera could scarce rival thee at either."

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“Ay, my poor Ysabel! My heart breaks every night when I say a prayer for her.” She tightened the clasp of her arms and pressed her face close to her mother’s. “Mamacita, darling,” she said coaxingly, “I have a big favour to beg. Ay, an enormous one! How dare I ask it?”

“Aha! What is it? I should like to know. I thought thy tenderness was a little anxious.”

“Ay, mamacita! Do not refuse me or it will break my heart. On Wednesday night Don Thomas Larkin gives a ball at his house to the officers of the American squadron. Oh, mamacita! mamacita! *darling!* do, do let me go!”

“Benicia! Thou wouldst meet those men? Valgame Dios! And thou art a child of mine!”

She flung the girl from her, and walked rapidly up and down the room, Benicia following with her little white hands outstretched. “Dearest one, I know just how you feel about it! But think a moment. They have come to stay. They will never go. We shall meet them everywhere—every night—every day. And my new gown, mamacita! The beautiful silver spangles! There is not such a gown in Monterey! Ay, I must go. And they say the Americans hop like puppies when they dance. How I shall laugh at them! And it is not once in the year that I have a chance to speak English, and none of the other girls can. And all the girls, all the girls, all the girls, will go to this ball. Oh, mamacita!”

Her mother was obliged to laugh. “Well, well, I cannot refuse you anything; you know that! Go to the ball! Ay, yi, do not smother me! As you have said—that little head can think—we must meet these insolent braggarts sooner or later. So I would not—” her cheeks blanched suddenly, she caught her daughter’s face between her hands, and bent her piercing eyes above the girl’s soft depths. “Mother of God! That could not be. My child! Thou couldst never love an American! A Gringo! A Protestant! Holy Mary!”

Benicia threw back her head and gave a long laugh—the light rippling laugh of a girl who has scarcely dreamed of lovers. “I love an American? Oh, my mother! A great, big, yellow-haired bear! When I want only to laugh at their dancing! No, mamacita, when I love an American thou shalt have his ears for thy necklace.”

III

Thomas O. Larkin, United States Consul to California until the occupation left him without duties, had invited Monterey to meet the officers of the *Savannah, Cyane,* and *Levant*, and only Dona Modeste Castro had declined. At ten o’clock the sala of his large house on the rise of the hill was thronged with robed girls in every shade and device of white, sitting demurely behind the wide shoulders of coffee-coloured dowagers, also in white, and blazing with jewels. The young matrons were there, too, although they left the sala at intervals to visit the room set apart for the nurses and children; no Monterena

ever left her little ones at home. The old men and the caballeros wore the black coats and white trousers which Monterey fashion dictated for evening wear; the hair of the younger men was braided with gay ribbons, and diamonds flashed in the lace of their ruffles.

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The sala was on the second floor; the musicians sat on the corridor beyond the open windows and scraped their fiddles and twanged their guitars, awaiting the coming of the American officers. Before long the regular tramp of many feet turning from Alvarado Street up the little Primera del Este, facing Mr. Larkin's house, made dark eyes flash, lace and silken gowns flutter. Benicia and a group of girls were standing by Dona Eustaquia. They opened their large black fans as if to wave back the pink that had sprung to their cheeks. Only Benicia held her head saucily high, and her large brown eyes were full of defiant sparkles.

"Why art thou so excited, Blandina?" she asked of a girl who had grasped her arm. "I feel as if the war between the United States and Mexico began tonight."

"Ay, Benicia, thou hast so gay a spirit that nothing ever frightens thee! But, Mary! How many they are! They tramp as if they would go through the stair. Ay, the poor flag! No wonder—"

"Now, do not cry over the flag any more. Ah! there is not one to compare with General Castro!"

The character of the Californian sala had changed for ever; the blue and gold of the United States had invaded it.

The officers, young and old, looked with much interest at the faces, soft, piquant, tropical, which made the effect of pansies looking inquisitively over a snowdrift. The girls returned their glances with approval, for they were as fine and manly a set of men as ever had faced death or woman. Ten minutes later California and the United States were flirting outrageously.

Mr. Larkin presented a tall officer to Benicia. That the young man was very well-looking even Benicia admitted. True, his hair was golden, but it was cut short, and bore no resemblance to the coat of a bear; his mustache and brows were brown; his gray eyes were as laughing as her own.

"I suppose you do not speak any English, senorita," he said helplessly.

"No? I spik Eenglish like the Spanish. The Spanish people no have difficult at all to learn the other langues. But Senor Hartnell he say it no is easy at all for the Eenglish to spik the French and the Spanish, so I suppose you no spik one word our langue, no?"

He gallantly repressed a smile. "Thankfully I may say that I do not, else would I not have the pleasure of hearing you speak English. Never have I heard it so charmingly spoken before."

Benicia took her skirt between the tips of her fingers and swayed her graceful body forward, as a tule bends in the wind.

“You like dip the flag of the conqueror in honey, senor. Ay! We need have one compliment for every tear that fall since your eagle stab his beak in the neck de ours.”

“Ah, the loyal women of Monterey! I have no words to express my admiration for them, senorita. A thousand compliments are not worth one tear.”

Benicia turned swiftly to her mother, her eyes glittering with pleasure. “Mother, you hear! You hear!” she cried in Spanish. “These Americans are not so bad, after all.”

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Dona Eustaquia gave the young man one of her rare smiles; it flashed over her strong dark face, until the light of youth was there once more.

“Very pretty speech,” she said, with slow precision. “I thank you, Senor Russell, in the name of the women of Monterey.”

“By Jove! Madam—senora—I assure you I never felt so cut up in my life as when I saw all those beautiful women crying down there by the Custom-house. I am a good American, but I would rather have thrown the flag under your feet than have seen you cry like that. And I assure you, dear senora, every man among us felt the same. As you have been good enough to thank me in the name of the women of Monterey, I, in behalf of the officers of the United States squadron, beg that you will forgive us.”

Dona Eustaquia’s cheek paled again, and she set her lips for a moment; then she held out her hand.

“Senor,” she said, “we are conquered, but we are Californians; and although we do not bend the head, neither do we turn the back. We have invite you to our houses, and we cannot treat you like enemies. I will say with—how you say it—truth?—we did hate the thought that you come and take the country that was ours. But all is over and cannot be changed. So, it is better we are good friends than poor ones; and—and—my house is open to you, senor.”

Russell was a young man of acute perceptions; moreover, he had heard of Dona Eustaquia; he divined in part the mighty effort by which good breeding and philosophy had conquered bitter resentment. He raised the little white hand to his lips.

“I would that I were twenty men, senora. Each would be your devoted servant.”

“And then she have her necklace!” cried Benicia, delightedly.

“What is that?” asked Russell; but Dona Eustaquia shook her fan threateningly and turned away.

“I no tell you everything,” said Benicia, “so no be too curiosa. You no dance the contradanza, no?”

“I regret to say that I do not. But this is a plain waltz; will you not give it to me?”

Benicia, disregarding the angry glances of approaching caballeros, laid her hand on the officer’s shoulder, and he spun her down the room.

“Why, you no dance so bad!” she said with surprise. “I think always the Americanos dance so terreeblay.”

“Who could not dance with a fairy in his arms?”

“What funny things you say. I never been called fairy before.”

“You have never been interpreted.” And then, in the whirl-waltz of that day, both lost their breath.

When the dance was over and they stood near Dona Eustaquia, he took the fan from Benicia’s hand and waved it slowly before her. She laughed outright.

“You think I am so tired I no can fan myself?” she demanded. “How queer are these Americanos! Why, I have dance for three days and three nights and never estop.”

“Senorita!”

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“Si, senor. Oh, we estop sometimes, but no for long. It was at Sonoma two months ago. At the house de General Vallejo.”

“You certainly are able to fan yourself; but it is no reflection upon your muscle. It is only a custom we have.”

“Then I think much better you no have the custom. You no look like a man at all when you fan like a girl.”

He handed her back the fan with some choler.

“Really, senorita, you are very frank. I suppose you would have a man lie in a hammock all day and roll cigaritos.”

“Much better do that than take what no is yours.”

“Which no American ever did!”

“Excep’ when he pulled California out the pocket de Mexico.”

“And what did Mexico do first? Did she not threaten the United States with hostilities for a year, and attack a small detachment of our troops with a force of seven thousand men —”

“No make any difference what she do. Si she do wrong, that no is excuse for you do wrong.”

Two angry young people faced each other.

“You steal our country and insult our men. But they can fight, Madre de Dios! I like see General Castro take your little Commodore Sloat by the neck. He look like a little gray rat.”

“Commodore Sloat is a brave and able man, Miss Ortega, and no officer in the United States navy will hear him insulted.”

“Then much better you lock up the ears.”

“My dear Captain Russell! Benicia! what is the matter?”

Mr. Larkin stood before them, an amused smile on his thin intellectual face. “Come, come, have we not met to-night to dance the waltz of peace? Benicia, your most humble admirer has a favour to crave of you. I would have my countrymen learn at once the utmost grace of the Californian. Dance El Jarabe, please, and with Don Fernando Altimira.”

Benicia lifted her dainty white shoulders. She was not unwilling to avenge herself upon the American by dazzling him with her grace and beauty. Her eye's swift invitation brought Don Fernando, scowling, to her side. He led her to the middle of the room, and the musicians played the stately jig.

Benicia swept one glance of defiant coquetry at Russell from beneath her curling lashes, then fixed her eyes upon the floor, nor raised them again. She held her reed-like body very erect and took either side of her spangled skirt in the tips of her fingers, lifting it just enough to show the arched little feet in their embroidered stockings and satin slippers. Don Fernando crossed his hands behind him, and together they rattled their feet on the floor with dexterity and precision, whilst the girls sang the words of the dance. The officers gave genuine applause, delighted with this picturesque fragment of life on the edge of the Pacific. Don Fernando listened to their demonstrations with sombre contempt on his dark handsome face; Benicia indicated her pleasure by sundry archings of her narrow brows, or coquettish curves of her red lips. Suddenly she made a deep courtesy and ran to her mother, with a long sweeping movement, like the bending and lifting of grain in the wind. As she approached Russell he took a rose from his coat and threw it at her. She caught it, thrust it carelessly in one of her thick braids, and the next moment he was at her side again.

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IV

Dona Eustaquia slipped from the crowd and out of the house. Drawing a reboso about her head she walked swiftly down the street and across the plaza. Sounds of ribaldry came from the lower end of the town, but the aristocratic quarter was very quiet, and she walked unmolested to the house of General Castro. The door was open, and she went down the long hall to the sleeping room of Dona Modeste. There was no response to her knock, and she pushed open the door and entered. The room was dimly lit by the candles on the altar. Dona Modeste was not in the big mahogany bed, for the heavy satin coverlet was still over it. Dona Eustaquia crossed the room to the altar and lifted in her arms the small figure kneeling there.

“Pray no more, my friend,” she said. “Our prayers have been unheard, and thou art better in bed or with thy friends.”

Dona Modeste threw herself wearily into a chair, but took Dona Eustaquia’s hand in a tight clasp. Her white skin shone in the dim light, and with her black hair and green tragic eyes made her look like a little witch queen, for neither suffering nor humiliation could bend that stately head.

“Religion is my solace,” she said, “my only one; for I have not a brain of iron nor a soul of fire like thine. And, Eustaquia, I have more cause to pray to-night.”

“It is true, then, that Jose is in retreat? Ay, Mary!”

“My husband, deserted by all but one hundred men, is flying southward from San Juan Bautista. I have it from the wash-tub mail. That never is wrong.”

“Ingrates! Traitors! But it is true, Modeste—surely, no?—that our general will not surrender? That he will stand against the Americans?”

“He will not yield. He would have marched upon Monterey and forced them to give him battle here but for this base desertion. Now he will go to Los Angeles and command the men of the South to rally about him.”

“I knew that he would not kiss the boots of the Americans like the rest of our men! Oh, the cowards! I could almost say to-night that I like better the Americans than the men of my own race. *They* are Castros! I shall hate their flag so long as life is in me; but I cannot hate the brave men who fight for it. But my pain is light to thine. Thy heart is wrung, and I am sorry for thee.”

“My day is over. Misfortune is upon us. Even if my husband’s life is spared—ay! shall I ever see him again?—his position will be taken from him, for the Americans will conquer in the end. He will be Commandante-General of the army of the Californias no longer,

but—holy God!—a ranchero, a caballero! He at whose back all California has galloped! Thou knowest his restless aspiring soul, Eustaquia, his ambition, his passionate love of California. Can there be happiness for such a man humbled to the dust—no future! no hope? Ay!"—she sprang to her feet with arms uplifted, her small slender form looking twice its height as it palpitated against the shadows, "I feel the bitterness of that spirit! I know how that great heart is torn. And he is alone!" She flung herself across Dona Eustaquia's knees and burst into violent sobbing.

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Dona Eustaquia laid her strong arm about her friend, but her eyes were more angry than soft. “Weep no more, Modeste,” she said. “Rather, arise and curse those who have flung a great man into the dust. But comfort thyself. Who can know? Thy husband, weary with fighting, disgusted with men, may cling the closer to thee, and with thee and thy children forget the world in thy redwood forests or between the golden hills of thy ranchos.”

Dona Modeste shook her head. “Thou speakest the words of kindness, but thou knowest Jose. Thou knowest that he would not be content to be as other men. And, ay! Eustaquia, to think that it was opposite our own dear home, our favourite home, that the American flag should first have been raised! Opposite the home of Jose Castro!”

“To perdition with Fremont! Why did he, of all places, select San Juan Bautista in which to hang up his American rag?”

“We never can live there again. The Gabilan Mountains would shut out the very face of the sun from my husband.”

“Do not weep, my Modeste; remember thy other beautiful ranchos. Dios de mi alma!” she added with a flash of humour, “I revere San Juan Bautista for your husband’s sake, but I weep not that I shall visit you there no more. Every day I think to hear that the shaking earth of that beautiful valley has opened its jaws and swallowed every hill and adobe. God grant that Fremont’s hair stood up more than once. But go to bed, my friend. Look, I will put you there.” As if Dona Modeste were an infant, she undressed and laid her between the linen sheets with their elaborate drawn work, then made her drink a glass of angelica, folded and laid away the satin coverlet, and left the house.

She walked up the plaza slowly, holding her head high. Monterey at that time was infested by dogs, some of them very savage. Dona Eustaquia’s strong soul had little acquaintance with fear, and on her way to General Castro’s house she had paid no attention to the snarling muzzles thrust against her gown. But suddenly a cadaverous creature sprang upon her with a savage yelp and would have caught her by the throat had not a heavy stick cracked its skull. A tall officer in the uniform of the United States navy raised his cap from iron-gray hair and looked at her with blue eyes as piercing as her own.

“You will pardon me, madam,” he said, “if I insist upon attending you to your door. It is not safe for a woman to walk alone in the streets of Monterey at night.”

Dona Eustaquia bent her head somewhat haughtily. “I thank you much, senor, for your kind rescue. I would not like, at all, to be eaten by the dogs. But I not like to trouble you to walk with me. I go only to the house of the Senor Larkin. It is there, at the end of the little street beyond the plaza.”

“My dear madam, you must not deprive the United States of the pleasure of protecting California. Pray grant my humble request to walk behind you and keep off the dogs.”

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Her lips pressed each other, but pride put down the bitter retort.

“Walk by me, if you wish,” she said graciously. “Why are you not at the house of Don Thomas Larkin?”

“I am on my way there now. Circumstances prevented my going earlier.” His companion did not seem disposed to pilot the conversation, and he continued lamely, “Have you noticed, madam, that the English frigate *Collingwood* is anchored in the bay?”

“I saw it in the morning.” She turned to him with sudden hope. “Have they—the English—come to help California?”

“I am afraid, dear madam, that they came to capture California at the first whisper of war between Mexico and the United States; you know that England has always cast a covetous eye upon your fair land. It is said that the English admiral stormed about the deck in a mighty rage to-day when he saw the American flag flying on the fort.”

“All are alike!” she exclaimed bitterly, then controlled herself. “You—do you admeer our country, senor? Have you in America something more beautiful than Monterey?”

The officer looked about him enthusiastically, glad of a change of topic, for he suspected to whom he was talking. “Madam, I have never seen anything more perfect than this beautiful town of Monterey. What a situation! What exquisite proportions! That wide curve of snow-white sand about the dark blue bay is as exact a crescent as if cut with a knife. And that semicircle of hills behind the town, with its pine and brush forest tapering down to the crescent’s points! Nor could anything be more picturesque than this scattered little town with its bright red tiles above the white walls of the houses and the gray walls of the yards; its quaint church surrounded by the ruins of the old presidio; its beautiful, strangely dressed women and men who make this corner of the earth resemble the pages of some romantic old picture-book—”

“Ay!” she interrupted him. “Much better you feel proud that you conquer us; for surely, senor, California shall shine like a diamond in the very centre of America’s crown.” Then she held out her hand impulsively.

“Mucho gracias, senor—pardon—thank you very much. If you love my country, senor, you must be my friend and the friend of my daughter. I am the Senora Dona Eustaquia Carillo de Ortega, and my house is there on the hill—you can see the light, no? Always we shall be glad to see you.”

He doffed his cap again and bent over her hand.

“And I, John Brotherton, a humble captain in the United States navy, do sincerely thank the most famous woman of Monterey for her gracious hospitality. And if I abuse it, lay it to the enthusiasm of the American who is not the conqueror but the conquered.”

“That was very pretty—speech. When you abuse me I put you out the door. This is the house of Don Thomas Larkin, where is the ball. You come in, no? You like I take your arm? Very well”

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And so the articles of peace were signed.

V

“Yes, yes, indeed, Blandina,” exclaimed Benicia, “they had no chance at all last night, for we danced until dawn, and perhaps they were afraid of Don Thomas Larkin. But we shall talk and have music to-night, and those fine new tables that came on the last ship from Boston must not be destroyed.”

“Well, if you really think—” said Blandina, who always thought exactly as Benicia did. She opened a door and called:—

“Flujencio.”

“Well, my sister?”

A dreamy-looking young man in short jacket and trousers of red silk entered the room, sombrero in one hand, a cigarito in the other.

“Flujencio, you know it is said that these ‘Yankees’ always ‘whittle’ everything. We are afraid they will spoil the furniture to-night; so tell one of the servants to cut a hundred pine slugs, and you go down to the store and buy a box of penknives. Then they will have plenty to amuse themselves with and will not cut the furniture.”

“True! True! What a good idea! Was it Benicia’s?” He gave her a glance of languid adoration. “I will buy those knives at once, before I forget it,” and he tossed the sombrero on his curls and strode out of the house.

“How dost thou like the Senor Lieutenant Russell, Benicia?”

Benicia lifted her chin, but her cheeks became very pink.

“Well enough. But he is like all the Americans, very proud, and thinks too well of his hateful country. But I shall teach him how to flirt. He thinks he can, but he cannot.”

“Thou canst do it, Benicia—look! look!”

Lieutenant Russell and a brother officer were sauntering slowly by and looking straight through the grated window at the beautiful girls in their gayly flowered gowns. They saluted, and the girls bent their slender necks, but dared not speak, for Dona Francesca Hernandez was in the next room and the door was open. Immediately following the American officers came Don Fernando Altimira on horseback. He scowled as he saw the erect swinging figures of the conquerors, but Benicia kissed the tips of her fingers as he flung his sombrero to the ground, and he galloped, smiling, on his way.

That night the officers of the United States squadron met the society of Monterey at the house of Don Jorje Hernandez. After the contradanza, to which they could be admiring spectators only, much to the delight of the caballeros, Benicia took the guitar presented by Flujencio, and letting her head droop a little to one side like a lily bent on its stalk by the breeze, sang the most coquettish song she knew. Her mahogany brown hair hung unconfined over her white shoulders and gown of embroidered silk with its pointed waist and full skirt. Her large brown eyes were alternately mischievous and tender, now and again lighted by a sudden flash. Her cheeks were pink; her round babylike arms curved with all the grace of the Spanish woman. As she finished the song she dropped her eyelids for a moment, then raised them slowly and looked straight at Russell.

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“By Jove, Ned, you are a lucky dog!” said a brother officer. “She’s the prettiest girl in the room! Why don’t you fling your hat at her feet, as these ardent Californians do?”

[Illustration: “*Russell crossed the room and sat beside Benicia*.”]

“My cap is in the next room, but I will go over and fling myself there instead.”

Russell crossed the room and sat down beside Benicia.

“I should like to hear you sing under those cypresses out on the ocean about six or eight miles from here,” he said to her. “I rode down the coast yesterday. Jove! what a coast it is!”

“We will have a merienda there on some evening,” said Dona Eustaquia, who sat beside her daughter. “It is very beautiful on the big rocks to watch the ocean, under the moonlight.”

“A merienda?”

“A peek-neek.”

“Good! You will not forget that?”

She smiled at his boyishness. “It will be at the next moon. I promise.”

Benicia sang another song, and a half-dozen caballeros stood about her, regarding her with glances languid, passionate, sentimental, reproachful, determined, hopeless. Russell, leaning back in his chair, listened to the innocent thrilling voice of the girl, and watched her adorers, amused and stimulated. The Californian beauty was like no other woman he had known, and the victory would be as signal as the capture of Monterey. “More blood, perhaps,” he thought, “but a victory is a poor affair unless painted in red. It will do these seething caballeros good to learn that American blood is quite as swift as Californian.”

As the song finished, the musicians began a waltz; Russell took the guitar from Benicia’s hand and laid it on the floor.

“This waltz is mine, senorita,” he said.

“I no know—”

“Senorita!” said Don Fernando Altimira, passionately, “the first waltz is always mine. Thou wilt not give it to the American?”

“And the next is mine!”

“And the next contradanza!”

The girl’s faithful retinue protested for their rights. Russell could not understand, but he translated their glances, and bent his lips to Benicia’s ear. That ear was pink and her eyes were bright with roguish triumph.

“I want this dance, dear senorita. I may go away any day. Orders may come to-morrow which will send me where I never can see you again. You can dance with these men every night of the year—”

“I give to you,” said Benicia, rising hurriedly. “We must be hospitable to the stranger who comes to-day and leaves to-morrow,” she said in Spanish to the other men. “I have plenty more dances for you.”

After the dance, salads and cakes, claret and water, were brought to the women by Indian girls, who glided about the room with borrowed grace, their heads erect, the silver trays held well out. They wore bright red skirts and white smocks of fine embroidered linen, open at the throat, the sleeves very short. Their coarse hair hung in heavy braids; their bright little eyes twinkled in square faces scrubbed until they shone like copper.

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“Captain,” said Russell to Brotherton, as the men followed the host into the supper room, “let us buy a ranch, marry two of these stunning girls, and lie round in hammocks whilst these Western houris bring us aguardiente and soda. What an improvement on Byron and Tom Moore! It is all so unhackneyed and unexpected. In spite of Dana and Robinson I expected mud huts and whooping savages. This is Arcadia, and the women are the most elegant in America.”

“Look here, Ned,” said his captain, “you had better do less flirting and more thinking while you are in this odd country. Your talents will get rusty, but you can rub them up when you get home. Neither Californian men nor women are to be trifled with. This is the land of passion, not of drawing-room sentiment.”

“Perhaps I am more serious than you think. What is the matter?” He spoke to a brother officer who had joined them and was laughing immoderately.

“Do you see those Californians grinning over there?” The speaker beckoned to a group of officers, who joined him at once. “What job do you suppose they have put up on us? What do you suppose that mysterious table in the sala means, with its penknives and wooden sticks? I thought it was a charity bazaar. Well, it is nothing more nor less than a trick to keep us from whittling up the furniture. We are all Yankees to them, you know. Preserve my Spanish!”

The officers shouted with delight. They marched solemnly back into the sala, and seating themselves in a deep circle about the table, whittled the slugs all over the floor, much to the satisfaction of the Californians.

VI

After the entertainment was over, Russell strolled about the town. The new moon was on the sky, the stars thick and bright; but dark corners were everywhere, and he kept his hand on his pistol. He found himself before the long low house of Dona Eustaquia Ortega. Not a light glimmered; the shutters were of solid wood. He walked up and down, trying to guess which was Benicia’s room.

“I am growing as romantic as a Californian,” he thought; “but this wonderful country pours its colour all through one’s nature. If I could find her window, I believe I should serenade her in true Spanish fashion. By Jove, I remember now, she said something about looking through her window at the pines on the hill. It must be at the back of the house, and how am I going to get over that great adobe wall? That gate is probably fastened with an iron bar—ah!”

He had walked to the corner of the wall surrounding the large yard behind and at both sides of Dona Eustaquia’s house, and he saw, ascending a ladder, a tall figure, draped

in a serape, its face concealed by the shadow of a sombrero. He drew his pistol, then laughed at himself, although not without annoyance. “A rival; and he has got ahead of me. He is going to serenade her.”

The caballero seated himself uncomfortably on the tiles that roofed the wall, removed his sombrero, and Russell recognized Fernando Altimira. A moment later the sweet thin chords of the guitar quivered in the quiet air, and a tenor, so fine that even Russell stood entranced, sang to Benicia one of the old songs of Monterey:—

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EL SUSPIRO

Una mirada un suspiro,
Una lagrima querida,
Es balsamo a la herida
Que abriste en mi corazon.

Por esa lagrima cara
Objeto de mi termina,
Yo te ame bella criatura
Desde que te vi llorar.

Te acuerdas de aquella noche
En que triste y abatida
Una lagrima querida
Vi de tus ojos brotar.

Although Russell was at the base of the high wall he saw that a light flashed. The light was followed by the clapping of little hands. "Jove!" he thought, "am I really jealous? But damn that Californian!"

Altimira sang two more songs and was rewarded by the same demonstrations. As he descended the ladder and reached the open street he met Russell face to face. The two men regarded each other for a moment. The Californian's handsome face was distorted by a passionate scowl; Russell was calmer, but his brows were lowered.

Altimira flung the ladder to the ground, but fire-blooded as he was, the politeness of his race did not desert him, and his struggle with English flung oil upon his passion.

"Senor," he said, "I no know what you do it by the house of the Senorita Benicia so late in the night. I suppose you have the right to walk in the town si it please yourself."

"Have I not the same right as you—to serenade the Senorita Benicia? If I had known her room, I should have been on the wall before you."

Altimira's face flushed with triumph. "I think the Senorita Benicia no care for the English song, senor. She love the sweet words of her country: she no care for words of ice."

Russell smiled. "Our language may not be as elastic as yours, Don Fernando, but it is a good deal more sincere. And it can express as much and perhaps—"

"You love Benicia?" interrupted Altimira, fiercely.

“I admire the Senorita Ortega tremendously. But I have seen her twice only, and although we may love longer, we take more time to get there, perhaps, than you do.”

“Ay! Dios de mi vida! You have the heart of rock! You chip it off in little pieces, one to-day, another to-morrow, and give to the woman. I, senor, I love Benicia, and I marry her. You understand? Si you take her, I cut the heart from your body. You understand?”

“I understand. We understand each other.” Russell lifted his cap. The Californian took his sombrero from his head and made a long sweeping bow; and the two men parted.

VII

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On the twenty-third of July, Commodore Sloat transferred his authority to Commodore Stockton, and the new commander of the Pacific squadron organized the California Battalion of Mounted Riflemen, appointing Fremont major and Gillespie captain. He ordered them South at once to intercept Castro. On the twenty-eighth, Stockton issued a proclamation in which he asserted that Mexico was the instigator of the present difficulties, and justified the United States in seizing the Californias. He denounced Castro in violent terms as an usurper, a boasting and abusive chief, and accused him of having violated every principle of national hospitality and good faith toward Captain Fremont and his surveying party. Stockton sailed for the South the same day in the *Congress*, leaving a number of officers to Monterey and the indignation of the people.

“By Jove, I don’t dare to go near Dona Eustaquia,” said Russell to Brotherton. “And I’m afraid we won’t have our picnic. It seems to me the Commodore need not have used such strong language about California’s idol. The very people in the streets are ready to unlimb us; and as for the peppery Dona—”

“Speak more respectfully of Dona Eustaquia, young man,” said the older officer, severely. “She is a very remarkable woman and not to be spoken slightingly of by young men who are in love with her daughter.”

“God forbid that I should slight her, dear Captain. Never have I so respected a woman. She frightens the life out of me every time she flashes those eyes of hers. But let us go and face the enemy at once, like the brave Americans we are.”

“Very well.” And together they walked along Alvarado Street from the harbour, then up the hill to the house of Dona Eustaquia.

That formidable lady and her daughter were sitting on the corridor dressed in full white gowns, slowly wielding large black fans, for the night was hot. Benicia cast up her eyes expressively as she rose and courtesied to the officers, but her mother merely bent her head; nor did she extend her hand. Her face was very dark.

Brotherton went directly to the point.

“Dear Dona Eustaquia, we deeply regret that our Commodore has used such harsh language in regard to General Castro. But remember that he has been here a few days only and has had no chance to learn the many noble and valiant qualities of your General. He doubtless has been prejudiced against him by some enemy, and he adores Fremont:—there is the trouble. He resents Castro’s treating Fremont as an enemy before the United States had declared its intentions. But had he been correctly informed, he undoubtedly would have conceived the same admiration and respect for your brave General that is felt by every other man among us.”

Dona Eustaquia looked somewhat mollified, but shook her head sternly. “Much better he took the trouble to hear true. He insult all Californians by those shemful words. All the enemies of our dear General be glad. And the poor wife! Poor my Modeste! She fold the arms and raise the head, but the heart is broken.”

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“Jove! I almost wish they had driven us out! Dear senora—” Russell and Benicia were walking up and down the corridor—“we have become friends, true friends, as sometimes happens—not often—between man and woman. Cease to think of me as an officer of the United States navy, only as a man devoted to your service. I have already spent many pleasant hours with you. Let me hope that while I remain here neither Commodore Stockton nor party feeling will exclude me from many more.”

She raised her graceful hand to her chin with a gesture peculiar to her, and looked upward with a glance half sad, half bitter.

“I much appreciate your friendship, Capitan Brotherton. You give me much advice that is good for me, and tell me many things. It is like the ocean wind when you have live long in the hot valley. Yes, dear friend, I forget you are in the navy of the conqueror.”

“Mamacita,” broke in Benicia’s light voice, “tell us now when we can have the peek-neek.”

“To-morrow night.”

“Surely?”

“Surely, ninita.”

“Castro,” said Russell, lifting his cap, “peace be with thee.”

VIII

The great masses of rock on the ocean’s coast shone white in the moonlight. Through the gaunt outlying rocks, lashed apart by furious storms, boiled the ponderous breakers, tossing aloft the sparkling clouds of spray, breaking in the pools like a million silver fishes. High above the waves, growing out of the crevices of the massive rocks of the shore, were weird old cypresses, their bodies bent from the ocean as if petrified in flight before the mightier foe. On their gaunt outstretched arms and gray bodies, seamed with time, knobs like human muscles jutted; between the broken bark the red blood showed. From their angry hands, clutching at the air or doubled in imprecation, long strands of gray-green moss hung, waving and coiling, in the night wind. Only one old man was on his hands and knees as if to crawl from the field; but a comrade spurned him with his foot and wound his bony hand about the coward’s neck. Another had turned his head to the enemy, pointing his index finger in scorn, although he stood alone on high.

All along the cliffs ran the ghostly army, sometimes with straining arms fighting the air, sometimes thrust blankly outward, all with life quivering in their arrested bodies, silent and scornful in their defeat. Who shall say what winter winds first beat them, what great

waves first fought their deathless trunks, what young stars first shone over them? They have outstood centuries of raging storm and rending earthquake. Tradition says that until convulsion wrenched the Golden Gate apart the San Franciscan waters rolled through the long valleys and emptied into the Bay of Monterey. But the old cypresses were on the ocean just beyond; the incoming and the outgoing of the inland ocean could not trouble them; and perhaps they will stand there until the end of time.

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Down the long road by the ocean rode a gay cavalcade. The caballeros had haughtily refused to join the party, and the men wore the blue and gold of the United States.

But the women wore fluttering mantillas, and their prancing high-stepping horses were trapped with embossed leather and silver. In a lumbering "wagon of the country," drawn by oxen, running on solid wheels cut from the trunks of trees, but padded with silk, rode some of the older people of the town, disapproving, but overridden by the impatient enthusiasm of Dona Eustaquia. Through the pine woods with their softly moving shadows and splendid aisles, out between the cypresses and rocky beach, wound the stately cavalcade, their voices rising above the sociable converse of the seals and the screeching of the seagulls spiking the rocks where the waves fought and foamed. The gold on the shoulders of the men flashed in the moonlight; the jewels of the women sparkled and winked. Two by two they came like a conquering army to the rescue of the cypresses. Brotherton, who rode ahead with Dona Eustaquia, half expected to see the old trees rise upright with a deep shout of welcome.

When they reached a point where the sloping rocks rose high above surf and spray, they dismounted, leaving the Indian servants to tether the horses. They climbed down the big smooth rocks and sat about in groups, although never beyond the range of older eyes, the cypresses lowering above them, the ocean tearing through the outer rocks to swirl and grumble in the pools. The moon was so bright, its light so broad and silver, they almost could imagine they saw the gorgeous mass of colour in the pools below.

"You no have seaweed like that in Boston," said Benicia, who had a comprehensive way of symbolizing the world by the city from which she got many of her clothes and all of her books.

"Indeed, no!" said Russell. "The other day I sat for hours watching those great bunches and strands that look like richly coloured chenille. And there were stones that looked like big opals studded with vivid jewels. God of my soul, as you say, it was magnificent! I never saw such brilliant colour, such delicate tints! And those great rugged defiant rocks out there, lashed by the waves! Look at that one; misty with spray one minute, bare and black the next! They look like an old castle which has been battered down with cannon. Captain, do you not feel romantic?"

"I feel that I never want to go into an art gallery again. No wonder the women of California are original."

"Benicia," said Russell, "I have tried in vain to learn a Spanish song. But teach me a Spanish phrase of endearment. All our 'darlings' and 'dearests' are too flat for California."

"Bueno; I teach you. Say after me: Mi muy querida prima. That is very sweet. Say."

“Mi muy—”

“Querida prima.”

“Que—What is it in English?”

“My—very—darling—first. It no sound so pretty in English.”

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“It does very well. My—very—darling—first—if all these people were not about us, I should kiss you. You look exactly like a flower.”

“Si you did, Senor Impertinencio, you get that for thanks.”

Russell jumped to his feet with a shout, and shook from his neck a little crab with a back like green velvet and legs like carven garnet.

“Did you put that crab on my neck, senorita?”

“Si, senor.”

A sulky silence of ten minutes ensued, during which Benicia sent little stones skipping down into the silvered pools, and Russell, again recumbent, stared at the horizon.

“Si you no can talk,” she said finally, “I wish you go way and let Don Henry Tallant come talk to me. He look like he want.”

“No doubt he does; but he can stay where he is. Let me kiss your hand, Benicia, and I will forgive you.”

Benicia hit his mouth lightly with the back of her hand, but he captured it and kissed it several times.

“Your mustache feels like the cat’s,” said she.

He flung the hand from him, but laughed in a moment. “How sentimental you are! Making love to you is like dragging a cannon uphill! Will you not at least sing me a love-song? And please do not make faces in the tender parts.”

Benicia tossed her spirited head, but took her guitar from its case and called to the other girls to accompany her. They withdrew from their various flirtations with audible sighs, but it was Benicia’s merienda, and in a moment a dozen white hands were sweeping the long notes from the strings.

Russell moved to a lower rock, and lying at Benicia’s feet looked upward. The scene was all above him—the great mass of white rocks, whiter in the moonlight; the rigid cypresses aloft; the beautiful faces, dreamy, passionate, stolid, restless, looking from the lace mantillas; the graceful arms holding the guitars; the sweet rich voices threading through the roar of the ocean like the melody in a grand recitativo; the old men and women crouching like buzzards on the stones, their sharp eyes never closing; enfolding all with an almost palpable touch, the warm voluptuous air. Now and again a bird sang a few notes, a strange sound in the night, or the soft wind murmured like the ocean’s echo through the pines.

The song finished. “Benicia, I love you,” whispered Russell.

“We will now eat,” said Benicia. “Mamma,”—she raised her voice,—“shall I tell Raphael to bring down the supper?”

“Yes, nina.”

The girl sprang lightly up the rocks, followed by Russell. The Indian servants were some distance off, and as the young people ran through a pine grove the bold officer of the United States squadron captured the Californian and kissed her on the mouth. She boxed his ears and escaped to the light.

Benicia gave her orders, Raphael and the other Indians followed her with the baskets, and spread the supper of tomales and salads, dulces and wine, on a large table-like rock, just above the threatening spray; the girls sang each in turn, whilst the others nibbled the dainties Dona Eustaquia had provided, and the Americans wondered if it were not a vision that would disappear into the fog bearing down upon them.

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A great white bank, writhing and lifting, rolling and bending, came across the ocean slowly, with majestic stealth, hiding the swinging waves on which it rode so lightly, shrouding the rocks, enfolding the men and women, wreathing the cypresses, rushing onward to the pines.

“We must go,” said Dona Eustaquia, rising. “There is danger to stay. The lungs, the throat, my children. Look at the poor old cypresses.”

The fog was puffing through the gaunt arms, festooning the rigid hands. It hung over the green heads, it coiled about the gray trunks. The stern defeated trees looked like the phantoms of themselves, a long silent battalion of petrified ghosts. Even Benicia’s gay spirit was oppressed, and during the long ride homeward through the pine woods she had little to say to her equally silent companion.

IX

Dona Eustaquia seldom gave balls, but once a week she opened her salas to the more intellectual people of the town. A few Americans were ever attendant; General Vallejo often came from Sonoma to hear the latest American and Mexican news in her house; Castro rarely had been absent; Alvarado, in the days of his supremacy, could always be found there, and she was the first woman upon whom Pio Pico called when he deigned to visit Monterey. A few young people came to sit in a corner with Benicia, but they had little to say.

The night after the picnic some fifteen or twenty people were gathered about Dona Eustaquia in the large sala on the right of the hall; a few others were glancing over the Mexican papers in the little sala on the left. The room was ablaze with many candles standing, above the heads of the guests, in twisted silver candelabra, the white walls reflecting their light. The floor was bare, the furniture of stiff mahogany and horse-hair, but no visitor to that quaint ugly room ever thought of looking beyond the brilliant face of Dona Eustaquia, the lovely eyes of her daughter, the intelligence and animation of the people she gathered about her. As a rule Dona Modeste Castro’s proud head and strange beauty had been one of the living pictures of that historical sala, but she was not there to-night.

As Captain Brotherton and Lieutenant Russell entered, Dona Eustaquia was waging war against Mr. Larkin.

“And what hast thou to say to that proclamation of thy little American hero, thy Commodore”—she gave the word a satirical roll, impossible to transcribe—“who is heir to a conquest without blood, who struts into history as the Commander of the United States Squadron of the Pacific, holding a few hundred helpless Californians in subjection? O warlike name of Sloat! O heroic name of Stockton! O immortal Fremont,

prince of strategists and tacticians, your country must be proud of you! Your newspapers will glorify you! Sometime, perhaps, you will have a little history bound in red morocco all to yourselves; whilst

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Castro—" she sprang to her feet and brought her open palm down violently upon the table, "Castro, the real hero of this country, the great man ready to die a thousand deaths for the liberty of the Californians, a man who was made for great deeds and born for fame, he will be left to rust and rot because we have no newspapers to glorify him, and the Gringos send what they wish to their country! Oh, profanation! That a great man should be covered from sight by an army of red ants!"

"By Jove!" said Russell, "I wish I could understand her! Doesn't she look magnificent?"

Captain Brotherton made no reply. He was watching her closely, gathering the sense of her words, full of passionate admiration for the woman. Her tall majestic figure was quivering under the lash of her fiery temper, quick to spring and strike. The red satin of her gown and the diamonds on her finely moulded neck and in the dense coils of her hair grew dim before the angry brilliancy of her eyes.

The thin sensitive lips of Mr. Larkin curled with their accustomed humour, but he replied sincerely, "Yes, Castro is a hero, a great man on a small canvas—"

"And they are little men on a big canvas!" interrupted Dona Eustaquia.

Mr. Larkin laughed, but his reply was non-committal. "Remember, they have done all that they have been called upon to do, and they have done it well. Who can say that they would not be as heroic, if opportunity offered, as they have been prudent?"

Dona Eustaquia shrugged her shoulders disdainfully, but resumed her seat. "You will not say, but you know what chance they would have with Castro in a fair fight. But what chance has even a great man, when at the head of a few renegades, against the navy of a big nation? But Fremont! Is he to cast up his eyes and draw down his mouth to the world, whilst the man who acted for the safety of his country alone, who showed foresight and wisdom, is denounced as a violator of international courtesy?"

"No," said one of the American residents who stood near, "history will right all that. Some day the world will know who was the great and who the little man."

"Some day! When we are under our stones! This swaggering Commodore Stockton adores Fremont and hates Castro. His lying proclamation will be read in his own country—"

The door opened suddenly and Don Fernando Altimira entered the room. "Have you heard?" he cried. "All the South is in arms! The Departmental Assembly has called the whole country to war, and men are flocking to the standard! Castro has sworn that he will never give up the country under his charge. Now, Mother of God! let our men drive the usurper from the country."

Even Mr. Larkin sprang to his feet in excitement. He rapidly translated the news to Brotherton and Russell.

“Ah! There will be a little blood, then,” said the younger officer. “It was too easy a victory to count.”

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Every one in the room was talking at once. Dona Eustaquia smote her hands together, then clasped and raised them aloft.

“Thanks to God!” she cried. “California has come to her senses at last!”

Altimira bent his lips to her ear. “I go to fight the Americans,” he whispered.

She caught his hand between both her own and pressed it convulsively to her breast. “Go,” she said, “and may God and Mary protect thee. Go, my son, and when thou returnest I will give thee Benicia. Thou art a son after my heart, a brave man and a good Catholic.”

Benicia, standing near, heard the words. For the first time Russell saw the expression of careless audacity leave her face, her pink colour fade.

“What is that man saying to your mother?” he demanded.

“She promise me to him when he come back; he go to join General Castro.”

“Benicia!” He glanced about. Altimira had left the house. Every one was too excited to notice them. He drew her across the hall and into the little sala, deserted since the startling news had come. “Benicia,” he said hurriedly, “there is no time to be lost. You are such a butterfly I hardly know whether you love me or not.”

“I no am such butterfly as you think,” said the girl, pathetically. “I often am very gay, for that is my spirit, senor; but I cry sometimes in the night.”

“Well, you are not to cry any more, my very darling first!” He took her in his arms and kissed her, and she did not box his ears. “I may be ordered off at any moment, and what may they not do with you while I am gone? So I have a plan! Marry me to-morrow!”

“Ay! Senor!”

“To-morrow. At your friend Blandina’s house. The Hernandez like the Americans; in fact, as we all know, Tallant is in love with Blandina and the old people do not frown. They will let us marry there.”

“Ay! Cielo santo! What my mother say? She kill me!”

“She will forgive you, no matter how angry she may be at first. She loves you—almost as much as I do.”

The girl withdrew from his arms and walked up and down the room. Her face was very pale, and she looked older. On one side of the room hung a large black cross, heavily

mounted with gold. She leaned her face against it and burst into tears. “Ay, my home! My mother!” she cried under her breath. “How I can leave you? Ay, triste de mi!” She turned suddenly to Russell, whose face was as white as her own, and put to him the question which we have not yet answered. “What is this love?” she said rapidly. “I no can understand. I never feel before. Always I laugh when men say they love me; but I never laugh again. In my heart is something that shake me like a lion shake what it go to kill, and make me no care for my mother or my God—and you are a Protestant! I have love my mother like I have love that cross; and now a man come—a stranger! a conqueror! a Protestant! an American! And he twist my heart out with his hands! But I no can help. I love you and I go.”

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X

The next morning, Dona Eustaquia looked up from her desk as Benicia entered the room. “I am writing to Alvarado,” she said. “I hope to be the first to tell him the glorious news. Ay! my child, go to thy altar and pray that the bandoleros may be driven wriggling from the land like snakes out of a burning field!”

“But, mother, I thought you had learned to like the Gringos.”

“I like the Gringos well enough, but I hate their flag! Ay! I will pull it down with my own hands if Castro and Pico roll Stockton and Fremont in the dust!”

“I am sorry for that, my mother, for I am going to marry an American to-day.”

Her mother laughed and glanced over the closely written page.

“I am going to marry the Lieutenant Russell at Blandina’s house this morning.”

“Ay, run, run. I must finish my letter.”

Benicia left the sala and crossing her mother’s room entered her own. From the stout mahogany chest she took white silk stockings and satin slippers, and sitting down on the floor put them on. Then she opened the doors of her wardrobe and looked for some moments at the many pretty frocks hanging there. She selected one of fine white lawn, half covered with deshalados, and arrayed herself. She took from the drawer of the wardrobe a mantilla of white Spanish lace, and draped it about her head and shoulders, fastening it back above one ear with a pink rose. Around her throat she clasped a string of pearls, then stood quietly in the middle of the room and looked about her. In one corner was a little brass bedstead covered with a heavy quilt of satin and lace. The pillow-cases were almost as fine and elaborate as her gown. In the opposite corner was an altar with little gold candlesticks and an ivory crucifix. The walls and floor were bare but spotless. The ugly wardrobe built into the thick wall never had been empty: Dona Eustaquia’s generosity to the daughter she worshipped was unbounded.

Benicia drew a long hysterical breath and went over to the window. It looked upon a large yard enclosed by the high adobe wall upon which her lovers so often had sat and sung to her. No flowers were in the garden, not even a tree. It was as smooth and clean as the floor of a ballroom. About the well in the middle were three or four Indian servants quarrelling good-naturedly. The house stood on the rise of one of the crescent’s horns. Benicia looked up at the dark pine woods on the hill. What days she had spent there with her mother! She whirled about suddenly and taking a large fan from the table returned to the sala.

Dona Eustaquia laughed. “Thou silly child, to dress thyself like a bride. What nonsense is this?”

“I will be a bride in an hour, my mother.”

“Go! Go, with thy nonsense! I have spoiled thee! What other girl in Monterey would dare to dress herself like this at eleven in the morning? Go! And do not ruin that mantilla, for thou wilt not get another. Thou art going to Blandina’s, no? Be sure thou goest no farther! I would not let thee go there alone were it not so near. And be sure thou speakest to no man in the street.”

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“No, mamacita, I will speak to no man in the street, but one awaits me in the house. Hasta luego.” And she flitted out of the door and up the street.

XI

A few hours later Dona Eustaquia sat in the large and cooler sala with Captain Brotherton. He read Shakespeare to her whilst she fanned herself, her face aglow with intelligent pleasure. She had not broached to him the uprising in the South lest it should lead to bitter words. Although an American and a Protestant, few friends had ever stood so close to her.

He laid down the book as Russell and Benicia entered the room. Dona Eustaquia’s heavy brows met.

“Thou knowest that I do not allow thee to walk with on the street,” she said in Spanish.

“But, mamacita, he is my husband. We were married this morning at Blandina’s,” Excitement had tuned Benicia’s spirit to its accustomed pitch, and her eyes danced with mischief. Moreover, although she expected violent reproaches, she knew the tenacious strength of her mother’s affection, and had faith in speedy forgiveness.

Brotherton opened his eyes, but Dona Eustaquia moved back her head impatiently. “That silly joke!” Then she smiled at her own impatience. What was Benicia but a spoiled child, and spoiled children would disobey at times. “Welcome, my son,” she said to Russell, extending her hand. “We celebrate your marriage at the supper to-night, and the Captain helps us, no? my friend.”

“Let us have chicken with red pepper and tomato sauce,” cried Russell. “And rice with saffron; and that delightful dish with which I remonstrate all night—olives and cheese and hard-boiled eggs and red peppers all rolled up in corn-meal cakes.”

“Enchiladas? You have them! Now, both you go over to the corner and talk not loud, for I wish to hear my friend read.”

Russell, lifting his shoulders, did as he was bidden. Benicia, with a gay laugh, kissed her mother and flitted like a butterfly about the room, singing gay little snatches of song.

“Oh, mamacita, mamacita,” she chanted. “Thou wilt not believe thou hast lost thy little daughter. Thou wilt not believe thou hast a son. Thou wilt not believe I shall sleep no more in the little brass bed—”

“Benicia, hold thy saucy tongue! Sit down!” And this Benicia finally consented to do, although smothered laughter came now and again from the corner.

Dona Eustaquia sat easily against the straight back of her chair, looking very handsome and placid as Brotherton read and expounded “As You Like It” to her. Her gown of thin black silk threw out the fine gray tones of her skin; about her neck and chest was a heavy chain of Californian gold; her dense lustreless hair was held high with a shell comb banded with gold; superb jewels weighted her little white hands; in her small ears were large hoops of gold studded with black pearls. She was perfectly contented in that hour. Her woman’s vanity was at peace and her eager mind expanding.

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The party about the supper table in the evening was very gay. The long room was bare, but heavy silver was beyond the glass doors of the cupboard; a servant stood behind each chair; the wines were as fine as any in America, and the favourite dishes of the Americans had been prepared. Even Brotherton, although more nervous than was usual with him, caught the contagion of the hour and touched his glass more than once to that of the woman whose overwhelming personality had more than half captured a most indifferent heart.

After supper they sat on the corridor, and Benicia sang her mocking love-songs and danced El Son to the tinkling of her own guitar.

“Is she not a light-hearted child?” asked her mother. “But she has her serious moments, my friend. We have been like the sisters. Every path of the pine woods we walk together, arm in arm. We ride miles on the beach and sit down on the rocks for hours and try to think what the seals say one to the other. Before you come I have friends, but no other companion; but it is good for me you come, for she think only of flirting since the Americans take Monterey. Mira! Look at her flash the eyes at Senor Russell. It is well he has the light heart like herself.”

Brotherton made no reply.

“Give to me the guitar,” she continued.

Benicia handed her the instrument and Dona Eustaquia swept the chords absently for a moment then sang the song of the troubadour. Her rich voice was like the rush of the wind through the pines after the light trilling of a bird, and even Russell sat enraptured. As she sang the colour came into her face, alight with the fire of youth. Her low notes were voluptuous, her high notes rang with piercing sadness. As she finished, a storm of applause came from Alvarado Street, which pulsed with life but a few yards below them.

“No American woman ever sang like that,” said Brotherton. He rose and walked to the end of the corridor. “But it is a part of Monterey.”

“Most enchanting of mothers-in-law,” said Russell, “you have made it doubly hard for us to leave you; but it grows late and my wife and I must go. Good night,” and he raised her hand to his lips.

“Good night, my son.”

“Mamacita, good night,” and Benicia, who had fluttered into the house and found a reboso, kissed her mother, waved her hand to Brotherton, and stepped from the corridor to the street.

“Come here, senorita!” cried her mother. “No walk to-night, for I have not the wish to walk myself.”

“But I go with my husband, mamma.”

“Oh, no more of that joke without sense! Senor Russell, go home, that she have reason for one moment.”

“But, dear Dona Eustaquia, won’t you understand that we are really married?”

Dona Eustaquia’s patience was at an end. She turned to Brotherton and addressed a remark to him. Russell and Benicia conferred a moment, then the young man walked rapidly down the street.

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“Has he gone?” asked Dona Eustaquia. “Then let us go in the house, for the fog comes from the bay.”

They went into the little sala and sat about the table. Dona Eustaquia picked up a silver dagger she used as a paper cutter and tapped a book with it.

“Ay, this will not last long,” she said to Brotherton. “I much am afraid your Commodore send you to the South to fight with our men.”

“I shall return,” said Brotherton, absently. His eyes were fixed on the door.

“But it will not be long that you will be there, my friend. Many people are not killed in our wars. Once there was a great battle at Point Rincon, near Santa Barbara, between Castro and Carillo. Carillo have been appointed governor by Mejico, and Alvarado refuse to resign. They fight for three days, and Castro manage so well he lose only one man, and the others run away and not lose any.”

Brotherton laughed. “I hope all our battles may be as bloodless,” he said, and then drew a short breath.

Russell, accompanied by Don Jorje and Dona Francesca Hernandez and the priest of Monterey, entered the room.

Dona Eustaquia rose and greeted her guests with grace and hospitality.

“But I am glad to see you, my father, my friends. And you always are welcome, Senor Russell; but no more joke. Where is our Blandina? Sit down—Why, what is it?”

The priest spoke.

“I have that to tell you, Dona Eustaquia, which I fear will give you great displeasure. I hoped not to be the one to tell it. I was weak to consent, but these young people importuned me until I was weary. Dona Eustaquia, I married Benicia to the Senor Russell to-day.”

Dona Eustaquia’s head had moved forward mechanically, her eyes staring incredulously from the priest to the other members of the apprehensive group. Suddenly her apathy left her, her arm curved upward like the neck of a snake; but as she sprang upon Benicia her ferocity was that of a tiger.

“What!” she shrieked, shaking the girl violently by the shoulder. “What! ingrate! traitor! Thou hast married an American, a Protestant!”

Benicia burst into terrified sobs. Russell swung the girl from her mother’s grasp and placed his arm around her.

“She is mine now,” he said. “You must not touch her again.”

“Yours! Yours!” screamed Dona Eustaquia, beside herself. “Oh, Mother of God!” She snatched the dagger from the table and, springing backward, plunged it into the cross.

“By that sign I curse thee,” she cried. “Accursed be the man who has stolen my child! Accursed be the woman who has betrayed her mother and her country! God! God!—I implore thee, let her die in her happiest hour.”

XII

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On August twelfth Commodore Hull arrived on the frigate *Warren*, from Mazatlan, and brought the first positive intelligence of the declaration of war between Mexico and the United States. Before the middle of the month news came that Castro and Pico, after gallant defence, but overwhelmed by numbers, had fled, the one to Sonora, the other to Baja California. A few days after, Stockton issued a proclamation to the effect that the flag of the United States was flying over every town in the territory of California; and Alcalde Colton announced that the rancheros were more than satisfied with the change of government.

A month later a mounted courier dashed into Monterey with a note from the Alcalde of Los Angeles, wrapped about a cigarito and hidden in his hair. The note contained the information that all the South was in arms again, and that Los Angeles was in the hands of the Californians. Russell was ordered to go with Captain Mervine, on the *Savannah*, to join Gillespie at San Pedro; Brotherton was left at Monterey with Lieutenant Maddox and a number of men to quell a threatened uprising. Later came the news of Mervine's defeat and the night of Talbot from Santa Barbara; and by November California was in a state of general warfare, each army receiving new recruits every day.

Dona Eustaquia, hard and stern, praying for the triumph of her people, lived alone in the old house. Benicia, praying for the return of her husband and the relenting of her mother, lived alone in her little house on the hill. Friends had interceded, but Dona Eustaquia had closed her ears. Brotherton went to her one day with the news that Lieutenant Russell was wounded.

"I must tell Benicia," he said, "but it is you who should do that."

"She betray me, my friend."

"Oh, Eustaquia, make allowance for the lightness of youth. She barely realized what she did. But she loves him now, and suffers bitterly. She should be with you."

"Ay! She suffer for another! She love a strange man—an American—better than her mother! And it is I who would die for her! Ay, you cold Americans! Never you know how a mother can love her child."

"The Americans know how to love, senora. And Benicia was thoroughly spoiled by her devoted mother. She was carried away by her wild spirits, nothing more."

"Then much better she live on them now."

Dona Eustaquia sat with her profile against the light. It looked severe and a little older, but she was very handsome in her rich black gown and the gold chain about her strong throat. Her head, as usual, was held a little back. Brotherton sat down beside her and took her hand.

“Eustaquia,” he said, “no friendship between man and woman was ever deeper and stronger than ours. In spite of the anxiety and excitement of these last months we have found time to know each other very intimately. So you will forgive me if I tell you that the more a friend loves you the more he must be saddened by the terrible iron in your nature. Only the great strength of your passions has saved you from hardening into an ugly and repellent woman. You are a mother; forgive your child; remember that she, too, is about to be a mother—”

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She caught his hand between both of hers with a passionate gesture. “Oh, my friend,” she said, “do not too much reproach me! You never have a child, you cannot know! And remember we all are not make alike. If you are me, you act like myself. If I am you, I can forgive more easy. But I am Eustaquia Ortega, and as I am make, so I do feel now. No judge too hard, my friend, and—*infelez de mi!* do not forsake me.”

“I will never forsake you, Eustaquia.” He rose suddenly. “I, too, am a lonely man, if not a hard one, and I recognize that cry of the soul’s isolation.”

He left her and went up the hill to Benicia’s little house, half hidden by the cypress trees that grew before it.

She was sitting in her sala working an elaborate deshalados on a baby’s gown. Her face was pale, and the sparkle had gone out of it; but she held herself with all her mother’s pride, and her soft eyes were deeper. She rose as Captain Brotherton entered, and took his hand in both of hers. “You are so good to come to me, and I love you for your friendship for my mother. Tell me how she is.”

“She is well, Benicia.” Then he exclaimed suddenly: “Poor little girl! What a child you are—not yet seventeen.”

“In a few months, senor. Sit down. No? And I no am so young now. When we suffer we grow more than by the years; and now I go to have the baby, that make me feel very old.”

“But it is very sad to see you alone like this, without your husband or your mother. She will relent some day, Benicia, but I wish she would do it now, when you most need her.”

“Yes, I wish I am with her in the old house,” said the girl, pathetically, although she winked back the tears. “Never I can be happy without her, even si *he* is here, and you know how I love him. But I have love her so long; she is—how you say it?—like she is part of me, and when she no spik to me, how I can be happy with all myself when part is gone. You understand, senor?”

“Yes, Benicia, I understand.” He looked through the bending cypresses, down the hill, upon the fair town. He had no relish for the task which had brought him to her. She looked up and caught the expression of his face.

“Senor!” she cried sharply. “What you go to tell me?”

“There is a report that Ned is slightly wounded; but it is not serious. It was Altimira who did it, I believe.”

She shook from head to foot, but was calmer than he had expected. She laid the gown on a chair and stood up. “Take me to him. Si he is wound, I go to nurse him.”

“My child! You would die before you got there. I have sent a special courier to find out the truth. If Ned is wounded, I have arranged to have him sent home immediately.”

“I wait for the courier come back, for it no is right I hurt the baby si I can help. But si he is wound so bad he no can come, then I go to him. It no is use for you to talk at all, senor, I go.”

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Brotherton looked at her in wonderment. Whence had the butterfly gone? Its wings had been struck from it and a soul had flown in.

“Let me send Blandina to you,” he said. “You must not be alone.”

“I am alone till he or my mother come. I no want other. I love Blandina before, but now she make me feel tired. She talk so much and no say anything. I like better be alone.”

“Poor child!” said Brotherton, bitterly, “truly do love and suffering age and isolate.” He motioned with his hand to the altar in her bedroom, seen through the open door. “I have not your faith, I am afraid I have not much of any; but if I cannot pray for you, I can wish with all the strength of a man’s heart that happiness will come to you yet, Benicia.”

She shook her head. “I no know; I no believe much happiness come in this life. Before, I am like a fairy; but it is only because I no am *un*happy. But when the heart have wake up, senor, and the knife have gone in hard, then, after that, always, I think, we are a little sad.”

XIII

General Kearney and Lieutenant Beale walked rapidly up and down before the tents of the wretched remnant of United States troops with which the former had arrived overland in California. It was bitterly cold in spite of the fine drizzling rain. Lonely buttes studded the desert, whose palms and cacti seemed to spring from the rocks; high on one of them was the American camp. On the other side of a river flowing at the foot of the butte, the white tents of the Californians were scattered among the dark huts of the little pueblo of San Pasqual.

“Let me implore you, General,” said Beale, “not to think of meeting Andres Pico. Why, your men are half starved; your few horses are broken-winded; your mules are no match for the fresh trained mustangs of the enemy. I am afraid you do not appreciate the Californians. They are numerous, brave, and desperate. If you avoid them now, as Commodore Stockton wishes, and join him at San Diego, we stand a fair chance of defeating them. But now Pico’s cavalry and foot are fresh and enthusiastic—in painful contrast to yours. And, moreover, they know every inch of the ground.”

Kearney impatiently knocked the ashes out of his pipe. He had little regard for Stockton, and no intention of being dictated to by a truculent young lieutenant who spoke his mind upon all occasions.

“I shall attack them at daybreak,” he said curtly. “I have one hundred and thirty good men; and has not Captain Gillespie joined me with his battalion? Never shall it be said that I turned aside to avoid a handful of boasting Californians. Now go and get an hour’s sleep before we start.”

The young officer shrugged his shoulders, saluted, and walked down the line of tents. A man emerged from one of them, and he recognized Russell.

“Hello, Ned,” he said. “How’s the arm?”

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“’Twas only a scratch. Is Altimira down there with Pico, do you know? He is a brave fellow! I respect that man; but we have an account to settle, and I hope it will be done on the battle-field.”

“He is with Pico, and he has done some good fighting. Most of the Californians have. They know how to fight and they are perfectly fearless. Kearney will find it out to-morrow. He is mad to attack them. Why, his men are actually cadaverous. Bueno! as they say here; Stockton sent me to guide him to San Diego. If he prefers to go through the enemy’s lines, there is nothing for me to do but take him.”

“Yes, but we may surprise them. I wish to God this imitation war were over!”

“It will be real enough before you get through. Don’t worry. Well, good night. Luck to your skin.”

At daybreak the little army marched down the butte, shivering with cold, wet to the skin. Those on horseback naturally proceeded more rapidly than those mounted upon the clumsy stubborn mules; and Captain Johnson, who led the advance guard of twelve dragoons, found himself, when he came in sight of the enemy’s camp, some distance ahead of the main body of Kearney’s small army. To his surprise he saw that the Californians were not only awake, but horsed and apparently awaiting him. Whether he was fired by valour or desperation at the sight is a disputed point; but he made a sudden dash down the hill and across the river, almost flinging himself upon the lances of the Californians.

Captain Moore, who was ambling down the hill on an old white horse at the head of fifty dragoons mounted on mules, spurred his beast as he witnessed the foolish charge of the advance, and arrived upon the field in time to see Johnson fall dead and to take his place. Pico, seeing that reenforcements were coming, began to retreat, followed hotly by Moore and the horsed dragoons. Suddenly, however, Fernando Altimira raised himself in his stirrups, looked back, laughed and galloped across the field to General Pico.

“Look!” he said. “Only a few men on horses are after us. The mules are stumbling half a mile behind.”

Pico wheeled about, gave the word of command, and bore down upon the Americans. Then followed a hand-to-hand conflict, the Californians lancing and using their pistols with great dexterity, the Americans doing the best they could with their rusty sabres and clubbed guns.

They were soon reenforced by Moore’s dragoons and Gillespie’s battalion, despite the unwilling mules; but the brutes kicked and bucked at every pistol shot and fresh cloud of smoke. The poor old horses wheezed and panted, but stood their ground when not

flung out of position by the frantic mules. The officers and soldiers of the United States army were a sorry sight, and in pointed contrast to the graceful Californians on their groomed steeds, handsomely trapped, curvetting and rearing and prancing as lightly as if on the floor of a circus. Kearney cursed his

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own stupidity, and Pico laughed in his face. Beale felt satisfaction and compunction in saturating the silk and silver of one fine saddle with the blood of its owner. The point of the dying man's lance pierced his face, but he noted the bleaching of Kearney's, as one dragoon after another was flung upon the sharp rocks over which his bewildered brute stumbled, or was caught and held aloft in the torturing arms of the cacti.

On the edge of the battle two men had forgotten the Aztec Eagle and the Stars and Stripes; they fought for love of a woman. Neither had had time to draw his pistol; they fought with lance and sabre, thrusting and parrying. Both were skilful swordsmen, but Altimira's horse was far superior to Russell's, and he had the advantage of weapons.

"One or the other die on the rocks," said the Californian, "and si I kill you, I marry Benicia."

Russell made no reply. He struck aside the man's lance and wounded his wrist. But Altimira was too excited to feel pain. His face was quivering with passion.

It is not easy to parry a lance with a sabre, and still more difficult to get close enough to wound the man who wields it. Russell rose suddenly in his stirrups, described a rapid half-circle with his weapon, brought it down midway upon the longer blade, and snapped the latter in two. Altimira gave a cry of rage, and spurring his horse sought to ride his opponent down; but Russell wheeled, and the two men simultaneously snatched their pistols from the holsters. Altimira fired first, but his hand was unsteady and his ball went through a cactus. Russell raised his pistol with firm wrist, and discharged it full in the face of the Californian.

Then he looked over the field. Moore, fatally lanced, lay under a palm, and many of his men were about him. Gillespie was wounded, Kearney had received an ugly thrust. The Californians, upon the arrival of the main body of the enemy's troops, had retreated unpursued; the mules attached to one of the American howitzers were scampering over to the opposite ranks, much to the consternation of Kearney. The sun, looking over the mountain, dissipated the gray smoke, and cast a theatrical light on the faces of the dead. Russell bent over Altimira. His head was shattered, but his death was avenged. Never had an American troop suffered a more humiliating defeat. Only six Californians lay on the field; and when the American surgeon, after attending to his own wounded, offered his services to Pico's, that indomitable general haughtily replied that he had none.

"By Jove!" said Russell to Beale that night, "you know your Californians! I am prouder than ever of having married one! That army is of the stuff of which my mother-in-law is made!"

XIV

That was a gay Christmas at Monterey, despite the barricades in the street. News had come of the defeat of Kearney at San Pasqual, and the Monterenos, inflated with hope and pride, gave little thought to the fact that his forces were now joined with Stockton's at San Diego.

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On Christmas eve light streamed from every window, bonfires flared on the hills; the streets were illuminated, and every one was abroad. The clear warm night was ablaze with fireworks; men and women were in their gala gowns; rockets shot upward amidst shrieks of delight which mingled oddly with the rolling of drums at muster; even the children caught the enthusiasm, religious and patriotic.

“I suppose you would be glad to see even your friends driven out,” said Brotherton to Dona Eustaquia, as they walked through the brilliant town toward the church: bells called them to witness the dramatic play of “The Shepherds.”

“I be glad to see the impertinent flag come down,” said she, frankly; “but you can make resignation from the army, and have a little store on Alvarado Street. You can have beautiful silks and crepes from America. I buy of you.”

“Thanks,” he said grimly. “You would put a dunce cap on poor America, and stand her in a corner. If I resign, Dona Eustaquia, it will be to become a ranchero, not a shopkeeper. To tell the truth, I have little desire to leave California again.”

“But you were make for the fight,” she said, looking up with some pride at the tall military figure, the erect head and strong features. “You not were make to lie in the hammock and horseback all day.”

“But I should do a good deal else, senora. I should raise cattle with some method; and I should have a library—and a wife.”

“Ah! you go to marry?”

“Some day, I hope. It would be lonely to be a ranchero without a wife.”

“Truly.”

“What is the matter with those women?”

A group of old women stood by the roadside. Their forms were bent, their brown faces gnarled like apples. Some were a shapeless mass of fat, others were parchment and bone; about the head and shoulders of each was a thick black shawl. Near them stood a number of young girls clad in muslin petticoats, flowered with purple and scarlet. Bright satin shoes were on their feet, cotton rebosas covered their pretty, pert little heads. All were looking in one direction, whispering and crossing themselves.

Dona Eustaquia glanced over her shoulder, then leaned heavily on Brotherton’s arm.

“It is Benicia,” she said. “It is because she was cursed and is with child that they cross themselves.”

Brotherton held her arm closely and laid his hand on hers, but he spoke sternly.

“The curse is not likely to do her any harm. You prayed that she should die when happiest, and you have done your best to make her wretched.”

She did not reply, and they walked slowly onward. Benicia followed, leaning on the arm of an Indian servant. Her friends avoided her, for they bitterly resented Altimira’s death. But she gave them little regret. Since her husband could not be with her on this Christmas eve, she wished only for reconciliation with her mother. In spite of the crowd she followed close behind Dona Eustaquia and Brotherton, holding her head proudly, but ready to fall at the feet of the woman she worshipped.

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“My friend,” said Dona Eustaquia, after a moment, “perhaps it is best that I do not forgive her. Were she happy, then might the curse come true.”

“She has enough else to make her unhappy. Besides, who ever heard of a curse coming true? It has worked its will already for the matter of that. You kept your child from happiness with her husband during the brief time she had him. The bitterness of death is a small matter beside the bitterness of life. You should be satisfied.”

“You are hard, my friend.”

“I see your other faults only to respect and love them.”

“Does she look ill, Captain?”

“She cannot be expected to look like the old Benicia. Of course she looks ill, and needs care.”

“Look over the shoulder. Does she walk heavily?”

“Very. But as haughtily as do you.”

“Talk of other things for a little while, my friend.”

“Truly there is much to claim the interest to-night. This may be an old scene to you, but it is novel and fascinating to me. How lovely are those stately girls, half hidden by their rebosas, telling their beads as they hurry along. It is the very coquetry of religion. And those—But here we are.”

The church was handsomer without than within, for the clever old padres that built it had more taste than their successors. About the whitewashed walls of the interior were poor copies of celebrated paintings—the Passion of Christ, and an extraordinary group of nude women and grinning men representing the temptation of St. Anthony. In a glass case a beautiful figure of the Saviour reclined on a stiff couch clumsily covered with costly stuffs. The Virgin was dressed much like the aristocratic ladies of Monterey, and the altar was a rainbow of tawdry colours.

But the ceremonies were interesting, and Brotherton forgot Benicia for the hour. After the mass the priest held out a small waxen image of the infant Jesus, and all approached and kissed it. Then from without came the sound of a guitar; the worshippers arose and ranged themselves against the wall; six girls dressed as shepherdesses; a man representing Lucifer; two others, a hermit and the lazy vagabond Bartola; a boy, the archangel Gabriel, entered the church. They bore banners and marched to the centre of the building, then acted their drama with religious fervour.

The play began with the announcement by Gabriel of the birth of the Saviour, and exhortations to repair to the manger. On the road came the temptation of Lucifer; the archangel appeared once more; a violent altercation ensued in which all took part, and finally the prince of darkness was routed. Songs and fanciful by-play, brief sermons, music, gay and solemn, diversified the strange performance. When all was over, the players were followed by an admiring crowd to the entertainment awaiting them.

“Is it not beautiful—our Los Pastores?” demanded Dona Eustaquia, looking up at Brotherton, her fine face aglow with enthusiasm. “Do not you feel the desire to be a Catholic, my friend?”

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“Rather would I see two good Catholics united, dear senora,” and he turned suddenly to Benicia, who also had remained in the church, almost at her mother’s side.

“Mamacita!” cried Benicia.

Dona Eustaquia opened her arms and caught the girl passionately to her heart; and Brotherton left the church.

XV

The April flowers were on the hills. Beds of gold-red poppies and silver-blue baby eyes were set like tiles amidst the dense green undergrowth beneath the pines, and on the natural lawns about the white houses. Although hope of driving forth the intruder had gone forever in January, Monterey had resumed in part her old gayety; despair had bred philosophy. But Monterey was Monterey no longer. An American alcalde with a power vested in no judge of the United States ruled over her; to add injury to insult, he had started a newspaper. The town was full of Americans; the United States was constructing a fort on the hill; above all, worse than all, the Californians were learning the value of money. Their sun was sloping to the west.

A thick India shawl hung over the window of Benicia’s old room in her mother’s house, shutting out the perfume of the hills. A carpet had been thrown on the floor, candles burned in the pretty gold candlesticks that had stood on the altar since Benicia’s childhood. On the little brass bedstead lay Benicia, very pale and very pretty, her transparent skin faintly reflecting the pink of the satin coverlet. By the bed sat an old woman of the people. Her ragged white locks were bound about by a fillet of black silk; her face, dark as burnt umber, was seamed and lined like a withered prune; even her long broad nose was wrinkled; her dull eyes looked like mud-puddles; her big underlip was pursed up as if she had been speaking mincing words, and her chin was covered with a short white stubble. Over her coarse smock and gown she wore a black cotton reboso. In her arms she held an infant, muffled in a white lace mantilla.

Dona Eustaquia came in and bent over the baby, her strong face alight with joy.

“Didst thou ever nurse so beautiful a baby?” she demanded.

The old woman grunted; she had heard that question before.

“See how pink and smooth it is—not red and wrinkled like other babies! How becoming is that mantilla! No, she shall not be wrapped in blankets, cap, and shawls.”

“She catch cold, most likely,” grunted the nurse.

“In this weather? No; it is soft as midsummer. I cannot get cool. Ay, she looks like a rosebud lying in a fog-bank!” She touched the baby’s cheek with her finger, then sat on the bed, beside her daughter. “And how dost thou feel, my little one? Thou wert a baby thyself but yesterday, and thou art not much more to-day.”

“I feel perfectly well, my mother, and—ay, Dios, so happy! Where is Edourdo?”

“Of course! Always the husband! They are all alike! Hast thou not thy mother and thy baby?”

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“I adore you both, mamacita, but I want Edourdo. Where is he?”

Her mother grimaced. “I suppose it is no use to protest. Well, my little one, I think he is at this moment on the hill with Lieutenant Ord.”

“Why did he not come to see me before he went out?”

“He did, my daughter, but thou wert asleep. He kissed thee and stole away.”

“Where?”

“Right there on your cheek, one inch below your eyelashes.”

“When will he return?”

“Holy Mary! For dinner, surely, and that will be in an hour.”

“When can I get up?”

“In another week. Thou art so well! I would not have thee draw too heavily on thy little strength. Another month and thou wilt not remember that thou hast been ill. Then we will go to the rancho, where thou and thy little one will have sun all day and no fog.”

“Have I not a good husband, mamacita?”

“Yes; I love him like my own son. Had he been unkind to thee, I should have killed him with my own hands; but as he has his lips to thy little slipper, I forgive him for being an American.”

“And you no longer wish for a necklace of American ears! Oh, mamma!”

Dona Eustaquia frowned, then sighed. “I do not know the American head for which I have not more like than hate, and they are welcome to their ears; but *the spirit* of that wish is in my heart yet, my child. Our country has been taken from us; we are aliens in our own land; it is the American’s. They—holy God!—permit us to live here!”

“But they like us better than their own women.”

“Perhaps; they are men and like what they have not had too long.”

“Mamacita, I am thirsty.”

“What wilt thou have? A glass of water?”

“Water has no taste.”

“I know!”

Dona Eustaquia left the room and returned with an orange. “This will be cool and pleasant on so warm a day. It is just a little sour,” she said; but the nurse raised her bony hand.

“Do not give her that,” she said in her harsh voice. “It is too soon.”

“Nonsense! The baby is two weeks old. Why, I ate fruit a week after childing. Look how dry her mouth is! It will do her good.”

She pared the orange and gave it to Benicia, who ate it gratefully.

“It is very good, mamita. You will spoil me always, but that is because you are so good. And one day I hope you will be as happy as your little daughter; for there are other good Americans in the world. No? mamma. I think—Mamacita!”

She sprang upward with a loud cry, the body curving rigidly; her soft brown eyes stared horribly; froth gathered about her mouth; she gasped once or twice, her body writhing from the agonized arms that strove to hold it, then fell limply down, her features relaxing.

“She is dead,” said the nurse.

“Benicia!” whispered Dona Eustaquia. “Benicia!”

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“You have killed her,” said the old woman, as she drew the mantilla about the baby’s face.

Dona Eustaquia dropped the body and moved backward from the bed. She put out her hands and went gropingly from the room to her own, and from thence to the sala. Brotherton came forward to meet her.

“Eustaquia!” he cried. “My friend! *My dear*! What has happened? What—”

She raised her hand and pointed to the cross. The mark of the dagger was still there.

“Benicia!” she uttered. “The curse!” and then she fell at his feet.

THE WASH-TUB MAIL

PART I

“Mariquita! Thou good-for-nothing, thou art wringing that smock in pieces! Thy senora will beat thee! Holy heaven, but it is hot!”

“For that reason I hurry, old Faquita. Were I as slow as thou, I should cook in my own tallow.”

“Aha, thou art very clever! But I have no wish to go back to the rancho and wash for the cooks. Ay, yi! I wonder will La Tulita ever give me her bridal clothes to wash. I have no faith that little flirt will marry the Senor Don Ramon Garcia. He did not well to leave Monterey until after the wedding. And to think—Ay! yi!”

“Thou hast a big letter for the wash-tub mail, Faquita.”

“Aha, my Francesca, thou hast interest! I thought thou wast thinking only of the bandits.”

Francesca, who was holding a plunging child between her knees, actively inspecting its head, grunted but did not look up, and the oracle of the wash-tubs, provokingly, with slow movements of her knotted coffee-coloured arms, flapped a dainty skirt, half-covered with drawn work, before she condescended to speak further.

Twenty women or more, young and old, dark as pine cones, stooped or sat, knelt or stood, about deep stone tubs sunken in the ground at the foot of a hill on the outskirts of Monterey. The pines cast heavy shadows on the long slope above them, but the sun was overhead. The little white town looked lifeless under its baking red tiles, at this hour of siesta. On the blue bay rode a warship flying the American colours. The

atmosphere was so clear, the view so uninterrupted, that the younger women fancied they could read the name on the prow: the town was on the right; between the bay and the tubs lay only the meadow, the road, the lake, and the marsh. A few yards farther down the road rose a hill where white slabs and crosses gleamed beneath the trees. The roar of the surf came refreshingly to their hot ears. It leaped angrily, they fancied, to the old fort on the hill where men in the uniform of the United States moved about with unsleeping vigilance. It was the year 1847. The Americans had come and conquered. War was over, but the invaders guarded their new possessions.

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The women about the tubs still bitterly protested against the downfall of California, still took an absorbing interest in all matters, domestic, social, and political. For those old women with grizzled locks escaping from a cotton handkerchief wound bandwise about their heads, their ample forms untrammelled by the flowing garment of calico, those girls in bright skirts and white short-sleeved smock and young hair braided, knew all the news of the country, past and to come, many hours in advance of the dons and donas whose linen they washed in the great stone tubs: the Indians, domestic and roving, were their faithful friends.

“Sainted Mary, but thou art more slow than a gentleman that walks!” cried Mariquita, an impatient-looking girl. “Read us the letter. La Tulita is the prettiest girl in Monterey now that the Senorita Ysabel Herrera lies beneath the rocks, and Benicia Ortega has died of her childing. But she is a flirt—that Tulita! Four of the Gringos are under her little slipper this year, and she turn over the face and roll in the dirt. But Don Ramon, so handsome, so rich—surely she will marry him.”

Faquita shook her head slowly and wisely. “There—come —yesterday—from—the—& shy;South—a—young—lieutenant—of—America.” She paused a moment, then proceeded leisurely, though less provokingly. “He come over the great American deserts with General Kearney last year and help our men to eat the dust in San Diego. He come only yesterday to Monterey, and La Tulita is like a little wild-cat ever since. She box my ears this morning when I tell her that the Americans are bandoleros, and say she never marry a Californian. And never Don Ramon Garcia, ay, yi!”

By this time the fine linen was floating at will upon the water, or lying in great heaps at the bottom of the clear pools. The suffering child scampered up through the pines with whoops of delight. The washing-women were pressed close about Faquita, who stood with thumbs on her broad hips, the fingers contracting and snapping as she spoke, wisps of hair bobbing back and forth about her shrewd black eyes and scolding mouth.

“Who is he? Where she meet him?” cried the audience. “Oh, thou old carreta! Why canst thou not talk faster?”

“If thou hast not more respect, Senorita Mariquita, thou wilt hear nothing. But it is this. There is a ball last night at Dona Maria Ampudia’s house for La Tulita. She look handsome, that witch! Holy Mary! When she walk it was like the tule in the river. You know. Why she have that name? She wear white, of course, but that frock—it is like the cobweb, the cloud. She has not the braids like the other girls, but the hair, soft like black feathers, fall down to the feet. And the eyes like blue stars! You know the eyes of La Tulita. The lashes so long, and black like the hair. And the sparkle! No eyes ever sparkle like those. The eyes of Ysabel Herrera look like they want the world and never can get it. Benicia’s, pobrecita, just dance like the child’s. But La Tulita’s! They sparkle like the devil sit behind and strike fire out red-hot iron—”

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“Mother of God!” cried Mariquita, impatiently, “we all know thou art daft about that witch! And we know how she looks. Tell us the story.”

“Hush thy voice or thou wilt hear nothing. It is this way. La Tulita have the castanets and just float up and down the sala, while all stand back and no breathe only when they shout. I am in the garden in the middle the house, and I stand on a box and look through the doors. Ay, the roses and the nasturtiums smell so sweet in that little garden! Well! She dance so beautiful, I think the roof go to jump off so she can float up and live on one the gold stars all by herself. Her little feet just twinkle! Well! The door open and Lieutenant Ord come in. He have with him another young man, not so handsome, but so straight, so sharp eye and tight mouth. He look at La Tulita like he think she belong to America and is for him. Lieutenant Ord go up to Dona Maria and say, so polite: ’I take the liberty to bring Lieutenant’—I no can remember that name, so American! ’He come to-day from San Diego and will stay with us for a while.’ And Dona Maria, she smile and say, very sweet, ’Very glad when I have met all of our conquerors.’ And he turn red and speak very bad Spanish and look, look, at La Tulita. Then Lieutenant Ord speak to him in English and he nod the head, and Lieutenant Ord tell Dona Maria that his friend like be introduced to La Tulita, and she say, ’Very well,’ and take him over to her who is now sit down. He ask her to waltz right away, and he waltz very well, and then they dance again, and once more. And then they sit down and talk, talk. God of my soul, but the caballeros are mad! And Dona Maria! By and by she can stand it no more and she go up to La Tulita and take away from the American and say, ’Do you forget—and for a bandolero—that you are engage to my nephew?’ And La Tulita toss the head and say: ’How can I remember Ramon Garcia when he is in Yerba Buena? I forget he is alive.’ And Dona Maria is very angry. The eyes snap. But just then the little sister of La Tulita run into the sala, the face red like the American flag. ‘Ay, Herminia!’ she just gasp. ‘The donas! The donas! It has come!’”

“The donas!” cried the washing-women, old and young. “Didst thou see it, Faquita? Oh, surely. Tell us, what did he send? Is he a generous bridegroom? Were there jewels? And satins? Of what was the rosary?”

“Hush the voice or you will hear nothing. The girls all jump and clap their hands and they cry: ’Come, Herminia. Come quick! Let us go and see.’ Only La Tulita hold the head very high and look like the donas is nothing to her, and the Lieutenant look very surprise, and she talk to him very fast like she no want him to know what they mean. But the girls just take her hands and pull her out the house. I am after. La Tulita look very mad, but she cannot help, and in five minutes we are at the Casa Rivera, and the girls scream and clap the hands in the sala for Dona Carmen she have unpack the donas and the beautiful things are on the tables and the sofas and the chairs, Mother of God!”

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“Go on! Go on!” cried a dozen exasperated voices.

“Well! Such a donas. Ay, he is a generous lover. A yellow crepe shawl embroidered with red roses. A white one with embroidery so thick it can stand up. A string of pearls from Baja California. (Ay, poor Ysabel Herrera!) Hoops of gold for the little ears of La Tulita. A big chain of California gold. A set of topaz with pearls all round. A rosary of amethyst—purple like the violets. A big pin painted with the Ascension, and diamonds all round. Silks and satins for gowns. A white lace mantilla, Dios de mi alma! A black one for the visits. And the night-gowns like cobwebs. The petticoats!” She stopped abruptly.

“And the smocks?” cried her listeners, excitedly. “The smocks? They are more beautiful than Blandina’s? They were pack in rose-leaves—”

“Ay! yi! yi! yi!” The old woman dropped her head on her breast and waved her arms. She was a study for despair. Even she did not suspect how thoroughly she was enjoying herself.

“What! What! Tell us! Quick, thou old snail. They were not fine? They had not embroidery?”

“Hush the voices. I tell you when I am ready. The girls are like crazy. They look like they go to eat the things. Only La Tulita sit on the chair in the door with her back to all and look at the windows of Dona Maria. They look like a long row of suns, those windows.

“I am the one. Suddenly I say: ‘Where are the smocks?’ And they all cry: ’Yes, where are the smocks? Let us see if he will be a good husband. Dona Carmen, where are the smocks?’

“Dona Carmen turn over everything in a hurry. ’I did not think of the smocks,’ she say. ’But they must be here. Everything was unpack in this room.’ She lift all up, piece by piece. The girls help and so do I. La Tulita sit still but begin to look more interested. We search everywhere—everywhere—for twenty minutes. There—are—no—smocks!”

“God of my life! The smocks! He did not forget!”

“He forget the smocks!”

There was an impressive pause. The women were too dumfounded to comment. Never in the history of Monterey had such a thing happened before.

Faquita continued: “The girls sit down on the floor and cry. Dona Carmen turn very white and go in the other room. Then La Tulita jump up and walk across the room. The lashes fall down over the eyes that look like she is California and have conquer

America, not the other way. The nostrils just jump. She laugh, laugh, laugh. ‘So!’ she say, ’my rich and generous and ardent bridegroom, he forget the smocks of the donas. He proclaim as if by a poster on the streets that he will be a bad husband, a thoughtless, careless, indifferent husband. He has vow by the stars that he adore me. He has serenade beneath my window until I have beg for mercy. He persecute my mother. And now he flings the insult of insults in my teeth. And he with six married sisters!’

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“The girls just sob. They can say nothing. No woman forgive that. Then she say loud, ‘Ana,’ and the girl run in. ‘Ana,’ she say, ’pack this stuff and tell Jose and Marcos take it up to the house of the Senor Don Ramon Garcia. I have no use for it.’ Then she say to me: ’Faquita, walk back to Dona Maria’s with me, no? I have engagement with the American.’ And I go with her, of course; I think I go jump in the bay if she tell me; and she dance all night with that American. He no look at another girl—all have the eyes so red, anyhow. And Dona Maria is crazy that her nephew do such a thing, and La Tulita no go to marry him now. Ay, that witch! She have the excuse and she take it.”

For a few moments the din was so great that the crows in a neighbouring grove of willows sped away in fear. The women talked all at once, at the top of their voices and with no falling inflections. So rich an assortment of expletives, secular and religious, such individuality yet sympathy of comment, had not been called upon for duty since the seventh of July, a year before, when Commodore Sloat had run up the American flag on the Custom-house. Finally they paused to recover breath. Mariquita’s young lungs being the first to refill, she demanded of Faquita:—

“And Don Ramon—when does he return?”

“In two weeks, no sooner.”

PART II

Two weeks later they were again gathered about the tubs.

For a time after arrival they forgot La Tulita—now the absorbing topic of Monterey—in a new sensation. Mariquita had appeared with a basket of unmistakable American underwear.

“What!” cried Faquita, shrilly. “Thou wilt defile these tubs with the linen of bandoleros? Hast thou had thy silly head turned with a kiss? Not one shirt shall go in this water.”

Mariquita tossed her head defiantly. “Captain Brotherton say the Indian women break his clothes in pieces. They know not how to wash anything but dish-rags. And does he not go to marry our Dona Eustaquia?”

“The Captain is not so bad,” admitted Faquita. The indignation of the others also visibly diminished: the Captain had been very kind the year before when gloom lay heavy on the town. “But,” continued the autocrat, with an ominous pressing of her lips, “sure he must change three times a day. Is all that Captain Brotherton’s?”

“He wear many shirts,” began Mariquita, when Faquita pounced upon the basket and shook its contents to the grass.

“Aha! It seems that the Captain has sometimes the short legs and sometimes the long. Sometimes he put the tucks in his arms, I suppose. What meaning has this? Thou monster of hypocrisy!”

The old women scowled and snorted. The girls looked sympathetic: more than one midshipman had found favour in the lower quarter.

“Well,” said Mariquita, sullenly, “if thou must know, it is the linen of the Lieutenant of La Tulita. Ana ask me to wash it, and I say I will.”

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At this announcement Faquita squared her elbows and looked at Mariquita with snapping eyes.

“Oho, senorita, I suppose thou wilt say next that thou knowest what means this flirtation! Has La Tulita lost her heart, perhaps? And Don Ramon—dost thou know why he leaves Monterey one hour after he comes?” Her tone was sarcastic, but in it was a note of apprehension.

Mariquita tossed her head, and all pressed close about the rivals.

“What dost thou know, this time?” inquired the girl, provokingly. “Hast thou any letter to read today? Thou dost forget, old Faquita, that Ana is my friend—”

“Throw the clothes in the tubs,” cried Faquita, furiously. “Do we come here to idle and gossip? Mariquita, thou hussy, go over to that tub by thyself and wash the impertinent American rags. Quick. No more talk. The sun goes high.”

No one dared to disobey the queen of the tubs, and in a moment the women were kneeling in irregular rows, tumbling their linen into the water, the brown faces and bright attire making a picture in the colorous landscape which some native artist would have done well to preserve. For a time no sound was heard but the distant roar of the surf, the sighing of the wind through the pines on the hill, the less romantic grunts of the women and the swish of the linen in the water. Suddenly Mariquita, the proscribed, exclaimed from her segregated tub:—

“Look! Look!”

Heads flew up or twisted on their necks. A party of young people, attended by a duena, was crossing the meadow to the road. At the head of the procession were a girl and a man, to whom every gaze which should have been intent upon washing-tubs alone was directed. The girl wore a pink gown and a reboso. Her extraordinary grace made her look taller than she was; the slender figure swayed with every step. Her pink lips were parted, her blue starlike eyes looked upward into the keen cold eyes of a young man wearing the uniform of a lieutenant of the United States army.

The dominant characteristics of the young man’s face, even then, were ambition and determination, and perhaps the remarkable future was foreshadowed in the restless scheming mind. But to-day his deep-set eyes were glowing with a light more peculiar to youth, and whenever bulging stones afforded excuse he grasped the girl’s hand and held it as long as he dared. The procession wound past the tubs and crossing the road climbed up the hill to the little wooded cemetery of the early fathers, the cemetery where so many of those bright heads were to lie forgotten beneath the wild oats and thistles.

“They go to the grave of Benicia Ortega and her little one,” said Francesca. “Holy Mary! La Tulita never look in a man’s eyes like that before.”

“But she have in his,” said Mariquita, wisely.

“No more talk!” cried Faquita, and once more silence came to her own. But fate was stronger than Faquita. An hour later a little girl came running down, calling to the old woman that her grandchild, the consolation of her age, had been taken ill. After she had hurried away the women fairly leaped over one another in their efforts to reach Mariquita’s tub.

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“Tell us, tell us, chiquita,” they cried, fearful lest Faquita’s snubbing should have turned her sulky, “what dost thou know?”

But Mariquita, who had been biting her lips to keep back her story, opened them and spoke fluently.

“Ay, my friends! Dona Eustaquia and Benicia Ortega are not the only ones to wed Americans. Listen! La Tulita is mad for this man, who is no more handsome than the palm of my hand when it has all day been in the water. Yesterday morning came Don Ramon. I am in the back garden of the Casa Rivera with Ana, and La Tulita is in the front garden sitting under the wall. I can look through the doors of the sala and see and hear all. Such a handsome caballero, my friends! The gold six inches deep on the serape. Silver eagles on the sombrero. And the botas! Stamp with birds and leaves, ay, yi! He fling open the gates so bold, and when he see La Tulita he look like the sun is behind his face. (Such curls, my friends, tied with a blue ribbon!) But listen!

“‘Mi querida!’ he cry, ‘mi alma!’ (Ay, my heart jump in my throat like he speak to me.) Then he fall on one knee and try to kiss her hand. But she throw herself back like she hate him. Her eyes are like the bay in winter. And then she laugh. When she do that, he stand up and say with the voice that shake:—

“‘What is the matter, Herminia? Do you not love me any longer?’

“‘I never love you,’ she say. ’They give me no peace until I say I marry you, and as I love no one else—I do not care much. But now that you have insult me, I have the best excuse to break the engagement, and I do it.’

“‘I insult you?’ He hardly can speak, my friends, he is so surprised and unhappy.

“‘Yes; did you not forget the smocks?’

“‘The—smocks!’ he stammer, like that. ‘The smocks?’

“‘No one can be blame but you,’ she say. ’And you know that no bride forgive that. You know all that it means.’

“‘Herminia!’ he say. ’Surely you will not put me; away for a little thing like that!’

“‘I have no more to say,’ she reply, and then she get up and go in the house and shut the door so I cannot see how he feel, but I am very sorry for him if he did forget the smocks. Well! That evening I help Ana water the flowers in the front garden, and every once in the while we look through the windows at La Tulita and the Lieutenant. They talk, talk, talk. He look so earnest and she—she look so beautiful. Not like a devil, as when she talk to Don Ramon in the morning, but like an angel. Sure, a woman can be both! It depends upon the man. By and by Ana go away, but I stay there, for I like look

at them. After a while they get up and come out. It is dark in the garden, the walls so high, and the trees throw the shadows, so they cannot see me. They walk up and down, and by and by the Lieutenant take out his knife and cut a shoot from the rose-bush that climb up the house.

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"'These Castilian roses,' he say, very soft, but in very bad Spanish, 'they are very beautiful and a part of Monterey—a part of you. Look, I am going to plant this here, and long before it grow to be a big bush I come back and you will wear its buds in your hair when we are married in that lovely old church. Now help me,' and then they kneel down and he stick it in the ground, and all their fingers push the earth around it. Then she give a little sob and say, 'You must go?'

"He lift her up and put his arms around her tight. 'I must go,' he say. 'I am not my own master, you know, and the orders have come. But my heart is here, in this old garden, and I come back for it.' And then she put her arms around him and he kiss her, and she love him so I forget to be sorry for Don Ramon. After all, it is the woman who should be happy. He hold her a long time, so long I am afraid Dona Carmen come out to look for her. I lift up on my knees (I am sit down before) and look in the window and I see she is asleep, and I am glad. Well! After a while they walk up and down again, and he tell her all about his home far away, and about some money he go to get when the law get ready, and how he cannot marry on his pay. Then he say how he go to be a great general some day and how she will be the more beautiful woman in—how you call it?—-Washington, I think. And she cry and say she does not care, she only want him. And he tell her water the rose-bush every day and think of him, and he will come back before it is large, and every time a bud come out she can know he is thinking of her very hard."

"Ay, pobrecita!" said Francesca, "I wonder will he come back. These men!"

"Surely. Are not all men mad for La Tulita?"

"Yes—yes, but he go far away. To America! Dios de mi alma! And men, they forget." Francesca heaved a deep sigh. Her youth was far behind her, but she remembered many things.

"He return," said Mariquita, the young and romantic.

"When does he go?"

Mariquita pointed to the bay. A schooner rode at anchor. "He go to Yerba Buena on that to-morrow morning. From there to the land of the American. Ay, yi! Poor La Tulita! But his linen is dry. I must take it to iron for I have it promised for six in the morning." And she hastily gathered the articles from the low bushes and hurried away.

That evening as the women returned to town, talking gayly, despite the great baskets on their heads, they passed the hut of Faquita and paused at the window to inquire for the child. The little one lay gasping on the bed. Faquita sat beside her with bowed head. An aged crone brewed herbs over a stove. The dingy little house faced the hills and was dimly lighted by the fading rays of the sun struggling through the dark pine woods.

“Holy Mary, Faquita!” said Francesca, in a loud whisper. “Does Liseta die?”

Faquita sprang to her feet. Her cross old face was drawn with misery. “Go, go!” she said, waving her arms, “I want none of you.”

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The next evening she sat in the same position, her eyes fixed upon the shrinking features of the child. The crone had gone. She heard the door open, and turned with a scowl. But it was La Tulita that entered and came rapidly to the head of the bed. The girl's eyes were swollen, her dress and hair disordered.

"I have come to you because you are in trouble," she said. "I, too, am in trouble. Ay, my Faquita!"

The old woman put up her arms and drew the girl down to her lap. She had never touched her idol before, but sorrow levels even social barriers.

"Pobrecita!" she said, and the girl cried softly on her shoulder.

"Will he come back, Faquita?"

"Surely, ninita. No man could forget you."

"But it is so far."

"Think of what Don Vicente do for Dona Ysabel, mijita."

"But he is an American. Oh, no, it is not that I doubt him. He loves me! It is so far, like another world. And the ocean is so big and cruel."

"We ask the priest to say a mass."

"Ah, my Faquita! I will go to the church to-morrow morning. How glad I am that I came to thee." She kissed the old woman warmly, and for the moment Faquita forgot her trouble.

But the child threw out its arms and moaned. La Tulita pushed the hair out of her eyes and brought the medicine from the stove, where it simmered unsavourily. The child swallowed it painfully, and Faquita shook her head in despair. At the dawn it died. As La Tulita laid her white fingers on the gaping eyelids, Faquita rose to her feet. Her ugly old face was transfigured. Even the grief had gone out of it. For a moment she was no longer a woman, but one of the most subtle creations of the Catholic religion conjoined with racial superstitions.

"As the moon dieth and cometh to life again," she repeated with a sort of chanting cadence, "so man, though he die, will live again. Is it not better that she will wander forever through forests where crystal streams roll over golden sands, than grow into wickedness, and go out into the dark unrepenting, perhaps, to be bitten by serpents and scorched by lightning and plunged down cataracts?" She turned to La Tulita. "Will you stay here, senorita, while I go to bid them make merry?"

The girl nodded, and the woman went out. La Tulita watched the proud head and erect carriage for a moment, then bound up the fallen jaw of the little corpse, crossed its hands and placed weights on the eyelids. She pushed the few pieces of furniture against the wall, striving to forget the one trouble that had come into her triumphant young life. But there was little to do, and after a time she knelt by the window and looked up at the dark forest upon which long shafts of light were striking, routing the fog that crouched in the hollows. The town was as quiet as a necropolis. The white houses, under the black shadows of the hills, lay like tombs. Suddenly the roar of the surf came to her ears, and she threw out her arms with a cry, dropping her head upon them and sobbing convulsively. She heard the ponderous waves of the Pacific lashing the keel of a ship.

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She was aroused by shouting and sounds of merriment. She raised her head dully, but remembered in a moment what Faquita had left her to await. The dawn lay rosily on the town. The shimmering light in the pine woods was crossed and recrossed by the glare of rockets. Down the street came the sound of singing voices, the words of the song heralding the flight of a child-spirit to a better world. La Tulita slipped out of the back door and went to her home without meeting the procession. But before she shut herself in her room she awakened Ana, and giving her a purse of gold, bade her buy a little coffin draped with white and garlanded with white flowers.

PART III

“Tell us, tell us, Mariquita, does she water the rose-tree every night?”

“Every night, ay, yi!”

“And is it big yet? Ay, but that wall is high! Not a twig can I see!”

“Yes, it grows!”

“And he comes not?”

“He write. I see the letters.”

“But what does he say?”

“How can I know?”

“And she goes to the balls and meriendas no more. Surely, they will forget her. It is more than a year now. Some one else will be La Favorita.”

“She does not care.”

“Hush the voices,” cried Faquita, scrubbing diligently. “It is well that she stay at home and does not dance away her beauty before he come. She is like a lily.”

“But lilies turn brown, old Faquita, when the wind blow on them too long. Dost thou think he will return?”

“Surely,” said Faquita, stoutly. “Could any one forget that angel?”

“Ay, these men, these men!” said Francesca, with a sigh.

“Oh, thou old raven!” cried Mariquita. “But truly—truly—she has had no letter for three months.”

“Aha, senorita, thou didst not tell us that just now.”

“Nor did I intend to. The words just fell from my teeth.”

“He is ill,” cried Faquita, angrily. “Ay, my probrecita! Sometimes I think Ysabel is more happy under the rocks.”

“How dost thou know he is ill? Will he die?” The wash-tub mail had made too few mistakes in its history to admit of doubt being cast upon the assertion of one of its officials.

“I hear Captain Brotherton read from a letter to Dona Eustaquia. Ay, they are happy!”

“When?”

“Two hours ago.”

“Then we know before the town—like always.”

“Surely. Do we not know all things first? Hist!”

The women dropped their heads and fumbled at the linen in the water. La Tulita was approaching.

She came across the meadow with all her old swinging grace, the blue gown waving about her like the leaves of a California lily when the wind rustled the forest. But the reboso framed a face thin and pale, and the sparkle was gone from her eyes. She passed the tubs and greeted the old women pleasantly, walked a few steps up the hill, then turned as if in obedience to an afterthought, and sat down on a stone in the shade of a willow.

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“It is cool here,” she said.

“Yes, senorita.” They were not deceived, but they dared not stare at her, with Faquita’s scowl upon them.

“What news has the wash-tub mail to-day?” asked the girl, with an attempt at lightness. “Did an enemy invade the South this morning, and have you heard it already, as when General Kearney came? Is General Castro still in Baja California, or has he fled to Mexico? Has Dona Prudencia Iturbi y Moncada given a ball this week at Santa Barbara? Have Don Diego and Dona Chonita—?”

“The young Lieutenant is ill,” blurted out one of the old women, then cowered until she almost fell into her tub. Faquita sprang forward and caught the girl in her arms.

“Thou old fool!” she cried furiously. “Thou devil! Mayst thou find a tarantula in thy bed to-night. Mayst thou dream thou art roasting in hell.” She carried La Tulita rapidly across the meadow.

“Ah, I thought I should hear there,” said the girl, with a laugh. “Thank heaven for the wash-tub mail.”

Faquita nursed her through a long illness. She recovered both health and reason, and one day the old woman brought her word that the young Lieutenant was well again—-and that his illness had been brief and slight.

THE LAST

“Ay, but the years go quick!” said Mariquita, as she flapped a piece of linen after taking it from the water. “I wonder do all towns sleep like this. Who can believe that once it is so gay? The balls! The grand caballeros! The serenades! The meriendas! No more! No more! Almost I forget the excitement when the Americanos coming. I no am young any more. Ay, yi!”

“Poor Faquita, she just died of old age,” said a woman who had been young with Mariquita, spreading an article of underwear on a bush. “Her life just drop out like her teeth. No one of the old women that taught us to wash is here now, Mariquita. We are the old ones now, and we teach the young, ay, yi!”

“Well, it is a comfort that the great grow old like the low people. High birth cannot keep the skin white and the body slim. Ay, look! Who can think she is so beautiful before?”

A woman was coming down the road from the town. A woman, whom passing years had browned, although leaving the fine strong features uncoarsened. She was dressed simply in black, and wore a small American bonnet. The figure had not lost the

slimness of its youth, but the walk was stiff and precise. The carriage evinced a determined will.

“Ay, who can think that once she sway like the tule!” said Mariquita, with a sigh. “Well, when she come to-day I have some news. A letter, we used to call it, dost thou remember, Brigida? Who care for the wash-tub mail now? These Americanos never hear of it, and our people—triste de mi—have no more the interest in anything.”

“Tell us thy news,” cried many voices. The older women had never lost their interest in La Tulita. The younger ones had heard her story many times, and rarely passed the wall before her house without looking at the tall rose-bush which had all the pride of a young tree.

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“No, you can hear when she come. She will come to-day. Six months ago to-day she come. Ay, yi, to think she come once in six months all these years! And never until to-day has the wash-tub mail a letter for her.”

“Very strange she did not forget a Gringo and marry with a caballero,” said one of the girls, scornfully. “They say the caballeros were so beautiful, so magnificent. The Americans have all the money now, but she been rich for a little while.”

“All women are not alike. Sometimes I think she is more happy with the memory.” And Mariquita, who had a fat lazy husband and a swarm of brown children, sighed heavily. “She live happy in the old house and is not so poor. And always she have the rose-bush. She smile, now, sometimes, when she water it.”

“Well, it is many years,” said the girl, philosophically. “Here she come.”

La Tulita, or Dona Herminia, as she now was called, walked briskly across the meadow and sat down on the stone which had come to be called for her. She spoke to each in turn, but did not ask for news. She had ceased long since to do that. She still came because the habit held her, and because she liked the women.

“Ah, Mariquita,” she said, “the linen is not as fine as when we were young. And thou art glad to get the shirts of the Americans now. My poor Faquita!”

“Coarse things,” said Mariquita, disdainfully. Then a silence fell, so sudden and so suggestive that Dona Herminia felt it and turned instinctively to Mariquita.

“What is it?” she asked rapidly. “Is there news to-day? Of what?”

Mariquita’s honest face was grave and important.

“There is news, senorita,” she said.

“What is it?”

The washing-women had dropped back from the tubs and were listening intently.

“Ay!” The oracle drew a long breath. “There is war over there, you know, senorita,” she said, making a vague gesture toward the Atlantic states.

“Yes, I know. Is it decided? Is the North or the South victorious? I am glad that the wash-tub mail has not—”

“It is not that, senorita.”

“Then what?”

“The Lieutenant—he is a great general now.”

“Ay!”

“He has won a great battle—And—they speak of his wife, senorita.”

Dona Herminia closed her eyes for a moment. Then she opened them and glanced slowly about her. The blue bay, the solemn pines, the golden atmosphere, the cemetery on the hill, the women washing at the stone tubs—all was unchanged. Only the flimsy wooden houses of the Americans scattered among the adobes of the town and the aging faces of the women who had been young in her brief girlhood marked the lapse of years. There was a smile on her lips. Her monotonous life must have given her insanity or infinite peace, and peace had been her portion. In a few minutes she said good-by to the women and went home. She never went to the tubs again.

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THE CONQUEST OF DONA JACOBA

I

A forest of willows cut by a forking creek, and held apart here and there by fields of yellow mustard blossoms fluttering in their pale green nests, or meadows carpeted with the tiny white and yellow flowers of early summer. Wide patches of blue where the willows ended, and immense banks of daisies bordering fields of golden grain, bending and shimmering in the wind with the deep even sweep of rising tide. Then the lake, long, irregular, half choked with tules, closed by a marsh. The valley framed by mountains of purplish gray, dull brown, with patches of vivid green and yellow; a solitary gray peak, barren and rocky, in sharp contrast to the rich Californian hills; on one side fawn-coloured slopes, and slopes with groves of crouching oaks in their hollows; opposite and beyond the cold peak, a golden hill rising to a mount of earthy green; still lower, another peak, red and green, mulberry and mould; between and afar, closing the valley, a line of pink-brown mountains splashed with blue.

Such was a fragment of Don Roberto Duncan's vast rancho, Los Quervos, and on a plateau above the willows stood the adobe house, white and red-tiled, shaped like a solid letter H. On the deep veranda, sunken between the short forearms of the H, Dona Jacoba could stand and issue commands in her harsh imperious voice to the Indians in the rancheria among the willows, whilst the long sala behind overflowed with the gay company her famous hospitality had summoned, the bare floor and ugly velvet furniture swept out of thought by beautiful faces and flowered silken gowns.

Behind the sala was an open court, the grass growing close to the great stone fountain. On either side was a long line of rooms, and above the sala was a library opening into the sleeping room of Dona Jacoba on one side, and into that of Elena, her youngest and loveliest daughter, on the other. Beyond the house were a dozen or more buildings: the kitchen; a room in which steers and bullocks, sheep and pigs, were hanging; a storehouse containing provisions enough for a hotel; and the manufactories of the Indians. Somewhat apart was a large building with a billiard-room in its upper story and sleeping rooms below. From her window Elena could look down upon the high-walled corral with its prancing horses always in readiness for the pleasure-loving guests, and upon the broad road curving through the willows and down the valley.

The great house almost shook with life on this brilliant day of the month of June, 1852. Don Roberto Duncan, into whose shrewd Scotch hands California had poured her wealth for forty years, had long ago taken to himself a wife of Castilian blood; to-morrow their eldest remaining daughter was to be married to a young Englishman, whose father had been a merchant in California when San Francisco was Yerba Buena. Not a room was vacant in the house. Young people had come from Monterey and San Francisco, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. Beds had been put up in the library and billiard-room,

in the store-rooms and attics. The corral was full of strange horses, and the huts in the willows had their humbler guests.

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Francisca sat in her room surrounded by a dozen chattering girls. The floor beneath the feet of the Californian heiress was bare, and the heavy furniture was of uncarved mahogany. But a satin quilt covered the bed, lavish Spanish needlework draped chest and tables, and through the open window came the June sunshine and the sound of the splashing fountain.

Francisca was putting the last stitches in her wedding-gown, and the girls were helping, advising, and commenting.

“Art thou not frightened, Panchita,” demanded one of the girls, “to go away and live with a strange man? Just think, thou hast seen him but ten times.”

“What of that?” asked Francisca, serenely, holding the rich corded silk at arm’s length, and half closing her eyes as she readjusted the deep flounce of Spanish lace. “Remember, we shall ride and dance and play games together for a week with all of you, dear friends, before I go away with him. I shall know him quite well by that time. And did not my father know him when he was a little boy? Surely, he cannot be a cruel man, or my father would not have chosen him for my husband.”

“I like the Americans and the Germans and the Russians,” said the girl who had spoken, “particularly the Americans. But these English are so stern, so harsh sometimes.”

“What of that?” asked Francisca again. “Am I not used to my father?”

She was a singular-looking girl, this compound of Scotch and Spanish. Her face was cast in her father’s hard mould, and her frame was large and sturdy, but she had the black luxuriant hair of Spain, and much grace of gesture and expression.

“I would not marry an Englishman,” said a soft voice.

Francisca raised her eyebrows and glanced coldly at the speaker, a girl of perfect loveliness, who sat behind a table, her chin resting on her clasped hands.

“Thou wouldst marry whom our father told thee to marry, Elena,” said her sister, severely. “What hast thou to say about it?”

“I will marry a Spaniard,” said Elena, rebelliously. “A Spaniard, and no other.”

“Thou wilt do what?” asked a cold voice from the door. The girls gave a little scream. Elena turned pale, even Francisca’s hands twitched.

Dona Jacoba was an impressive figure as she stood in the doorway; a tall unbowed woman with a large face and powerful penetrating eyes. A thin mouth covering white teeth separated the prominent nose and square chin. A braid of thick black hair lay over her fine bust, and a black silk handkerchief made a turban for her lofty head. She wore

a skirt of heavy black silk and a shawl of Chinese crepe, one end thrown gracefully over her shoulder.

“What didst thou say?” she demanded again, a sneer on her lips.

Elena made no answer. She stared through the window at the servants laying the table in the dining room on the other side of the court, her breath shortening as if the room had been exhausted of air.

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“Let me hear no more of that nonsense,” continued her mother. “A strange remark, truly, to come from the lips of a Californian! Thy father has said that his daughters shall marry men of his race—men who belong to that island of the North; and I have agreed, and thy sisters are well married. No women are more virtuous, more industrious, more religious, than ours; but our men—our young men—are a set of drinking gambling vagabonds. Go to thy room and pray there until supper.”

Elena ran out of an opposite door, and Dona Jacoba sat down on a high-backed chair and held out her hand for the wedding-gown. She examined it, then smiled brilliantly.

“The lace is beautiful,” she said. “There is no richer in California, and I have seen Dona Trinidad Iturbi y Moncada’s and Dona Modeste Castro’s. Let me see thy mantilla once more.”

Francisca opened a chest nearly as large as her bed, and shook out a long square of superb Spanish lace. It had arrived from the city of Mexico but a few days before. The girls clapped their admiring hands, as if they had not looked at it twenty times, and Dona Jacoba smoothed it tenderly with her strong hands. Then she went over to the chest and lifted the beautiful silk and crepe gowns, one by one, her sharp eyes detecting no flaw. She opened another chest and examined the piles of underclothing and bed linen, all of finest woof, and deeply bordered with the drawn work of Spain.

“All is well,” she said, returning to her chair. “I see nothing more to be done. Thy brother will bring the emeralds, and the English plate will come before the week is over.”

“Is it sure that Santiago will come in time for the wedding?” asked a half-English granddaughter, whose voice broke suddenly at her own temerity.

But Dona Jacoba was in a gracious mood.

“Surely. Has not Don Roberto gone to meet him? He will be here at four to-day.”

“How glad I shall be to see him!” said Francisca. “Just think, my friends, I have not seen him for seven years. Not since he was eleven years old. He has been on that cold dreadful island in the North all this time. I wonder has he changed!”

“Why should he change?” asked Dona Jacoba. “Is he not a Cortez and a Duncan? Is he not a Californian and a Catholic? Can a few years in an English school make him of another race? He is seven years older, that is all.”

“True,” assented Francisca, threading her needle; “of course he could not change.”

Dona Jacoba opened a large fan and wielded it with slow curves of her strong wrist. She had never been cold in her life, and even a June day oppressed her.

“We have another guest,” she said in a moment—“a young man, Don Dario Castanares of Los Robles Rancho. He comes to buy cattle of my husband, and must remain with us until the bargain is over.”

Several of the girls raised their large black eyes with interest. “Don Dario Castanares,” said one; “I have heard of him. He is very rich and very handsome, they say.”

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"Yes," said Dona Jacoba, indifferently. "He is not ugly, but much too dark. His mother was an Indian. He is no husband, with all his leagues, for any Californian of pure Castilian blood."

II

Elena had gone up to her room, and would have locked the door had she possessed a key. As it was, she indulged in a burst of tears at the prospect of marrying an Englishman, then consoled herself with the thought that her best-beloved brother would be with her in a few hours.

She bathed her face and wound the long black coils about her shapely head. The flush faded out of her white cheeks, and her eyelids were less heavy. But the sadness did not leave her eyes nor the delicate curves of her mouth. She had the face of the Madonna, stamped with the heritage of suffering; a nature so keenly capable of joy and pain that she drew both like a magnet, and would so long as life stayed in her.

She curled herself in the window-seat, looking down the road for the gray cloud of dust that would herald her brother. But only black flocks of crows mounted screaming from the willows, to dive and rise again. Suddenly she became conscious that she was watched, and her gaze swept downward to the corral. A stranger stood by the gates, giving orders to a vaquero but looking hard at her from beneath his low-dropped sombrero.

He was tall, this stranger, and very slight. His face was nearly as dark as an Indian's, but set with features so perfect that no one but Dona Jacoba had ever found fault with his skin. Below his dreaming ardent eyes was a straight delicate nose; the sensuous mouth was half parted over glistening teeth and but lightly shaded by a silken mustache. About his graceful figure hung a dark red serape embroidered and fringed with gold, and his red velvet trousers were laced, and his yellow riding-boots gartered, with silver.

Elena rose quickly and pulled the curtain across the window; the blood had flown to her hair, and a smile chased the sadness from her mouth. Then she raised her hands and pressed the palms against the slope of the ceiling, her dark upturned eyes full of terror. For many moments she stood so, hardly conscious of what she was doing, seeing only the implacable eyes of her mother. Then down the road came the loud regular hoof-falls of galloping horses, and with an eager cry she flung aside the curtain, forgetting the stranger.

Down the road, half hidden by the willows, came two men. When they reached the rancheria, Elena saw the faces: a sandy-haired hard-faced old Scotsman, with cold blue eyes beneath shaggy red brows, and a dark slim lad, every inch a Californian.

Elena waved her handkerchief and the lad his hat. Then the girl ran down the stairs and over to the willows. Santiago sprang from his horse, and the brother and sister clung together kissing and crying, hugging each other until her hair fell down and his hat was in the dust.

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“Thou hast come!” cried Elena at last, holding him at arm’s length that she might see him better, then clinging to him again with all her strength. “Thou never wilt leave me again—promise me! Promise me, my Santiago! Ay, I have been so lonely.”

“Never, my little one. Have I not longed to come home that I might be with you? O my Elena! I know so much. I will teach you everything.”

“Ay, I am proud of thee, my Santiago! Thou knowest more than any boy in California—I know.”

“Perhaps that would not be much,” with fine scorn. “But come, Elena mia, I must go to my mother; she is waiting. She looks as stern as ever; but how I have longed to see her!”

They ran to the house, passing the stranger, who had watched them with folded arms and scowling brows. Santiago rushed impetuously at his mother; but she put out her arm, stiff and straight, and held him back. Then she laid her hand, with its vice-like grip, on his shoulder, and led him down the sala to the chapel at the end. It was arranged for the wedding, with all the pomp of velvet altar-cloth and golden candelabra. He looked at it wonderingly. Why had she brought him to look upon this before giving him a mother’s greeting?

“Kneel down,” she said, “and repeat the prayers of thy Church—prayers of gratitude for thy safe return.”

The boy folded his hands deprecatingly.

“But, mother, remember it is seven long years since I have said the Catholic prayers. Remember I have been educated in an English college, in a Protestant country.”

Her tall form curved slowly toward him, the blood blazed in her dark cheeks.

“What!” she screamed incredulously. “Thou hast forgotten the prayers of thy Church—-the prayers thou learned at my knee?”

“Yes, mother, I have,” he said desperately. “I cannot—”

“God! God! Mother of God! My son says this to me!” She caught him by the shoulder again and almost hurled him from the room. Then she locked her hand about his arm and dragged him down the sala to his father’s room. She took a greenhide reata from the table and brought it down upon his back with long sweeps of her powerful arm, but not another word came from her rigid lips. The boy quivered with the shame and pain, but made no resistance—for he was a Californian, and she was his mother.

III

Joaquin, the eldest son, who had been hunting bear with a number of his guests, returned shortly after his brother's arrival and was met at the door by his mother.

"Where is Santiago?" he asked. "I hear he has come."

"Santiago has been sent to bed, where he will remain for the present. We have an unexpected guest, Joaquin. He leans there against the tree—Don Dario Castanares. Thou knowest who he is. He comes to buy cattle of thy father, and will remain some days. Thou must share thy room with him, for there is no other place—even on the billiard-table."

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Joaquin liked the privacy of his room, but he had all the hospitality of his race. He went at once to the stranger, walking a little heavily, for he was no longer young and slender, but with a cordial smile on his shrewd warmly coloured face.

“The house is at your service, Don Dario,” he said, shaking the newcomer’s hand. “We are honoured that you come in time for my sister’s wedding. It distresses me that I cannot offer you the best room in the house, but, Dios! we have a company here. I have only the half of my poor bed to offer you, but if you will deign to accept that—”

“I am miserable, wretched, to put you to such inconvenience—”

“Never think of such a thing, my friend. Nothing could give me greater happiness than to try to make you comfortable in my poor room. Will you come now and take a siesta before supper?”

Dario followed him to the house, protesting at every step, and Joaquin threw open the door of one of the porch rooms.

“At your service, senor—everything at your service.”

He went to one corner of the room and kicked aside a pile of saddles, displaying a small hillock of gold in ten-and fifty-dollar slugs. “You will find about thirty thousand dollars there. We sold some cattle a days ago. I beg that you will help yourself. It is all at your service. I will now go and send you some aguardiente, for you must be thirsty.” And he went out and left his guest alone.

Dario threw himself face downward on the bed. He was in love, and the lady had kissed another man as if she had no love to spare. True, it was but her brother she had kissed, but would she have eyes for any one else during a stranger’s brief visit? And how, in this crowded house, could he speak a word with her alone? And that terrible dragon of a mother! He sprang to his feet as an Indian servant entered with a glass of aguardiente. When he had burnt his throat, he felt better. “I will stay until I have won her, if I remain a month,” he vowed. “It will be some time before Don Roberto will care to talk business.”

But Don Roberto was never too occupied to talk business. After he had taken his bath and siesta, he sent a servant to request Don Dario Castanares to come up to the library, where he spent most of his time, received all his visitors, reprimanded his children, and took his after-dinner naps. It was a luxurious room for the Californian of that day. A thick red English carpet covered the floor; one side of the room was concealed by a crowded bookcase, and the heavy mahogany furniture was handsomely carved, although upholstered with horse-hair.

In an hour every detail of the transaction had been disposed of, and Dario had traded a small rancho for a herd of cattle. The young man's face was very long when the last detail had been arranged, but he had forgotten that his host was as Californian as himself. Don Roberto poured him a brimming glass of angelica and gave him a hearty slap on the back.

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“The cattle will keep for a few days, Don Dario,” he said, “and you shall not leave this house until the festivities are over. Not until a week from to-morrow—do you hear? I knew your father. We had many a transaction together, and I take pleasure in welcoming his son under my roof. Now get off to the young people, and do not make any excuses.”

Dario made none.

IV

The next morning at eight, Francisca stood before the altar in the chapel, looking very handsome in her rich gown and soft mantilla. The bridegroom, a sensible-looking young Englishman, was somewhat nervous, but Francisca might have been married every morning at eight o’clock. Behind them stood Don Roberto in a new suit of English broadcloth, and Dona Jacoba in heavy lilac silk, half covered with priceless lace. The six bridesmaids looked like a huge bouquet, in their wide delicately coloured skirts. Their dark eyes, mischievous, curious, thoughtful, flashed more brilliantly than the jewels they wore.

The sala and Don Roberto’s room beyond were so crowded that some of the guests stood in the windows, and many could not enter the doors; every family within a hundred leagues had come to the wedding. The veranda was crowded with girls, the sparkling faces draped in black mantillas or bright rebosos, the full gay gowns fluttering in the breeze. Men in jingling spurs and all the bravery of gold-laced trousers and short embroidered jackets respectfully elbowed their way past brown and stout old women that they might whisper a word into some pretty alert little ear. They had all ridden many leagues that morning, but there was not a trace of fatigue on any face. The court behind the sala was full of Indian servants striving to catch a glimpse of the ceremony.

Dario stood just within the front door, his eyes eagerly fixed upon Elena. She looked like a California lily in her white gown; even her head drooped a little as if a storm had passed. Her eyes were absent and heavy; they mirrored nothing of the solemn gayety of the morning; they saw only the welts on her brother’s back.

Dario had not seen her since Santiago’s arrival. She had not appeared at supper, and he had slept little in consequence; in fact, he had spent most of the night playing *monte* with Joaquin and a dozen other young men in the billiard-room.

During the bridal mass the padre gave communion to the young couple, and to those that had made confession the night before. Elena was not of the number, and during the intense silence she drew back and stood and knelt near Dario. They were not close enough to speak, had they dared; but the Californian had other speech than words, and Dario and Elena made their confession that morning.

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During breakfast they were at opposite ends of the long table in the dining room, but neither took part in the songs and speeches, the toasts and laughter. Both had done some manoeuvring to get out of sight of the old people, and sit at one of the many other tables in the sala, on the corridor, in the court; but Elena had to go with the bridesmaids, and Joaquin insisted upon doing honour to the uninvited guest. The Indian servants passed the rich and delicate, the plain and peppered, dishes, the wines and the beautiful cakes for which Dona Jacoba and her daughters were famous. The massive plate that had done duty for generations in Spain was on the table; the crystal had been cut in England. It was the banquet of a grandee, and no one noticed the silent lovers.

After breakfast the girls flitted to their rooms and changed their gowns, and wound rebosos or mantillas about their heads; the men put off their jackets for lighter ones of flowered calico, and the whole party, in buggies or on horseback, started for a bull-fight which was to take place in a field about a mile behind the house. Elena went in a buggy with Santiago, who was almost as pale as she. Dario, on horseback, rode as near her as he dared; but when they reached the fence about the field careless riders crowded between, and he could only watch her from afar.

The vaqueros in their broad black hats shining with varnish, their black velvet jackets, their crimson sashes, and short, black velvet trousers laced with silver cord over spotless linen, looked very picturesque as they dashed about the field jingling their spurs and shouting at each other. When the bulls trotted in and greeted each other pleasantly, the vaqueros swung their hissing reatas and yelled until the maddened animals wreaked their vengeance on each other, and the serious work of the day began.

Elena leaned back with her fan before her eyes, but Santiago looked on eagerly in spite of his English training.

“Caramba!” he cried, “but that old bull is tough. Look, Elena! The little one is down. No, no! He has the big one. Ay! yi, yi! By Jove! he is gone—no, he has run off—he is on him again! He has ripped him up! Brava! brava!”

A cheer as from one throat made the mountains echo, but Elena still held her fan before the field.

“How canst thou like such bloody sport?” she asked disgustedly. “The poor animals! What pleasure canst thou take to see a fine brute kicking in his death-agony, his bowels trailing on the ground?”

“Fie, Elena! Art thou not a Californian? Dost thou not love the sport of thy country? Why, look at the other girls! They are mad with excitement. By Jove! I never saw so many bright eyes. I wonder if I shall be too stiff to dance to-night. Elena, she gave me

a beating! But tell me, little one, why dost thou not like the bull-fight? I feel like another man since I have seen it."

"I cannot be pleased with cruelty. I shall never get used to see beasts killed for amusement. And Don Dario Castanares does not like it either. He never smiled once, nor said 'Brava!'"

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“Aha! And how dost thou know whether he did or not? I thought thy face was behind that big black fan.”

“I saw him through the sticks. What does ‘By Jove’ mean, my Santiago?”

He enlightened her, then stood up eagerly. Another bull had been brought in, and one of the vaqueros was to fight him. During the next two hours Santiago gave little thought to his sister, and sometimes her long black lashes swept above the top of her fan. When five or six bulls had stamped and roared and gored and died, the guests of Los Quervos went home to chocolate and siesta, the others returned to their various ranchos.

But Dario took no nap that day. Twice he had seen an Indian girl at Elena’s window, and as the house settled down to temporary calm, he saw the girl go to the rancheria among the willows. He wrote a note, and followed her as soon as he dared. She wore a calico frock, exactly like a hundred others, and her stiff black hair cut close to her neck in the style enforced by Dona Jacoba; but Dario recognized her imitation of Elena’s walk and carriage. He was very nervous, but he managed to stroll about and make his visit appear one of curiosity. As he passed the girl he told her to follow him, and in a few moments they were alone in a thicket. He had hard work to persuade her to take the note to her mistress, for she stood in abject awe of Dona Jacoba; but love of Elena and sympathy for the handsome stranger prevailed, and the girl went off with the missive.

The staircase led from Don Roberto’s room to Dona Jacoba’s; but the lady’s all-seeing eyes were closed, and the master was snoring in his library. Malia tiptoed by both, and Elena, who had been half asleep, sat up, trembling with excitement, and read the impassioned request for an interview. She lifted her head and listened, panting a little. Then she ran to the door and looked into the library. Her father was sound asleep; there could he no doubt of that. She dared not write an answer, but she closed the door and put her lips to the girl’s ear.

“Tell him,” she murmured, horrified at her own boldness—“tell him to take me out for the contradanza tonight. There is no other chance.” And the girl went back and delivered the message.

V

The guests and family met again at supper; but yards of linen and mounds of plate, spirited, quickly turning heads, flowered muslin gowns and silken jackets, again separated Dario and Elena. He caught a glimpse now and again of her graceful head turning on its white throat, or of her sad pure profile shining before her mother’s stern old face.

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Immediately after supper the bride and groom led the way to the sala, the musicians tuned their violins and guitars, and after an hour's excited comment upon the events of the day the dancing began. Dona Jacoba could be very gracious when she chose, and she moved among her guests like a queen to-night, begging them to be happy, and electrifying them with her brilliant smile. She dispelled their awe of her with magical tact, and when she laid her hand on one young beauty's shoulder, and told her that her eyes put out the poor candles of Los Quervos, the girl was ready to fling herself on the floor and kiss the tyrant's feet. Elena watched her anxiously. Her father petted her in his harsh abrupt way. If she had ever received a kiss from her mother, she did not remember it; but she worshipped the blinding personality of the woman, although she shook before the relentless will. But that her mother was pleased to be gracious tonight was beyond question, and she gave Dario a glance of timid encouragement, which brought him to her side at once.

"At your feet, senorita," he said; "may I dare to beg the honour of the contradanza?"

She bent her slender body in a pretty courtesy. "It is a small favour to grant a guest who deigns to honour us with his presence."

He led her out, and when he was not gazing enraptured at the graceful swaying and gliding of her body, he managed to make a few conventional remarks.

"You did not like bull-fighting, senorita?"

"He watched me," she thought. "No, senor. I like nothing that is cruel."

"Those soft eyes could never be cruel. Ay, you are so beautiful, senorita."

"I am but a little country girl, senor. You must have seen far more beautiful women in the cities. Have you ever been in Monterey?"

"Yes, senorita, many times. I have seen all the beauties, even Dona Modeste Castro. Once, too—that was before the Americans came—I saw the Senorita Ysabel Herrera, a woman so beautiful that a man robbed a church and murdered a priest for her sake. But she was not so beautiful as you, senorita."

The blood throbbed in the girl's fair cheeks. "He must love me," she told herself, "to think me more beautiful than Ysabel Herrera. Joaquin says she was the handsomest woman that ever was seen."

"You compliment me, senor," she answered vaguely. "She had wonderful green eyes. So has the Senora Castro. Mine are only brown, like so many other girls'."

"They are the most beautiful eyes in California. They are like the Madonna's. I do not care for green eyes." His black ones flashed their language to hers, and Elena

wondered if she had ever been unhappy. She barely remembered where she was, forgot that she was a helpless bird in a golden cage. Her mate had flown through the open door.

The contradanza ends with a waltz, and as Dario held her in his arms his last remnant of prudence gave way.

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“Elena, Elena,” he murmured passionately, “I love thee. Dost thou not know it? Dost thou not love me a little? Ay, Elena! I have not slept one hour since I saw thee.”

She raised her eyes to his face. The sadness still dwelt in their depths, but above floated the soft flame of love and trust. She had no coquetry in her straightforward and simple nature.

“Yes,” she whispered, “I love thee.”

“And thou art happy, querida mia? Thou art happy here in my arms?”

She let her cheek rest for a moment against his shoulder. “Yes, I am very happy.”

“And thou wilt marry me?”

The words brought her back to reality, and the light left her face.

“Ay,” she said, “why did you say that? It cannot ever be.”

“But it shall be! Why not? I will speak with Don Roberto in the morning.”

The hand that lay on his shoulder clutched him suddenly. “No, no,” she said hurriedly; “promise me that you will not speak to him for two or three days at least. My father wants us all to marry Englishmen. He is kind, and he loves me, but he is mad for Englishmen. And we can be happy meanwhile.”

The music stopped, and he could only murmur his promises before leading her back to her mother.

He dared not take her out again, but he danced with no one else in spite of many inviting eyes, and spent the rest of the night on the corridor, where he could watch her unobserved. The walls were so thick at Los Quervos that each window had a deep seat within and without. Dario ensconced himself, and was comfortable, if tumultuous.

VI

With dawn the dancing ended, and quiet fell upon Los Quervos. But at twelve gay voices and laughter came through every window. The family and guests were taking their cold bath, ready for another eighteen hours of pleasure.

Shortly after the long dinner, the iron-barred gates of the corral were thrown open and a band of horses, golden bronze in colour, with silvern mane and tail, silken embroidered saddles on their slender backs, trotted up to the door. The beautiful creatures shone in

the sun like burnished armour; they arched their haughty necks and lifted their small feet as if they were Californian beauties about to dance El Son.

The girls wore short riding-skirts, gay sashes, and little round hats. The men wore thin jackets of brightly coloured silk, gold-laced knee-breeches, and silver spurs. They tossed the girls upon their saddles, vaulted into their own, and all started on a wild gallop for the races.

Dario, with much manoeuvring, managed to ride by Elena's side. It was impossible to exchange a word with her, for keen and mischievous ears were about them; but they were close together, and a kind of ecstasy possessed them both. The sunshine was so golden, the quivering visible air so full of soft intoxication! They were filled with a reckless animal joy of living—the divine right of youth to exist and be happy. The bars of Elena's cage sank into the warm resounding earth; she wanted to cry aloud her joy to the birds, to hold and kiss the air as it passed. Her face sparkled, her mouth grew full. She looked at Dario, and he dug his spurs into his horse's flanks.

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The representatives of many ranchos, their wives and daughters, awaited the party from Los Quervos. But none pushed his way between Dario and Elena that day. And they both enjoyed the races; they were in a mood to enjoy anything. They became excited and shouted with the rest as the vaqueros flew down the field. Dario bet and lost a ranchita, then bet and won another. He won a herd of cattle, a band of horses, a saddle-bag of golden slugs. Surely, fortune smiled on him from the eyes of Elena. When the races were over they galloped down to the ocean and over the cliffs and sands, watching the ponderous waves fling themselves on the rocks, then retreat and rear their crests, to thunder on again.

“The fog!” cried some one. “The fog!” And with shrieks of mock terror they turned their horses’ heads and raced down the valley, the fog after them like a phantom tidal wave; but they outstripped it, and sprang from their horses at the corridor of Los Quervos with shouts of triumph and lightly blown kisses to the enemy.

After supper they found eggs piled upon silver dishes in the sala, and with cries of “Cascaron! Cascaron!” they flung them at each other, the cologne and flour and tinsel with which the shells were filled deluging and decorating them.

Dona Jacoba again was in a most gracious mood, and leaned against the wall, an amused smile on her strong serene face. Her husband stood by her, and she indicated Elena by a motion of her fan.

“Is she not beautiful to-night, our little one?” she asked proudly. “See how pink her cheeks are! Her eyes shine like stars. She is the handsomest of all our children, viejo.”

“Yes,” he said, something like tenderness in his cold blue eyes, “there is no prettier girl on twenty ranchos. She shall marry the finest Englishman of them all.”

Elena threw a cascaron directly into Dario’s mouth, and although the cologne scalded his throat, he heroically swallowed it, and revenged himself by covering her black locks with flour. The guests, like the children they were, chased each other all over the house, up and down the stairs; the men hid under tables, only to have a sly hand break a cascaron on the back of their heads, and to receive a deluge down the spinal column. The bride chased her dignified groom out into the yard, and a dozen followed. Then Dario found his chance.

Elena was after him, and as they passed beneath a tree he turned like a flash and caught her in his arms and kissed her. For a second she tried to free herself, mindful that her sisters had not kissed their lovers until they stood with them in the chapel; but she was made for love, and in a moment her white arms were clinging about his neck. People were shouting around them; there was time for but few of the words Dario wished to say.

“Thou must write me a little note every day,” he commanded. “Thy brother’s coat, one that he does not wear, hangs behind the door in my room. To-morrow morning thou wilt find a letter from me in the pocket. Let me find one there, too. Kiss me again, consuelo de mi alma!” and they separated suddenly, to speak no more that night.

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VII

The next morning, when Elena went to Joaquin's room to make the bed, she found Dario's note in the pocket of the coat, but she had had no opportunity to write one herself. Nor did she have time to read his until after dinner, although it burned her neck and took away her appetite. When the meal was over, she ran down to the willows and read it there, then went straight to the favourite lounging-place of an old vaquero who had adored her from the days when she used to trot about the rancho holding his forefinger, or perch herself upon his shoulder and command him to gallop.

He was smoking his pipe, and he looked up in some wonder as she stood before him, flushed and panting, her eyes-darting apprehensive glances.

"Pedro," she said imperiously, "get down on thy hands and knees."

Pedro was the colour of tanned leather and very hairy, but his face beamed with good-nature. He put his pipe between his teeth and did as he was bidden. Elena produced the pencil and paper she had managed to purloin from her father's table, and kneeling beside her faithful vaquero, wrote a note on his back. It took her a long time to coin that simple epistle, for she never had written a love-letter before. But Pedro knelt like a rock, although his old knees ached. When the note was finished she thrust it into her gown, and patted Pedro on the head.

"I love thee, my old man. I will make thee a new salve for thy rheumatism, and a big cake."

As she approached the house her mother stood on the corridor watching the young people mount, and Elena shivered as she met a fiery and watchful eye. Yesterday had been a perfect day, but the chill of fear touched this. She sprang on her horse and went with the rest to the games. Her brother Joaquin kept persistently by her side, and Dario thought it best not to approach her. She took little interest in the games. The young men climbed the greased pole amidst soft derisive laughter. The greased pig was captured by his tail in a tumult of excitement, which rivalled the death of the bull, but Elena paid no attention. It was not until Dario, restive with inaction, entered the lists for the buried rooster, and by its head twisted it from the ground as his horse flew by, that she was roused to interest; and as many had failed, and as his was the signal victory of the day, he rode home somewhat consoled.

That night, as Dario and Elena danced the contradanza together, they felt the eyes of Dona Jacoba upon them, but he dared to whisper:—

"To-morrow morning I speak with thy father. Our wedding-day must be set before another sun goes down."

“No, no!” gasped Elena; but for once Dario would not listen.

VIII

As soon as Elena had left his room next morning, Dario returned and read the note she had put in her brother’s pocket. It gave him courage, his dreamy eyes flashed, his sensitive mouth curved proudly. As soon as dinner was over he followed Don Roberto up to the library. The old man stretched himself out in the long brass and leather chair which had been imported from England for his comfort, and did not look overjoyed when his guest begged a few moments’ indulgence.

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“I am half asleep,” he said. “Is it about those cattle? Joaquin knows as much about them as I do.”

Dario had not been asked to sit down, and he stood before Don Roberto feeling a little nervous, and pressing his hand against the mantelpiece.

“I do not wish to speak of cattle, senor.”

“No? What then?” The old man’s face was flushed with wine, and his shaggy brows were drooping heavily.

“It is—it is about Elena.”

The brows lifted a little.

“Elena?”

“Yes, senor. We love each other very much. I wish to ask your permission that we may be married.”

The brows went up with a rush; the stiff hairs stood out like a roof above the cold angry eyes. For a moment Don Roberto stared at the speaker as if he had not heard; then he sprang to his feet, his red face purple.

“Get out of my house, you damned vagabond!” he shouted. “Go as fast as God Almighty’ll let you. You marry my daughter,—you damned Indian! I wouldn’t give her to you if you were pure-blooded Castilian, much less to a half-breed whelp. And you have dared to make love to her. Go! Do you hear? Or I’ll kick you down the stairs!”

Dario drew himself up and looked back at his furious host with a pride that matched his own. The blood was smarting in his veins, but he made no sign and walked down the stair.

Don Roberto went at once in search of his wife. Failing to find her, he walked straight into the sala, and taking Elena by the arm before the assembled guests, marched her upstairs and into her room, and locked the door with his key.

Elena fell upon the floor and sobbed with rebellious mortification and terror. Her father had not uttered a word, but she knew the meaning of his summary act, and other feelings soon gave way to despair. That she should never see Dario Castanares again was certain, and she wept and prayed with all the abandon of her Spanish nature. A picture of the Virgin hung over the bed, and she raised herself on her knees and lifted her clasped hands to it beseechingly. With her tumbled hair and white face, her streaming upturned eyes and drawn mouth, she looked more like the Mater Dolorosa than the expressionless print she prayed to.

“Mary! Mother!” she whispered, “have mercy on thy poor little daughter. Give him to me. I ask for nothing else in this world. I do not care for gold or ranchos, only to be his wife. I am so lonely, my mother, for even Santiago thinks of so many other things than of me. I only want to be loved, and no one else will ever love me who can make me love him. Ay! give him to me! give him to me!” And she threw herself on her face once more, and sobbed until her tears were exhausted. Then she dragged herself to the window and leaned over the deep seat. Perhaps she might have one glimpse of him as he rode away.

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She gave a little cry of agony and pleasure. He was standing by the gates of the corral whilst the vaqueros rounded up the cattle he had bought. His arms were folded, his head hung forward. As he heard her cry, he lifted his face, and Elena saw the tears in his eyes. For the moment they gazed at each other, those lovers of California's long-ago, while the very atmosphere quivering between them seemed a palpable barrier. Elena flung out her arms with a sudden passionate gesture; he gave a hoarse cry, and paced up and down like a race-horse curbed with a Spanish bit. How to have one last word with her? If she were behind the walls of the fort of Monterey it would be as easy. He dared not speak from where he was. Already the horses were at the door to carry the eager company to a fight between a bull and a bear. But he could write a note if only he had the materials. It was useless to return to his room, for Joaquin was there; and he hoped never to see that library again. But was there ever a lover in whom necessity did not develop the genius of invention? Dario flashed upward a glance of hope, then took from his pocket a slip of the rice-paper used for making cigaritos. He burnt a match, and with the charred stump scrawled a few lines.

"Elena! Mine! Star of my life! My sweet! Beautiful and idolized. Farewell! Farewell, my darling! My heart is sad. God be with thee.

"DARIO."

He wrapped the paper about a stone, and tied it with a wisp of grass. With a sudden flexile turn of a wrist that had thrown many a reata, he flung it straight through the open window. Elena read the meaningless phrases, then fell insensible to the floor.

IX

It was the custom of Dona Jacoba personally to oversee her entire establishment every day, and she always went at a different hour, that laziness might never feel sure of her back. To-day she visited the rancheria immediately after dinner, and looked through every hut with her piercing eyes. If the children were dirty, she peremptorily ordered their stout mammas to put them into the clean clothes which her bounty had provided. If a bed was unmade, she boxed the ears of the owner and sent her spinning across the room to her task. But she found little to scold about; her discipline was too rigid. When she was satisfied that the huts were in order, she went down to the great stone tubs sunken in the ground, where the women were washing in the heavy shade of the willows. In their calico gowns they made bright bits of colour against the drooping green of the trees.

"Maria," she cried sharply, "thou art wringing that fine linen too harshly. Dost thou wish to break in pieces the bridal clothes of thy senorita? Be careful, or I will lay the whip across thy shoulders."

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She walked slowly through the willows, enjoying the shade. Her fine old head was held sternly back, and her shoulders were as square as her youngest son's; but she sighed a little, and pressed a willow branch to her face with a caressing motion. She looked up to the gray peak standing above its fellows, bare, ugly, gaunt. She was not an imaginative woman, but she always had felt in closer kinship with that solitary peak than with her own blood. As she left the wood and saw the gay cavalcade about to start—the burnished horses, the dashing caballeros, the girls with their radiant faces and jaunty habits—she sighed again. Long ago she had been the bride of a brilliant young Mexican officer for a few brief years; her youth had gone with his life.

She avoided the company and went round to the buildings at the back of the house. Approving here, reproaching there, she walked leisurely through the various rooms where the Indians were making lard, shoes, flour, candles. She was in the chocolate manufactory when her husband found her.

"Come—come at once," he said. "I have good news for thee."

She followed him to his room, knowing by his face that tragedy had visited them. But she was not prepared for the tale he poured forth with violent interjections of English and Spanish oaths. She had detected a flirtation between her daughter and the uninvited guest, and not approving of flirtations, had told Joaquin to keep his eyes upon them when hers were absent; but that the man should dare and the girl should stoop to think of marriage wrought in her a passion to which her husband's seemed the calm flame of a sperm-candle.

"What!" she cried, her hoarse voice breaking. "What! A half-breed aspire to a Cortez!" She forgot her husband's separateness with true Californian pride. "My daughter and the son of an Indian! Holy God! And she has dared!—she has dared! The little imbecile! The little—But," and she gave a furious laugh, "she will not forget again."

She caught the greenhide reata from the nail and went up the stair. Crossing the library with heavy tread, as if she would stamp her rage through the floor, she turned the key in the door of her daughter's room and strode in. The girl still lay on the floor, although consciousness had returned. As Elena saw her mother's face she cowered pitifully. That terrible temper seldom dominated the iron will of the woman, but Santiago had shaken it a few days ago, and Elena knew that her turn had come.

Dona Jacoba shut the door and towered above her daughter, red spots on her face, her small eyes blazing, an icy sneer on her mouth. She did not speak a word. She caught the girl by her delicate shoulder, jerked her to her feet, and lashed her with the heavy whip until screams mingled with the gay laughter of the parting guests. When she had beaten her until her own arm ached, she flung her on the bed and went out and locked the door.

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Elena was insensible again for a while, then lay dull and inert for hours. She had a passive longing for death. After the suffering and the hideous mortification of that day there seemed no other climax. The cavalcade rode beneath her windows once more, with their untired laughter, their splendid vitality. They scattered to their rooms to don their bright evening gowns, then went to the dining room and feasted.

After supper Francisca unlocked Elena's door and entered with a little tray on her hand. Elena refused to eat, but her sister's presence roused her, and she turned her face to the wall and burst into tears.

"Nonsense!" said Francisca, kindly. "Do not cry, my sister. What is a lover? The end of a little flirtation? My father will find thee a husband—a strong fair English husband like mine. Dost thou not prefer blondes to brunettes, my sister? I am sorry my mother beat thee, but she has such a sense of her duty. She did it for thy good, my Elena. Let me dress thee in thy new gown, the white silk with the pale blue flowers. It is high in the neck and long in the sleeves, and will hide the marks of the whip. Come down and play cascarones and dance until dawn and forget all about it."

But Elena only wept on, and Francisca left her for more imperative duties.

The next day the girl still refused to eat, although Dona Jacoba opened her mouth and poured a cup of chocolate down her throat. Late in the afternoon Santiago slipped into the room and bent over her.

"Elena," he whispered hurriedly. "Look! I have a note for thee."

Elena sat upright on the bed, and he thrust a piece of folded paper into her hand. "Here it is. He is in San Luis Obispo and says he will stay there. Remember it is but a few miles away. My—"

Elena sank back with a cry, and Santiago blasphemed in English. Dona Jacoba unlocked her daughter's hand, took the note, and led Santiago from the room. When she reached her own, she opened a drawer and handed him a canvas bag full of gold.

"Go to San Francisco and enjoy yourself," she said. "Interfere no farther between your sister and your parents, unless you prefer that reata to gold. Your craft cannot outwit mine, and she will read no notes. You are a foolish boy to set your sense against your mother's. I may seem harsh to my children, but I strive on my knees for their good. And when I have made up my mind that a thing is right to do, you know that my nature is of iron. No child of mine shall marry a lazy vagabond who can do nothing but lie in a hammock and bet and gamble and make love. And a half-breed! Mother of God! Now go to San Francisco, and send for more money when this is gone."

Santiago obeyed. There was nothing else for him to do.

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Elena lay in her bed, scarcely touching food. Poor child! her nature demanded nothing of life but love, and that denied her, she could find no reason for living. She was not sport-loving like Joaquin, nor practical like Francisca, nor learned like Santiago, nor ambitious to dance through life like her many nieces. She was but a clinging unreasoning creature, with warm blood and a great heart. But she no longer prayed to have Dario given her. It seemed to her that after such suffering her saddened and broken spirit would cast its shadows over her happiest moments, and she longed only for death.

Her mother, becoming alarmed at her increasing weakness, called in an old woman who had been midwife and doctor of the county for half a century. She came, a bent and bony woman who must have been majestic in her youth. Her front teeth were gone, her face was stained with dark splashes like the imprint of a pre-natal hand. Over her head she wore a black shawl; and she looked enough like a witch to frighten her patients into eternity had they not been so well used to her. She prodded Elena all over as if the girl were a loaf of bread and her knotted fingers sought a lump of flour in the dough.

“The heart,” she said to Dona Jacoba with sharp emphasis, her back teeth meeting with a click, as if to proclaim their existence. “I have no herbs for that,” and she went back to her cabin by the ocean.

That night Elena lifted her head suddenly. From the hill opposite her window came the sweet reverberation of a guitar: then a voice, which, though never heard by her in song before, was as unmistakable as if it had serenaded beneath her window every night since she had known Dario Castanares.

EL ULTIMO ADIOS

“Si dos con el alma
Se amaron en vida,
Y al fin se separan
En vida las dos;
Sabeis que es tan grande
Le pena sentida
Que con esa palabra
Se dicen adios.
Y en esa palabra
Que breve murmura,
Ni verse prometen
Niamarse se juran;
Que en esa palabra
Se dicen adios.
No hay queja mas honda,
Suspiro mas largo;

Que aquellas palabras
Que dicen adios.
Al fin ha llegado,
La muerte en la vida;
Al fin para entrambos
Muramos los dos:
Al fin ha llegado
La hora cumplida,
Del ultimo adios.
Ya nunca en la vida,
Gentil companera
Ya nunca volveremos
A vernos los dos:
Por eso es tan triste
Mi acento postrere,
Por eso es tan triste
El ultimo adios."—

They were dancing downstairs; laughter floated through the open windows. Francisca sang a song of the bull-fight, in her strong high voice; the frogs chanted their midnight mass by the creek in the willows; the coyotes wailed; the owls hooted. But nothing could drown that message of love. Elena lit a candle and held it at arm's length before the window. She knew that its ray went straight through the curtains to the singer on the hill, for his voice broke suddenly, then swelled forth in passionate answer. He sat there until dawn singing to her; but the next night he did not come, and Elena knew that she had not been his only audience.

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X

The week of festivity was over; the bridal pair, the relatives, the friends went away. Quiet would have taken temporary possession of Los Quervos had it not been for the many passing guests lavishly entertained by Don Roberto.

And still Elena lay in her little iron bed, refusing to get out of it, barely eating, growing weaker and thinner every day. At the end of three weeks Dona Jacoba was thoroughly alarmed, and Don Roberto sent Joaquin to San Francisco for a physician.

The man of science came at the end of a week. He asked many questions, and had a long talk with his patient. When he left the sick-room, he found Don Roberto and Dona Jacoba awaiting him in the library. They were ready to accept his word as law, for he was an Englishman, and had won high reputation during his short stay in the new country.

He spoke with curt directness. “My dear sir, your child is dying because she does not wish to live. People who write novels call it dying of a broken heart; but it does not make much difference about the name. Your child is acutely sensitive, and has an extremely delicate constitution—predisposition to consumption. Separation from the young man she desires to marry has prostrated her to such an extent that she is practically dying. Under existing circumstances she will not live two months, and, to be brutally frank, you will have killed her. I understand that the young man is well-born on his father’s side, and possessed of great wealth. I see no reason why she should not marry him. I shall leave her a tonic, but you can throw it out of the window unless you send for the young man,” and he walked down the stair and made ready for his departure.

Don Roberto translated the verdict to his wife. She turned very gray, and her thin lips pressed each other. But she bent her head. “So be it,” she said; “I cannot do murder. Send for Dario Castanares.”

“And tell him to take her to perdition,” roared the old man. “Never let me see her again.”

He went down the stair, filled a small bag with gold, and gave it to the doctor. He found Joaquin and bade him go for Dario, then shut himself in a remote room, and did not emerge until late that day.

Dona Jacoba sent for the maid, Malia.

“Bring me one of your frocks,” she said, “a set of your undergarments, a pair of your shoes and stockings.” She walked about the room until the girl’s return, her face terrible in its repressed wrath, its gray consciousness of defeat. When Malia came with the garments she told her to follow, and went into Elena’s room and stood beside the bed.

“Get up,” she said. “Dress thyself in thy bridal clothes. Thou art going to marry Dario Castanares to-day.”

The girl looked up incredulously, then closed her eyes wearily.

“Get up,” said her mother. “The doctor has said that we must let our daughter marry the half-breed or answer to God for her murder.” She turned to the maid: “Malia, go downstairs and make a cup of chocolate and bring it up. Bring, too, a glass of angelica.”

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But Elena needed neither. She forgot her desire for death, her misgivings of the future; she slipped out of bed, and would have taken a pair of silk stockings from the chest, but her mother stopped her with an imperious gesture, and handed her the coarse shoes and stockings the maid had brought. Elena raised her eyes wonderingly, but drew them on her tender feet without complaint. Then her mother gave her the shapeless undergarments, the gaudy calico frock, and she put them on. When the maid returned with the chocolate and wine, she drank both. They gave her colour and strength; and as she stood up and faced her mother, she had never looked more beautiful nor more stately in the silken gowns that were hers no longer.

[Illustration: "HE BENT DOWN AND CAUGHT HER IN HIS ARMS."]

"There are horses' hoofs," said Dona Jacoba. "Leave thy father's house and go to thy lover."

Elena followed her from the room, walking steadily, although she was beginning to tremble a little. As she passed the table in the library, she picked up an old silk handkerchief of her father's and tied it about her head and face. A smile was on her lips, but no joy could crowd the sadness from her eyes again. Her spirit was shadowed; her nature had come to its own.

They walked through the silent house, and to Elena's memory came the picture of that other bridal, when the very air shook with pleasure and the rooms were jewelled with beautiful faces; but she would not have exchanged her own nuptials for her sister's calm acceptance.

When she reached the veranda she drew herself up and turned to her mother with all that strange old woman's implacable bearing.

"I demand one wedding present," she said. "The greenhide reata. I wish it as a memento of my mother."

Dona Jacoba, without the quiver of a muscle, walked into her husband's room and returned with the reata and handed it to her. Then Elena turned her back upon her father's house and walked down the road through the willows. Dario did not notice the calico frock or the old handkerchief about her head. He bent down and caught her in his arms and kissed her, then lifting her to his saddle, galloped down the road to San Luis Obispo. Dona Jacoba turned her hard old face to the wall.

A RAMBLE WITH EULOGIA[1]

[Footnote 1: Pronounced a-oo-lo-hia.]

I

Dona Pomposa crossed her hands on her stomach and twirled her thumbs. A red spot was in each coffee-coloured cheek, and the mole in her scanty eyebrow jerked ominously. Her lips were set in a taut line, and her angry little eyes were fixed upon a girl who sat by the window strumming a guitar, her chin raised with an air of placid impertinence.

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“Thou wilt stop this nonsense and cast no more glances at Juan Tornel!” commanded Dona Pomposa. “Thou little brat! Dost thou think that I am one to let my daughter marry before she can hem? Thank God we have more sense than our mothers! No child of mine shall marry at fifteen. Now listen—thou shalt be locked in a dark room if I am kept awake again by that hobo serenading at thy window. To-morrow, when thou goest to church, take care that thou throwest him no glance. Dios de mi alma! I am worn out! Three nights have I been awakened by that *tw-a-n-g, tw-a-n-g."*

“You need not be afraid,” said her daughter, digging her little heel into the floor. “I shall not fall in love. I have no faith in men.”

Her mother laughed outright in spite of her anger.

“Indeed, my Eulogia! Thou art very wise. And why, pray, hast thou no faith in men?”

Eulogia tossed the soft black braid from her shoulder, and fixed her keen roguish eyes on the old lady’s face.

“Because I have read all the novels of the Senor Dumas, and I well know all those men he makes. And they never speak the truth to women; always they are selfish, and think only of their own pleasure. If the women suffer, they do not care; they do not love the women—only themselves. So I am not going to be fooled by the men. I shall enjoy life, but I shall think of *myself*, not of the men.”

Her mother gazed at her in speechless amazement. She never had read a book in her life, and had not thought of locking from her daughter the few volumes her dead husband had collected. Then she gasped with consternation.

“Por Dios, senorita, a fine woman thou wilt make of thyself with such ideas! a nice wife and mother—when the time comes. What does Padro Flores say to that, I should like to know? It is very strange that he has let you read those books.”

“I have never told him,” said Eulogia, indifferently.

“What!” screamed her mother. “You never told at confession?”

“No, I never did. It was none of his business what I read. Reading is no sin. I confessed all—”

“Mother of God!” cried Dona Pomposa, and she rushed at Eulogia with uplifted hand; but her nimble daughter dived under her arm with a provoking laugh, and ran out of the room.

That night Eulogia pushed aside the white curtain of her window and looked out. The beautiful bare hills encircling San Luis Obispo were black in the silvered night, but the

moon made the town light as day. The owls were hooting on the roof of the mission; Eulogia could see them flap their wings. A few Indians were still moving among the dark huts outside the walls, and within, the padre walked among his olive trees. Beyond the walls the town was still awake. Once a horseman dashed down the street, and Eulogia wondered if murder had been done in the mountains; the bandits were thick in their fastnesses. She did wish she could see one.

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Then she glanced eagerly down the road beneath her window. In spite of the wisdom she had accepted from the French romanticist, her fancy was just a little touched by Juan Tornel. His black flashing eyes could look so tender, and he rode so beautifully. She twitched the curtain into place and ran across the room, her feet pattering on the bare floor, jumped into her little iron bed, and drew the dainty sheet to her throat. A ladder had fallen heavily against the side of the house.

She heard an agile form ascend and seat itself on the deep window-sill. Then the guitar vibrated under the touch of master fingers, and a rich sweet tenor sang to her:—

EL CORAZON

"El corazon del amor palpita,
Al oir de tu dulce voz,
Cuando mi sangre
Se pone en agitacion,
Tu eres la mas hermosa,
Tu eres la luz del dia,
Tu eres la gloria mia,
Tu eres mi dulce bien.

"Negro tienes el cabello, Talle lineas hermosas, Mano blanca, pie precioso, No hay que decir en ti:—Tu eres la mas hermosa, Tu eres la luz del dia, Tu eres la prenda mia, Tu me haras morir.

"Que importa que noche y dia,
En ti sola estoy pensando,
El corazon palpitante
No cesa de repetir:—
Tu eres la mas hermosa,
Tu eres la luz del dia,
Tu eres la prenda mia,
Tu me haras morir—Eulogia!"

Eulogia lay as quiet as a mouse in the daytime, not daring to applaud, hoping fatigue had sent her mother to sleep. Her lover tuned his guitar and began another song, but she did not hear it; she was listening to footfalls in the garret above. With a presentiment of what was about to happen she sprang out of bed with a warning cry; but she was too late. There was a splash and rattle on the window-seat, a smothered curse, a quick descent, a triumphant laugh from above. Eulogia stamped her foot with

rage. She cautiously raised the window and passed her hand along the outer sill. This time she beat the casement with both hands: they were covered with warm ashes.

“Well, my daughter, have I not won the battle?” said a voice behind her, and Eulogia sat down on the window-seat and swung her feet in silent wrath.

Dona Pomposa wore a rather short night-gown, and her feet were encased in a pair of her husband’s old boots. Her hair was twisted under a red silk kerchief, and again she crossed her hands on her stomach, but the thumbs upheld a candle. Eulogia giggled suddenly.

“What dost thou laugh at, senorita? At the way I have served thy lover? Dost thou think he will come soon again?”

“No, mamma, you have proved the famous hospitality of the Californians which the Americans are always talking about. You need have no more envy of the magnificence of Los Quervos.” And then she kicked her heels against the wall.

“Oh, thou canst make sharp speeches, thou impertinent little brat; but Juan Tornel will serenade under thy window no more. Dios! the ashes must look well on his pretty mustachios. Go to bed. I will put thee to board in the convent to-morrow.” And she shuffled out of the room, her ample figure swinging from side to side like a large pendulum.

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II

The next day Eulogia was sitting on her window-seat, her chin resting on her knees, a volume of Dumas beside her, when the door was cautiously opened and her Aunt Anastacia entered the room. Aunt Anastacia was very large; in fact she nearly filled the doorway; she also disdained whalebones and walked with a slight roll. Her ankles hung over her feet, and her red cheeks and chin were covered with a short black down. Her hair was twisted into a tight knot and protected by a thick net, and she wore a loose gown of brown calico, patterned with large red roses. But good-nature beamed all over her indefinite features, and her little eyes dwelt adoringly upon Eulogia, who gave her an absent smile.

“Poor little one,” she said in her indulgent voice. “But it was cruel in my sister to throw ashes on thy lover. Not but what thou art too young for lovers, my darling,—although I had one at twelve. But times have changed. My little one—I have a note for thee. Thy mother is out, and he has gone away, so there can be no harm in reading it—”

“Give it to me at once”—and Eulogia dived into her aunt’s pocket and found the note.

“Beautiful and idolized Eulogia.—Adios! Adios! I came a stranger to thy town. I fell blinded at thy feet. I fly forever from the scornful laughter in thine eyes. Ay, Eulogia, how couldst thou? But no! I will not believe it was thou! The dimples that play in thy cheeks, the sparks that fly in thine eyes—Dios de mi vida! I cannot believe that they come from a malicious soul. No, enchanting Eulogia! Consolation of my soul! It was thy mother who so cruelly humiliated me, who drives me from thy town lest I be mocked in the streets. Ay, Eulogia! Ay, misericordia! Adios! Adios!

“JUAN TORNEL.”

Eulogia shrugged her shoulders. “Well, my mother is satisfied, perhaps. She has driven him away. At least, I shall not have to go to the convent.”

“Thou art so cold, my little one,” said Aunt Anastacia, disapprovingly. “Thou art but fifteen years, and yet thou throwest aside a lover as if he were an old reboso. Madre de Dios! In your place I should have wept and beaten the air. But perhaps that is the reason all the young men are wild for thee. Not but that I had many lovers—”

“It is too bad thou didst not marry one,” interrupted Eulogia, maliciously. “Perhaps thou wouldst”—and she picked up her book—“if thou hadst read the Senor Dumas.”

“Thou heartless baby!” cried her indignant aunt, “when I love thee so, and bring thy notes at the risk of my life, for thou knowest that thy mother would pull the hair from my head. Thou little brat! to say I could not marry, when I had twenty—”

Eulogia jumped up and pecked her on the chin like a bird. “Twenty-five, my old mountain. I only joked with thee. Thou didst not marry because thou hadst more sense than to trot about after a man. Is it not so, my old sack of flour? I was but angry because I thought thou hadst helped my mother last night.”

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“Never! I was sound asleep.”

“I know, I know. Now trot away. I hear my mother coming,” and Aunt Anastacia obediently left her niece to the more congenial company of the Senor Dumas.

III

The steep hills of San Luis Obispo shot upward like the sloping sides of a well, so round was the town. Scarlet patches lay on the slopes—the wide blossoms of the low cacti. A gray-green peak and a mulberry peak towered, kithless and gaunt, in the circle of tan-coloured hills brushed with purple. The garden of the mission was green with fruit trees and silver with olive groves. On the white church and long wing lay the red tiles; beyond the wall the dull earth huts of the Indians. Then the straggling town with its white adobe houses crouching on the grass.

Eulogia was sixteen. A year had passed since Juan Tornel serenaded beneath her window, and, if the truth must be told, she had almost forgotten him. Many a glance had she shot over her prayer-book in the mission church; many a pair of eyes, dreamy or fiery, had responded. But she had spoken with no man. After a tempestuous scene with her mother, during which Aunt Anastacia had wept profusely, a compromise had been made: Eulogia had agreed to have no more flirtations until she was sixteen, but at that age she should go to balls and have as many lovers as she pleased.

She walked through the olive groves with Padre Moraga on the morning of her sixteenth birthday. The new padre and she were the best of friends.

“Well,” said the good old man, pushing the long white hair from his dark face—it fell forward whenever he stooped—“well, my little one, thou goest to thy first ball to-night. Art thou happy?”

Eulogia lifted her shoulder. Her small nose also tilted.

“Happy? There is no such thing as happiness, my father. I shall dance, and flirt, and make all the young men fall in love with me. I shall enjoy myself, that is enough.”

The padre smiled; he was used to her.

“Thou little wise one!” He collected himself suddenly. “But thou art right to build thy hopes of happiness on the next world alone.” Then he continued, as if he merely had broken the conversation to say the Angelus: “And thou art sure that thou wilt be La Favorita? Truly, thou hast confidence in thyself—an inexperienced chit who has not half the beauty of many other girls.”

“Perhaps not; but the men shall love me better, all the same. Beauty is not everything, my father. I have a greater attraction than soft eyes and a pretty mouth.”

“Indeed! Thou baby! Why, thou art no bigger than a well-grown child, and thy mouth was made for a woman twice thy size. Where dost thou keep that extraordinary charm?” Not but that he knew, for he liked her better than any girl in the town, but he felt it his duty to act the part of curb-bit now and again.

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“You know, my father,” said Eulogia, coolly; “and if you have any doubt, wait until to-morrow.”

The ball was given in the long sala of Dona Antonia Ampudia, on the edge of the rambling town. As the night was warm, the young people danced through the low windows on to the wide corridor; and, if watchful eyes relaxed their vigilance, stepped off to the grass and wandered among the trees. The brown old women in dark silks sat against the wall, as dowagers do to-day. Most of the girls wore bright red or yellow gowns, although softer tints blossomed here and there. Silken black hair was braided close to the neck, the coiffure finished with a fringe of chenille. As they whirled in the dance, their full bright gowns looked like an agitated flower-bed suddenly possessed by a wandering tribe of dusky goddesses.

Eulogia came rather late. At the last moment her mother had wavered in her part of the contract, and it was not until Eulogia had sworn by every saint in the calendar that she would not leave the sala, even though she stifled, that Dona Pomposa had reluctantly consented to take her. Eulogia’s perfect little figure was clad in a prim white silk gown, but her cold brilliant eyes were like living jewels, her large mouth was as red as the cactus patches on the hills, and a flame burned in either cheek. In a moment she was surrounded by the young men who had been waiting for her. It might be true that twenty girls in the room were more beautiful than she, but she had a quiet manner more effective than animation, a vigorous magnetism of which she was fully aware, and a cool coquetry which piqued and fired the young men, who were used to more sentimental flirtations.

She danced as airily as a flower on the wind, but with untiring vitality.

“Senorita!” exclaimed Don Carmelo Pena, “thou takest away my breath. Dost thou never weary?”

“Never. I am not a man.”

“Ay, senorita, thou meanest—”

“That women were made to make the world go round, and men to play the guitar.”

“Ay, I can play the guitar. I will serenade thee to-morrow night.”

“Thou wilt get a shower of ashes for thy pains. Better stay at home, and prepare thy soul with three-card *monte*”

“Ay, senorita, but thou art cruel! Does no man please thee?”

“*Men* please me. How tiresome to dance with a woman!”

“And that is all the use thou hast for us? For us who would die for thee?”

“In a barrel of aguardiente? I prefer thee to dance with. To tell the truth, thy step suits mine.”

“Ay, senorita mia! thou canst put honey on thy tongue. God of my life, senorita—I fling my heart at thy feet!”

“I fear to break it, senor, for I have faith that it is made of thin glass. It would cut my feet. I like better this smooth floor. Who is that standing by the window? He has not danced to-night?”

“Don Pablo Ignestria of Monterey. He says the women of San Luis are not half so beautiful nor so elegant as the women of Monterey; he says they are too dark and too small. He does not wish to dance with any one; nor do any of the girls wish to dance with him. They are very angry.”

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“I wish to dance with him. Bring him to me.”

“But, senorita, I tell thee thou wouldst not like him. Holy heaven! Why do those eyes flash so? Thou lookest as if thou wouldst fight with thy little fists.”

“Bring him to me.”

Don Carmelo walked obediently over to Don Pablo, although burning with jealousy.

“Senor, at your service,” he said. “I wish to introduce you to the most charming senorita in the room.”

“Which?” asked Ignestria, incuriously.

Don Carmelo indicated Eulogia with a grand sweep of his hand.

“That little thing? Why, there are a dozen prettier girls in the room than she, and I have not cared to meet any of them!”

“But she has commanded me to take you to her, senor, and—look at the men crowding about her—do you think I dare to disobey?”

The stranger’s dark gray eyes became less insensible. He was a handsome man, with a tall figure, and a smooth strong face; but about him hung the indolence of the Californian.

“Very well,” he said, “take me to her.”

He asked her to dance, and after a waltz Eulogia said she was tired, and they sat down within a proper distance of Dona Pomposa’s eagle eye.

“What do you think of the women of San Luis Obispo?” asked Eulogia, innocently. “Are not they handsome?”

“They are not to be compared with the women of Monterey—since you ask me.”

“Because they find the men of San Luis more gallant than the Senor Don Pablo Ignestria!”

“Do they? One, I believe, asked to have me introduced to her!”

“True, senor. I wished to meet you that you might fall in love with me, and that the ladies of San Luis might have their vengeance.”

He stared at her.

“Truly, senorita, but you do not hide your cards. And why, then, should I fall in love with you?”

“Because I am different from the women of Monterey.”

“A good reason why I should not. I have been in every town in California, and I admire no women but those of my city.”

“And because you will hate me first.”

“And if I hate you, how can I love you?”

“It is the same. You hate one woman and love another. Each is the same passion, only to a different person out goes a different side. Let the person loved or hated change his nature, and the passion will change.”

He looked at her with more interest.

“In truth I think I shall begin with love and end with hate, senorita. But that wisdom was not born in your little head; for sixteen years, I think, have not sped over it, no? It went in, if I mistake not, through those bright eyes.”

“Yes, senor, that is true. I am not content to be just like other girls of sixteen. I want to *know—to know.* Have you ever read any books, senor?”

“Many.” He looked at her with a lively interest now. “What ones have you read?”

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“Only the beautiful romances of the Senor Dumas. I have seen no others, for there are not many books in San Luis. Have you read others?”

“A great many others. Two wonderful Spanish books—’Don Quixote de la Mancha’ and ‘Gil Blas,’ and the romances of Sir Waltere Scote—a man of England, and some lives of famous men, senorita. A great man lent them to me—the greatest of our Governors—-Alvarado.”

“And you will lend them to me?” cried Eulogia, forgetting her coquetry, “I want to read them.”

“Aha! Those cool eyes can flash. That even little voice can break in two. By the holy Evangelists, senorita, thou shalt have every book I possess.”

“Will the Senorita Dona Eulogia favour us with a song?”

Don Carmelo was bowing before her, a guitar in his hand, his wrathful eyes fixed upon Don Pablo.

“Yes,” said Eulogia.

She took the guitar and sang a love-song in a manner which can best be described as no manner at all; her expression never changed, her voice never warmed. At first the effect was flat, then the subtle fascination of it grew until the very memory of impassioned tones was florid and surfeiting. When she finished, Ignestria’s heart was hammering upon the steel in which he fancied he had prisoned it.

IV

“Well,” said Eulogia to Padre Moraga two weeks later, “am I not La Favorita?”

“Thou art, thou little coquette. Thou hast a power over men which thou must use with discretion, my Eulogia. Tell thy beads three times a day and pray that thou mayest do no harm.”

“I wish to do harm, my father, for men have broken the hearts of women for ages—”

“Chut, chut, thou baby! Men are not so black as they are painted. Harm no one, and the world will be better that thou hast lived in it.”

“If I scratch, fewer women will be scratched,” and she raised her shoulders beneath the flowered muslin of her gown, swung her guitar under her arm, and walked down the grove, the silver leaves shining above her smoky hair.

The padre had bidden all the young people of the upper class to a picnic in the old mission garden. Girls in gay muslins and silk rebosos were sitting beneath the arches of the corridor or flitting under the trees where the yellow apricots hung among the green leaves. Languid and sparkling faces coquetted with caballeros in bright calico jackets and knee-breeches laced with silken cord, their slender waists girt with long sashes hanging gracefully over the left hip. The water rilled in the winding creek, the birds carolled in the trees; but above all rose the sound of light laughter and sweet strong voices.

They took their dinner behind the arches, at a table the length of the corridor, and two of the young men played the guitar and sang, whilst the others delighted their keen palates with the goods the padre had provided.

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Don Pablo sat by Eulogia, a place he very often managed to fill; but he never had seen her for a moment alone.

“I must go soon, Eulogia,” he murmured, as the voices waxed louder. “Duty calls me back to Monterey.”

“I am glad to know thou hast a sense of thy duty.”

“Nothing but that would take me away from San Luis Obispo. But both my mother and —and—a dear friend are ill, and wish to see me.”

“Thou must go to-night. How canst thou eat and be gay when thy mother and—and—a dear friend are ill?”

“Ay, Eulogia! wouldst thou scoff over my grave? I go, but it is for thee to say if I return.”

“Do not tell me that thou adorest me here at the table. I shall blush, and all will be about my smarting ears like the bees down in the padre’s hive.”

“I shall not tell thee that before all the world, Eulogia. All I ask is this little favour: I shall send thee a letter the night I leave. Promise me that thou wilt answer it—to Monterey.”

“No, sir! Long ago, when I was twelve, I made a vow I would never write to a man. I never break that vow.”

“Thou wilt break it for me, Eulogia.”

“And why for you, senor? Half the trouble in the world has been made on paper.”

“Oh, thou wise one! What trouble can a piece of paper make when it lies on a man’s heart?”

“It can crackle when another head lies on it.”

“No head will ever lie here but—”

“Mine?”

“Eulogia!”

“To thee, Senorita Dona Eulogia,” cried a deep voice. “May the jewels in thine eyes shine by the stars when thou art above them. May the tears never dim them while they shine for us below,” and a caballero pushed back his chair, leaned forward, and touched her glass with his, then went down on one knee and drank the red wine.

Eulogia threw him a little absent smile, sipped her wine, and went on talking to Ignestria in her soft monotonous voice.

“My friend—Graciosa La Cruz—went a few weeks ago to Monterey for a visit. You will tell her I think of her, no?”

“I will dance with her often because she is your friend—until I return to San Luis Obispo.”

“Will that be soon, senor?”

“I told thee that would be as soon as thou wished. Thou wilt answer my letter—promise me, Eulogia.”

“I will not, senor. I intend to be wiser than other women. At the very least, my follies shall not burn paper. If you want an answer, you will return.”

“I will *not* return without that answer. I never can see thee alone, and if I could, thy coquetry would not give me a plain answer. I must see it on paper before I will believe.”

“Thou canst wait for the day of resurrection for thy knowledge, then!”

V

Once more Aunt Anastacia rolled her large figure through Eulogia’s doorway and handed her a letter.

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“From Don Pablo Ignestria, my baby,” she said. “Oh, what a man! what a caballero! And so smart. He waited an hour by the creek in the mission gardens until he saw thy mother go out, and then he brought the note to me. He begged to see thee, but I dared not grant that, ninita, for thy mother will be back in ten minutes.”

“Go downstairs and keep my mother there,” commanded Eulogia, and Aunt Anastacia rolled off, whilst her niece with unwonted nervousness opened the letter.

“Sweet of my soul! Day-star of my life! I dare not speak to thee of love because, strong man as I am, still am I a coward before those mocking eyes. Therefore if thou laugh the first time thou readest that I love thee, I shall not see it, and the second time thou mayest be more kind. Beautiful and idolized Eulogia, men have loved thee, but never will be cast at thy little feet a heart stronger or truer than mine. Ay, dueno adorada, I love thee! Without hope? No! I believe that thou lovest me, thou cold little one, although thou dost not like to think that the heart thou hast sealed can open to let love in. But, Eulogia! Star of my eyes! I love thee so I will break that heart in pieces, and give thee another so soft and warm that it will beat all through the old house to which I will take thee. For thou wilt come to me, thou little coquette? Thou wilt write to me to come back and stand with thee in the mission while the good padre asks the saints to bless us? Eulogia, thou hast sworn thou wilt write to no man, but thou wilt write to me, my little one. Thou wilt not break the heart that lives in thine.

“I kiss thy little feet. I kiss thy tiny hands. I kiss—ay, Eulogia! Adios! Adios!

“PABLO.”

Eulogia could not resist that letter. Her scruples vanished, and, after an entire day of agonized composition, she sent these lines:—

“You can come back to San Luis Obispo.

“EULOGIA AMATA FRANCISCA GUADALUPE CARILLO.”

VI

Another year had passed. No answer had come from Pablo Ignestria. Nor had he returned to San Luis Obispo. Two months after Eulogia had sent her letter, she received one from Graciosa La Cruz, containing the information that Ignestria had married the invalid girl whose love for him had been the talk of Monterey for many years. And Eulogia? Her flirtations had earned her far and wide the title of Dona Coquetta, and she was cooler, calmer, and more audacious than ever.

“Dost thou never intend to marry?” demanded Dona Pomposa one day, as she stood over the kitchen stove stirring red peppers into a saucepan full of lard.

Eulogia was sitting on the table swinging her small feet. “Why do you wish me to marry? I am well enough as I am. Was Elena Castanares so happy with the man who was mad for her that I should hasten to be a neglected wife? Poor my Elena! Four years, and then consumption and death. Three children and an indifferent husband, who was dying of love when he could not get her.”

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“Thou thinkest of unhappy marriages because thou hast just heard of Elena’s death. But there are many others.”

“Did you hear of the present she left her mother?”

“No.” Dona Pomposa dropped her spoon; she dearly loved a bit of gossip. “What was it?”

“You know that a year ago Elena went home to Los Quervos and begged Don Roberto and Dona Jacoba on her knees to forgive her, and they did, and were glad to do it. Dona Jacoba was with her when she was so ill at the last, and just before she died Elena said: ’Mother, in that chest you will find a legacy from me. It is all of my own that I have in the world, and I leave it to you. Do not take it until I am dead.’ And what do you think it was? The greenhide reata.”

“Mother of God! But Jacoba must have felt as if she were already in purgatory.”

“It is said that she grew ten years older in the night.”

“May the saints be praised, my child can leave me no such gift. But all men are not like Dario Castanares. I would have thee marry an American. They are smart and know how to keep the gold. Remember, I have little now, and thou canst not be young forever.”

“I have seen no American I would marry.”

“There is Don Abel Hudson.”

“I do not trust that man. His tongue is sweet and his face is handsome, but always when I meet him I feel a little afraid, although it goes away in a minute. The Senor Dumas says that a woman’s instincts—”

“To perdition with Senor Dumas! Does he say that a chit’s instincts are better than her mother’s? Don Abel throws about the money like rocks. He has the best horses at the races. He tells me that he has a house in Yerba Buena—”

“San Francisco. And I would not live in that bleak and sandy waste. Did you notice how he limped at the ball last night?”

“No. What of that? But I am not in love with Don Abel Hudson if thou art so set against him. It is true that no one knows just who he is, now I think of it. I had not made up my mind that he was the husband for thee. But let it be an American, my Eulogia. Even when they have no money they will work for it, and that is what no Californian will do—”

But Eulogia had run out of the room: she rarely listened to the end of her mother's harangues. She draped a reboso about her head, and went over to the house of Graciosa La Cruz. Her friend was sitting by her bedroom window, trimming a yellow satin bed-spread with lace, and Eulogia took up a half-finished sheet and began fastening the drawn threads into an intricate pattern.

"Only ten days more, my Graciosa," she said mischievously. "Art thou going to run back to thy mother in thy night-gown, like Josefita Olvera?"

"Never will I be such a fool! Eulogia, I have a husband for thee."

"To the tunnel of the mission with husbands! I shall be an old maid like Aunt Anastacia, fat, with black whiskers."

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Graciosa laughed. “Thou wilt marry and have ten children.”

“By every station in the mission I will not. Why bring more women into the world to suffer?”

“Ay, Eulogia! thou art always saying things I cannot understand and that thou shouldst not think about. But I have a husband for thee. He came from Los Angeles this morning, and is a friend of my Carlos. His name is not so pretty—Tomas Garfias. There he rides now.”

Eulogia looked out of the window with little curiosity. A small young man was riding down the street on a superb horse coloured like golden bronze, with silver mane and tail. His saddle of embossed leather was heavily mounted with silver; the spurs were inlaid with gold and silver, and the straps of the latter were worked with gleaming metal threads. He wore a light red serape, heavily embroidered and fringed. His botas of soft deerskin, dyed a rich green and stamped with Aztec Eagles, were tied at the knee by a white silk cord wound about the leg and finished with heavy silver tassels. His short breeches were trimmed with gold lace. As he caught Graciosa’s eye he raised his sombrero, then rode through the open door of a neighbouring saloon and tossed off an American drink without dismounting from his horse.

Eulogia lifted her shoulders. “I like his saddle and his horse, but he is too small. Still, a new man is not disagreeable. When shall I meet him?”

“To-night, my Eulogia. He goes with us to Miramar.”

VII

A party of young people started that night for a ball at Miramar, the home of Don Polycarpo Quijas. Many a caballero had asked the lady of his choice to ride on his saddle while he rode on the less comfortable aquera behind and guided his horse with arm as near her waist as he dared. Dona Pomposa, with a small brood under her wing, started last of all in an American wagon. The night was calm, the moon was high, the party very gay.

Abel Hudson and the newcomer, Don Tomas Garfias, sat on either side of Eulogia, and she amused herself at the expense of both.

“Don Tomas says that he is handsomer than the men of San Luis,” she said to Hudson. “Do not you think he is right? See what a beautiful curl his mustachios have, and what a droop his eyelids. Holy Mary!—how that yellow ribbon becomes his hair! Ay, senor! Why have you come to dazzle the eyes of the poor girls of San Luis Obispo?”

“Ah, senorita,” said the little dandy, “it will do their eyes good to see an elegant young man from the city. And they should see my sister. She would teach them how to dress and arrange their hair.”

“Bring her to teach us, senor, and for reward we will find her a tall and modest husband such as the girls of San Luis Obispo admire. Don Abel, why do you not boast of your sisters? Have you none, nor mother, nor father, nor brother? I never hear you speak of them. Maybe you grow alone out of the earth.”

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Hudson's gaze wandered to the canon they were approaching. "I am alone, senorita; a lonely man in a strange land."

"Is that the reason why you are such a traveller, senor? Are you never afraid, in your long lonely rides over the mountains, of that dreadful bandit, John Power, who murders whole families for the sack of gold they have under the floor? I hope you always carry plenty of pistols, senor."

"True, dear senorita. It is kind of you to put me on my guard. I never had thought of this man."

"This devil, you mean. When last night I saw you come limping into the room—"

"Ay, yi, yi, Dios!" "Maria!" "Dios de mi alma!" "Dios de mi vida!" "Cielo santo!"

A wheel had given way, and the party was scattered about the road.

No one was hurt, but loud were the lamentations. No Californian had ever walked six miles, and the wheel was past repair. But Abel Hudson came to the rescue.

"Leave it to me," he said. "I pledge myself to get you there," and he went off in the direction of a ranch-house.

"Ay! the good American! The good American!" cried the girls. "Eulogia! how canst thou be so cold to him? The handsome stranger with the kind heart!"

"His heart is like the Sacramento Valley, veined with gold instead of blood." "Holy Mary!" she cried some moments later, "what is he bringing? The wagon of the country!"

Abel Hudson was standing erect on the low floor of a wagon drawn by two strong black mules. The wagon was a clumsy affair,—a large wooden frame covered with rawhide, and set upon a heavy axle. The wheels were made of solid sections of trees, and the harness was of greenhide. An Indian boy sat astride one of the mules. On either side rode a vaquero, with his reata fastened to the axle-tree.

"This is the best I can do," said Hudson. "There is probably not another American wagon between San Luis and Miramar. Do you think you can stand it?"

The girls shrugged their pretty shoulders. The men swore into their mustachios. Dona Pomposa groaned at the prospect of a long ride in a springless wagon. But no one was willing to return, and when Eulogia jumped lightly in, all followed, and Hudson placed them as comfortably as possible, although they were obliged to sit on the floor.

The wagon jolted down the canon, the mules plunging, the vaqueros shouting; but the moon glittered like a silvered snow peak, the wild green forest was about them, and

even Eulogia grew a little sentimental as Abel Hudson's blue eyes bent over hers and his curly head cut off Dona Pomposa's view.

"Dear senorita," he said, "thy tongue is very sharp, but thou hast a kind heart. Hast thou no place in it for Abel Hudson?"

"In the sala, senor—where many others are received—with mamma and Aunt Anastacia sitting in the corner."

He laughed. "Thou wilt always jest! But I would take all the rooms, and turn every one out, even to Dona Pomposa and Dona Anastacia!"

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“And leave me alone with you! God of my soul! How I should yawn!”

“Oh, yes, Dona Coquetta, I am used to such pretty little speeches. When you began to yawn I should ride away, and you would be glad to see me when I returned.”

“What would you bring me from the mountains, senor?”

He looked at her steadily. “Gold, senorita. I know of many rich veins. I have a little canon suspected by no one else, where I pick out a sack full of gold in a day. Gold makes the life of a beloved wife very sweet, senorita.”

“In truth I should like the gold better than yourself, senor,” said Eulogia, frankly. “For if you will have the truth—Ay! Holy heaven! This is worse than the other!”

A lurch, splash, and the party with shrill cries sprang to their feet; the low cart was filling with water. They had left the canon and were crossing a slough; no one had remembered that it would be high tide. The girls, without an instant’s hesitation, whipped their gowns up round their necks; but their feet were wet and their skirts draggled. They made light of it, however, as they did of everything, and drove up to Miramar amidst high laughter and rattling jests.

Dona Luisa Quijas, a handsome shrewd-looking woman, magnificently dressed in yellow satin, the glare and sparkle of jewels on her neck, came out upon the corridor to meet them.

“What is this? In a wagon of the country! An accident? Ay, Dios de mi vida, the slough! Come in—quick! quick! I will give you dry clothes. Trust these girls to take care of their gowns. Mary! What wet feet! Quick! quick! This way, or you will have red noses to-morrow,” and she led them down the corridor, past the windows through which they could see the dancers in the sala, and opened the door of her bedroom.

“There, my children, help yourselves,” and she pulled out the capacious drawers of her chest. “All is at your service.” She lifted out an armful of dry underclothing, then went to the door of an adjoining room and listened, her hand uplifted.

“Didst thou have to lock him up?” asked Dona Pomposa, as she drew on a pair of Dona Luisa’s silk stockings.

“Yes! yes! And such a time, my friend! Thou knowest that after I fooled him the last time he swore I never should have another ball. But, Dios de mi alma! I never was meant to be bothered with a husband, and have I not given him three children twenty times handsomer than himself? Is not that enough? By the soul of Saint Luis the Bishop, I will continue to promise, and then get absolution at the mission, but I will not perform! Well, he was furious, my friend; he had spent a sack of gold on that ball, and he swore I never should have another. So this time I invited my guests, and told him

nothing. At seven to-night I persuaded him into his room, and locked the door. But, madre de Dios! Diego had forgotten to screw down the window, and he got out. I could not get him back, Pomposa, and his

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big nose was purple with rage. He swore that he would turn every guest away from the door; he swore that he would be taking a bath on the corridor when they came up, and throw insults in their faces. Ay, Pomposa! I went down on my knees. I thought I should not have my ball—such cakes as I had made, and such salads! But Diego saved me. He went into Don Polycarpo's room and cried 'Fire!' Of course the old man ran there, and then we locked him in. Diego had screwed down the window first. Dios de mi vida! but he is terrible, that man! What have I done to be punished with him?"

"Thou art too handsome and too cruel, my Luisa. But, in truth, he is an old wild-cat. The saints be praised that he is safe for the night. Did he swear?"

"Swear! He has cursed the skin off his throat and is quiet now. Come, my little ones, are you ready? The caballeros are dry in Diego's clothes by this time, and waiting for their waltzes;" and she drove them through the door into the sala with a triumphant smile on her dark sparkling face.

The rest of the party had been dancing for an hour, and all gathered about the girls to hear the story of the accident, which was told with many variations. Eulogia as usual was craved for dances, but she capriciously divided her favours between Abel Hudson and Don Tomas Garfias. During the intervals, when the musicians were silent and the girls played the guitar or threw cascarones at their admirers, she sat in the deep window-seat watching the ponderous waves of the Pacific hurl themselves against the cliffs, whilst Hudson pressed close to her side, disregarding the insistence of Garfias. Finally, the little Don from the City of the Angels went into the dining room to get a glass of angelica, and Hudson caught at his chance.

"Senorita," he exclaimed, interrupting one of her desultory remarks, "for a year I have loved you, and, for many reasons, I have not dared to tell you. I must tell you now. I have no reason to think you care more for me than for a dozen other men, but if you will marry me, senorita, I will build you a beautiful American house in San Luis Obispo, and you can then be with your friends when business calls me away."

"And where will you live when you are away from me?" asked Eulogia, carelessly. "In a cave in the mountains? Be careful of the bandits."

"Senorita," he replied calmly, "I do not know what you mean by the things you say sometimes. Perhaps you have the idea that I am another person—John Power, or Pio Lenares, for instance. Do you wish me to bring you a certificate to the effect that I am Abel Hudson? I can do so, although I thought that Californians disdained the written form and trusted to each other's honour, even to the selling of cattle and lands."

"You are not a Californian."

“Ah, senorita—God! what is that?”

A tremendous knocking at the outer door sounded above the clear soprano of Graciosa La Cruz.

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“A late guest, no doubt. You are white like the wall. I think the low ceilings are not so good for your health, senor, as the sharp air of the mountains. Ay, Dios!” The last words came beneath her breath, and she forgot Abel Hudson. The front doors had been thrown open, and a caballero in riding-boots and a dark scrape wound about his tall figure had entered the room and flung his sombrero and saddle-bags into a corner. It was Pablo Ignestria.

“At your feet, senora,” he said to Dona Luisa, who held out both hands, welcome on her charming face. “I am an uninvited guest, but when I arrived at San Luis and found that all the town had come to one of Dona Luisa’s famous balls, I rode on, hoping that for friendship’s sake she would open her hospitable doors to a wanderer, and let him dance off the stiffness of a long ride.”

“You are welcome, welcome, Pablo,” said Dona Luisa. “Go to the dining room and get a glass of aguardiente; then come back and dance until dawn.”

Ignestria left the room with Diego Quijas, but returned in a few moments and walked directly over to Eulogia, ignoring the men who stood about her.

“Give me this dance,” he whispered eagerly. “I have something to say to thee. I have purposely come from Monterey to say it.”

Eulogia was looking at him with angry eyes, her brain on fire. But curiosity triumphed, and she put her hand on his shoulder as the musicians swept their guitars with lithe fingers, scraped their violins, and began the waltz.

“Eulogia!” exclaimed Ignestria; “dost thou suspect why I have returned?”

“Why should I suspect what I have not thought about?”

“Ay, Eulogia! Art thou as saucy as ever? But I will tell thee, beloved one. The poor girl who bore my name is dead, and I have come to beg an answer to my letter. Ay, little one, I *feel* thy love. Why couldst thou not have sent me one word? I was so angry when passed week after week and no answer came, that in a fit of spleen I married the poor sick girl. And what I suffered, Eulogia, after that mad act! Long ago I told myself that I should have come back for my answer, that you had sworn you would write no letter; I should have let you have your little caprices, but I did not reason until—”

“I answered your letter!” exclaimed Eulogia, furiously. “You know that I answered it! You only wished to humble me because I had sworn I would write to no man. Traitor! I hate you! You were engaged to the girl all the time you were here.”

“Eulogia! Believe! Believe!”

“I would not believe you if you kissed the cross! You said to yourself, ’That little coquette, I will teach her a lesson. To think the little chit should fancy an elegant Montereno could fall in love with her!’ Ah! ha! Oh, Dios! I hate thee, thou false man-of-the-world! Thou art the very picture of the men I have read about in the books of the Senor Dumas; and yet I was fooled by thy first love-word! But I never loved you. Never, never! It was only a fancy—because you were from Monterey. I am glad you did not get my letter, for I hate you! Mother of Christ! I hate you!”

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He whirled her into the dining room. No one else was there. He kissed her full on the mouth.

“Dost thou believe me now?” he asked.

She raised her little hand and struck him on the face, but the sting was not hotter than her lips had been.

“May the saints roll you in perdition!” she cried hoarsely. “May they thrust burning coals into the eyes that lied to me! May the devils bite off the fingers that made me shame myself! God! God! I hate you! I—I, who have fooled so many men, to have been rolled in the dust by you!”

He drew back and regarded her sadly.

“I see that it is no use to try to convince you,” he said; “and I have no proof to show that I never received your letter. But while the stars jewel the heavens, Eulogia, I shall love thee and believe that thou lovest me.”

He opened the door, and she swept past him into the sala. Abel Hudson stepped forward to offer his arm, and for the moment Pablo forgot Eulogia.

“John Power!” he cried.

Hudson, with an oath, leaped backward, sprang upon the window-seat, and smashing the pane with his powerful hand disappeared before the startled men thought of stopping him.

“Catch him! Catch him!” cried Ignestria, excitedly. “It is John Power. He stood me up a year ago.”

He whipped his pistol from the saddle-bags in the corner, and opening the door ran down the road, followed by the other men, shouting and firing their pistols into the air. But they were too late. Power had sprung upon Ignestria’s horse, and was far on his way.

VIII

The next day Eulogia went with her mother and Aunt Anastacia to pay a visit of sympathy to Dona Jacoba at Los Quervos. Eulogia’s eyes were not so bright nor her lips so red as they had been the night before, and she had little to say as the wagon jolted over the rough road, past the cypress fences, then down between the beautiful tinted hills of Los Quervos. Dona Pomposa sat forward on the high seat, her feet dangling just above the floor, her hands crossed as usual over her stomach, a sudden

twirl of thumbs punctuating her remarks. She wore a loose black gown trimmed with ruffles, and a black reboso about her head. Aunt Anastacia was attired in a like manner, but clutched the side of the wagon with one hand and an American sunshade with the other.

“Poor Jacoba!” exclaimed Dona Pomposa; “her stern heart is heavy this day. But she has such a sense of her duty, Anastacia. Only that makes her so stern.”

“O-h-h-h, y-e-e-s.” When Aunt Anastacia was preoccupied or excited, these words came from her with a prolonged outgoing and indrawing.

“I must ask her for the recipe for those cakes—the lard ones, Anastacia. I have lost it.”

“O-h-h, y-e-e-s. I love those cakes. Madre de Dios! It is hot!”

“I wonder will she give Eulogia a mantilla when the chit marries. She has a chest full.”

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“Surely. Jacoba is generous.”

“Poor my friend! Ay, her heart—Holy Mary! What is that?”

She and Aunt Anastacia stumbled to their feet. The sound of pistol shots was echoing between the hills. Smoke was rising from the willow forest that covered the centre of the valley.

The Indian whipped up his horses with an excited grunt, the two old women reeling and clutching wildly at each other. At the same time they noticed a crowd of horsemen galloping along the hill which a sudden turn in the road had opened to view.

“It is the Vigilantes,” said Eulogia, calmly, from the front seat. “They are after John Power and Pio Lenares and their lieutenants. After that awful murder in the mountains the other day, the men of San Luis and the ranchos swore they would hunt them out, and this morning they traced them to Los Quervos. I suppose they have made a barricade in the willows, and the Vigilantes are trying to fire them out.”

“Heart of Saint Peter! Thou little brat! Why didst thou not tell us of this before, and not let us come here to be shot by flying bullets?”

“I forgot,” said Eulogia, indifferently.

They could see nothing; but curiosity, in spite of fear, held them to the spot. Smoke and cries, shouts and curses, came from the willows; flocks of agitated crows circled screaming through the smoke. The men on the hill, their polished horses and brilliant attire flashing in the sun, kept up a ceaseless galloping, hallooing, and waving of sombreros. The beautiful earth-green and golden hills looked upon a far different scene from the gay cavalcades to which they were accustomed. Even Don Roberto Duncan, a black silk handkerchief knotted about his head, was dashing, on his gray horse, up and down the valley between the hills and the willows, regardless of chance bullets. And over all shone the same old sun, indifferent alike to slaughter and pleasure.

“Surely, Anastacia, all those bullets must shoot some one.”

“O—h—h, y—e—e—s.” Her sister was grasping the sunshade with both hands, her eyes starting from her head, although she never removed their gaze from the central volume of smoke.

“Ay, we can sleep in peace if those murdering bandits are killed!” exclaimed Dona Pomposa. “I have said a rosary every night for five years that they might be taken. And, holy heaven! To think that we have been petting the worst of them as if he were General Castro or Juan Alvarado. To think, my Eulogia!—that thirsty wild-cat has had his arm about thy waist more times than I can count.”

“He danced very well—aha!”

Aunt Anastacia gurgled like an idiot. Dona Pomposa gave a terrific shriek, which Eulogia cut in two with her hand. A man had crawled out of the brush near them. His face was black with powder, one arm hung limp at his side. Dona Pomposa half raised her arm to signal the men on the hill, but her daughter gave it such a pinch that she fell back on the seat, faint for a moment.

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“Let him go,” said Eulogia. “Do you want to see a man cut in pieces before your eyes? You would have to say rosaries for the rest of your life.” She leaned over the side of the wagon and spoke to the dazed man, whose courage seemed to have deserted him.

“Don Abel Hudson, you do not look so gallant as at the ball last night, but you helped us to get there, and I will save you now. Get into the wagon, and take care you crawl in like a snake that you may not be seen.”

“No—no!” cried the two older women, but in truth they were too terrified not to submit. Power swung himself mechanically over the wheel, and lay on the floor of the wagon. Eulogia, in spite of a protesting whimper from Aunt Anastacia, loosened that good dame’s ample outer skirt and threw it over the fallen bandit. Then the faithful Benito turned his horse and drove as rapidly toward the town as the rough roads would permit. They barely had started when they heard a great shouting behind them, and turned in apprehension, whilst the man on the floor groaned aloud in his fear. But the Vigilantes rode by them unsuspecting. Across their saddles they carried the blackened and dripping bodies of Lenares and his lieutenants; through the willows galloped the caballeros in search of John Power. But they did not find him, then nor after. Dona Pomposa hid him in her woodhouse until midnight, when he stole away and was never seen near San Luis again. A few years later came the word that he had been assassinated by one of his lieutenants in Lower California, and his body eaten by wild hogs.

IX

“Al contado plasentero
Del primer beso de amor,
Un fuego devorador
Que en mi pecho siento ardor.

“Y no me vuelvas a besar
Por que me quema tu aliento,
Ya desfayeserme siento,
Mas enbriagada de amor.

“Si a cuantas estimas, das
Beso en pruebas de amor;
Si me amas hasme el favor
De no besarme jamas.”

A caballero on a prancing horse sang beneath Eulogia’s window, his jingling spurs keeping time to the tinkling of his guitar. Eulogia turned over in bed, pulling the sheet above her ears, and went to sleep.

The next day, when Don Tomas Garfias asked her hand of her mother, Dona Coquetta accepted him with a shrug of her shoulders.

“And thou lovest me, Eulogia?” murmured the enraptured little dandy as Dona Pomposa and Aunt Anastacia good-naturedly discussed the composition of American pies.

“No.”

“Ay! senorita! Why, then, dost thou marry me? No one compels thee.”

“It pleases me. What affair of thine are my reasons if I consent to marry you?”

“Oh, Eulogia, I believe thou lovest me! Why not? Many pretty girls have done so before thee. Thou wishest only to tease me a little.”

“Well, do not let me see too much of you before the wedding-day, or I may send you back to those who admire you more than I do.”

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“Perhaps it is well that I go to San Francisco to remain three months,” said the young man, sulkily; he had too much vanity to be enraged. “Wilt thou marry me as soon as I return?”

“As well then as any other time.”

Garfias left San Luis a few days later to attend to important business in San Francisco, and although Dona Pomposa and Aunt Anastacia began at once to make the wedding outfit, Eulogia appeared to forget that she ever had given a promise of marriage. She was as great a belle as ever, for no one believed that she would keep faith with any man, much less with such a ridiculous scrap as Garfias. Her flirtations were more calmly audacious than ever, her dancing more spirited; in every frolic she was the leader.

Suddenly Dona Pomposa was smitten with rheumatism. She groaned by night and shouted by day. Eulogia, whose patience was not great, organized a camping party to the sulphur springs of the great rancho, Paso des Robles. The young people went on horseback; Dona Pomposa and Aunt Anastacia in the wagon with the tents and other camping necessities. Groans and shrieks mingled with the careless laughter of girls and caballeros, who looked upon rheumatism as the inevitable sister of old age; but when they entered the park-like valley after the ride over the beautiful chrome mountains, Dona Pomposa declared that the keen dry air had already benefited her.

That evening, when the girls left their tents, hearts fluttered, and gay muslin frocks waved like agitated banners. Several Americans were pitching their tents by the spring. They proved to be a party of mining engineers from San Francisco, and although there was only one young man among them, the greater was the excitement. Many of the girls were beautiful, with their long braids and soft eyes, but Eulogia, in her yellow gown, flashed about like a succession of meteors, as the Americans drew near and proffered their services to Dona Pomposa.

The young man introduced himself as Charles Rogers. He was a good-looking little fellow, in the lighter American style. His well-attired figure was slim and active, his mouse-coloured hair short and very straight, his shrewd eyes were blue. After a few moments’ critical survey of the charming faces behind Dona Pomposa, he went off among the trees, and returning with a bunch of wild flowers walked straight over to Eulogia and handed them to her.

She gave him a roguish little courtesy. “Much thanks, senor. You must scuse my English; I no spik often. The Americanos no care for the flores?”

“I like them well enough, but I hope you will accept these.”

“Si, senor.” She put them in her belt. “You like California?”

“Very much. It is full of gold, and, I should say, excellent for agriculture.”

“But it no is beautiful country?”

“Oh, yes, it does very well, and the climate is pretty fair in some parts.”

“You living in San Francisco?”

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“I am a mining engineer, and we have got hold of a good thing near here.”

“The mine—it is yours?”

“Only a part of it.”

“The Americanos make all the money now.”

“The gold was put here for some one to take out. You Californians had things all your own way for a hundred years, but you let it stay there.”

“Tell me how you take it out.”

He entered into a detailed and somewhat technical description, but her quick mind grasped the meaning of unfamiliar words.

“You like make the money?” she asked, after he had finished.

“Of course. What else is a man made for? Life is a pretty small affair without money.”

“We no have much now, but we live very happy. The Americanos love the money, though. Alway I see that.”

“Americans have sense.”

He devoted himself to her during the ten days of their stay, and his business shrewdness and matter-of-fact conversation attracted the keen-witted girl, satiated with sighs and serenades. Always eager for knowledge, she learned much from him of the Eastern world. She did not waste a glance on her reproachful caballeros, but held long practical conversations with Rogers under the mending wing of Dona Pomposa, who approved of the stranger, having ascertained his abilities and prospects from the older men of his party.

On the morning of their return to San Luis Obispo, Rogers and Eulogia were standing somewhat apart, whilst the vaqueros rounded up the horses that had strayed at will through the valley. Rogers plucked one of the purple autumn lilies and handed it to her.

“Senorita,” he said, “suppose you marry me. It is a good thing for a man to be married in a wild country like this; he is not so apt to gamble and drink. And although I’ve seen a good many pretty girls, I’ve seen no one so likely to keep me at home in the evening as yourself. What do you say?”

Eulogia laughed. His wooing interested her.

“I promise marry another man; not I think much I ever go to do it.”

“Well, let him go, and marry me.”

“I no think I like you much better. But I spose I must get marry some day. Here my mother come. Ask her. I do what she want.”

Dona Pomposa was trotting toward them, and while she struggled for her lost breath Eulogia repeated the proposal of the American, twanging her guitar the while.

The old lady took but one moment to make up her mind. “The American,” she said rapidly in Spanish. “Garfias is rich now, but in a few years the Americans will have everything. Garfias will be poor; this man will be rich. Marry the American,” and she beamed upon Rogers.

Eulogia shrugged her shoulders and turned to her practical wooer.

“My mother she say she like you the best.”

“Then I may look upon that little transaction as settled?”

“Si you like it.”

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"*Which* art thou going to marry, Eulogia?" asked one of the girls that night, as they rode down the mountain.

"Neither," said Eulogia, serenely.

X

Eulogia had just passed through an animated interview with her mother. Dona Pomposa had stormed and Eulogia had made an occasional reply in her cool monotonous voice, her gaze absently fixed on the gardens of the mission.

"Thou wicked little coquette!" cried Dona Pomposa, her voice almost worn out. "Thou darest repeat to me that thou wilt not marry the Senor Rogers!"

"I will not. It was amusing to be engaged to him for a time, but now I am tired. You can give him what excuse you like, but tell him to go."

"And the clothes I have made—the chests of linen with the beautiful deshalados that nearly put out Aunt Anastacia's eyes! The new silk gowns! Dias de mi vida! The magnificent bed-spread with the lace as deep as my hand!"

"They will keep until I do marry. Besides, I need some new clothes."

"Dost thou indeed, thou little brat! Thou shalt not put on a smock or a gown in that chest if thou goest naked! But thou shalt marry him, I say!"

"No."

"Oh, thou ice-hearted little devil!" Even Dona Pomposa's stomach was trembling with rage, and her fingers were jumping. "Whom then wilt thou marry? Garfias?"

"No."

"Thou wilt be an old maid like Aunt Anastacia."

"Perhaps."

"O—h—h—Who is this?"

A stranger in travelling scrape and riding-boots had dashed up to the house, and flung himself from his horse. He knocked loudly on the open door, then entered without waiting for an invitation, and made a deep reverence to Dona Pomposa.

“At your service, senora. At your service, senorita. I come from the Senor Don Tomas Garfias. Word has reached him that the Senorita Eulogia is about to marry an American. I humbly ask you to tell me if this be true or not. I have been told in town that the wedding is set for the day after to-morrow.”

“Ask her!” cried Dona Pomposa, tragically, and she swung herself to the other end of the room.

“Senorita, at your feet.”

“You can tell your friend that I have no more intention of marrying the American than I have of marrying him.”

“Senorita! But he expected to return next week and marry you.”

“We expect many things in this world that we do not get.”

“But—a thousand apologies for my presumption, senorita—why did you not write and tell him?”

“I never write letters.”

“But you could have sent word by some friend travelling to San Francisco, senorita.”

“He would find it out in good time. Why hurry?”

“Ay, senorita, well are you named Dona Coquetta. You are famous even to San Francisco. I will return to my poor friend. At your service, senora. At your service, senorita,” and he bowed himself out, and galloped away.

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Dona Pomposa threw herself into her chair, and wept aloud.

“Mother of God! I had thought to see her married to a thrifty American! What have I done to be punished with so heartless a child? And the Americans will have all the money! The little I have will go, too! We shall be left sitting in the street. And we might have a wooden house in San Francisco, and go to the theatre! Oh, Mother of God, why dost thou not soften the heart of the wicked—”

Eulogia slipped out of the window, and went into the mission gardens. She walked slowly through the olive groves, lifting her arms to part the branches where the little purple spheres lay in their silver nests. Suddenly she came face to face with Pablo Ignestria.

Her cynical brain informed her stormy heart that any woman must succumb finally to the one man who had never bored her.

THE ISLE OF SKULLS

I

The good priests of Santa Barbara sat in grave conference on the long corridor of their mission. It was a winter’s day, and they basked in the sun. The hoods of their brown habits peaked above faces lean and ascetic, fat and good-tempered, stern, intelligent, weak, commanding. One face alone was young.

But for the subject under discussion they would have been at peace with themselves and with Nature. In the great square of the mission the Indians they had Christianized worked at many trades. The great aqueduct along the brow of one of the lower hills, the wheat and corn fields on the slopes, the trim orchards and vegetable gardens in the canons of the great bare mountains curving about the valley, were eloquent evidence of their cleverness and industry. From the open door of the church came the sound of lively and solemn tunes: the choir was practising for mass. The day was as peaceful as only those long drowsy shimmering days before the Americans came could be. And yet there was dissent among the padres.

Several had been speaking together, when one of the older men raised his hand with cold impatience.

“There is only one argument,” he said. “We came here, came to the wilderness out of civilization, for one object only—to lead the heathen to God. We have met with a fair success. Shall we leave these miserable islanders to perish, when we have it in our power to save?”

“But no one knows exactly where this island is, Father Jimeno,” replied the young priest. “And we know little of navigation, and may perish before we find it. Our lives are more precious than those of savages.”

“In the sight of God one soul is of precisely the same value as another, Father Carillo.”

The young priest scowled. “We can save. They cannot.”

“If we refuse to save when the power is ours, then the savage in his extremest beastiality has more hope of heaven than we have.”

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Father Carillo looked up at the golden sun riding high in the dark blue sky, down over the stately oaks and massive boulders of the valley where quail flocked like tame geese. He had no wish to leave his paradise, and as the youngest and hardiest of the priests, he knew that he would be ordered to take charge of the expedition.

“It is said also,” continued the older man, “that once a ship from the Continent of Europe was wrecked among those islands—”

“No? No?” interrupted several of the priests.

“It is more than probable that there were survivors, and that their descendants live on this very island to-day. Think of it, my brother! Men and women of our own blood, perhaps, living like beasts of the field! Worshipping idols! Destitute of morality! Can we sit here in hope of everlasting life while our brethren perish?”

“No!” The possibility of rescuing men of European blood had quenched dissent. Even Carillo spoke as spontaneously as the others.

As he had anticipated, the expedition was put in his charge. Don Guillermo Iturbi y Moncada, the magnate of the South, owned a small schooner, and placed it at the disposal of the priests.

Through the wide portals of the mission church, two weeks later, rolled the solemn music of high mass. The church was decorated as for a festival. The aristocrats of the town knelt near the altar, the people and Indians behind.

Father Carillo knelt and took communion, the music hushing suddenly to rise in more sonorous volume. Then Father Jimeno, bearing a cross and chanting the rosary, descended the altar steps and walked toward the doors. On either side of him a page swung a censer. Four women neophytes rose from among the worshippers, and shouldering a litter on which rested a square box containing an upright figure of the Holy Virgin followed with bent heads. The Virgin’s gown was of yellow satin, covered with costly Spanish lace; strands of Baja Californian pearls bedecked the front of her gown. Behind this resplendent image came the other priests, two and two, wearing their white satin embroidered robes, chanting the sacred mysteries. Father Carillo walked last and alone. His thin clever face wore an expression of nervous exaltation.

As the procession descended the steps of the church, the bells rang out a wild inspiring peal. The worshippers rose, and forming in line followed the priests down the valley.

When they reached the water’s edge, Father Jimeno raised the cross above his head, stepped with the other priests into a boat, and was rowed to the schooner. He sprinkled holy water upon the little craft; then Father Carillo knelt and received the blessing of each of his brethren. When he rose all kissed him solemnly, then returned to the shore,

where the whole town knelt. The boat brought back the six Indians who were to give greeting and confidence to their kinsmen on the island, and the schooner was ready to sail. As she weighed anchor, the priests knelt in a row before the people, Father Jimeno alone standing and holding the cross aloft with rigid arms.

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Father Carillo stood on deck and watched the white mission under the mountain narrow to a thread, the kneeling priests become dots of reflected light. His exaltation vanished. He was no longer the chief figure in a picturesque panorama. He set his lips and his teeth behind them. He was a very ambitious man. His dreams leapt beyond California to the capital of Spain. If he returned with his savages, he might make success serve as half the ladder. But would he return?

Wind and weather favoured him. Three days after leaving Santa Barbara he sighted a long narrow mountainous island. He had passed another of different proportions in the morning, and before night sighted still another, small and oval. But the lofty irregular mass, some ten miles long and four miles wide, which he approached at sundown, was the one he sought. The night world was alight under the white blaze of the moon; the captain rode into a small harbour at the extreme end of the island and cast anchor, avoiding reefs and shoals as facilely as by midday. Father Carillo gave his Indians orders to be ready to march at dawn.

The next morning the priest arrayed himself in his white satin garments, embroidered about the skirt with gold and on the chest with a purple cross pointed with gold. The brown woollen habit of his voyage was left behind. None knew better than he the value of theatric effect upon the benighted mind. His Indians wore gayly striped blankets of their own manufacture, and carried baskets containing presents and civilized food.

Bearing a large gilt cross, Father Carillo stepped on shore, waved farewell to the captain, and directed his Indians to keep faithfully in the line of march: they might come upon the savages at any moment. They toiled painfully through a long stretch of white sand, then passed into a grove of banana trees, dark, cold, noiseless, but for the rumble of the ocean. When they reached the edge of the grove, Father Carillo raised his cross and commanded the men to kneel. Rumour had told him what to expect, and he feared the effect on his simple and superstitious companions. He recited a chaplet, then, before giving them permission to rise, made a short address.

“My children, be not afraid at what meets your eyes. The ways of all men are not our ways. These people have seen fit to leave their dead unburied on the surface of the earth. But these poor bones can do you no more harm than do those you have placed beneath the ground in Santa Barbara. Now rise and follow me, nor turn back as you fear the wrath of God.”

He turned and strode forward, with the air of one to whom fear had no meaning; but even he closed his eyes for a moment in horror. The poor creatures behind mumbled and crossed themselves and clung to each other. The plain was a vast charnel-house. The sun, looking over the brow of an eastern hill, threw its pale rays upon thousands of crumbling skeletons, bleached by unnumbered suns, picked bare by dead and

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gone generations of carrion, white, rigid, sinister. Detached skulls lay in heaps, grinning derisively. Stark digits pointed threateningly, as if the old warriors still guarded their domain. Other frames lay face downward, as though the broken teeth had bitten the dust in battle. Slender forms lay prone, their arms encircling cooking utensils, beautiful in form and colour. Great bowls and urns, toy canoes, mortars and pestles, of serpentine, sandstone, and steatite, wrought with a lost art,—if, indeed, the art had ever been known beyond this island,—and baked to richest dyes, were placed at the head and feet of skeletons more lofty in stature than their fellows.

Father Carillo sprinkled holy water right and left, bidding his Indians chant a rosary for the souls which once had inhabited these appalling tenements. The Indians obeyed with clattering teeth, keeping their eyes fixed stonily upon the ground lest they stumble and fall amid yawning ribs.

The ghastly tramp lasted two hours. The sun spurned the hill-top and cast a flood of light upon the ugly scene. The white bones grew whiter, dazzling the eyes of the living. They reached the foot of a mountain and began a toilsome ascent through a dark forest. Here new terrors awaited them. Skeletons sat propped against trees, grinning out of the dusk, gleaming in horrid relief against the mass of shadow. Father Carillo, with one eye over his shoulder, managed by dint of command, threats, and soothing words to get his little band to the top of the hill. Once, when revolt seemed imminent, he asked them scathingly if they wished to retrace their steps over the plain unprotected by the cross, and they clung to his skirts thereafter. When they reached the summit, they lay down to rest and eat their luncheon, Father Carillo reclining carefully on a large mat: his fine raiment was a source of no little anxiety. No skeletons kept them company here. They had left the last many yards below.

“Anacleto,” commanded the priest, at the end of an hour, “crawl forward on thy hands and knees and peer over the brow of the mountain. Then come back and tell me if men like thyself are below.”

Anacleto obeyed, and returned in a few moments with bulging eyes and a broad smile of satisfaction. People were in the valley—a small band. They wore feathers like birds, and came and went from the base of the hill. There were no wigwams, no huts.

Father Carillo rose at once. Bidding his Indians keep in the background, he walked to the jutting brow of the hill, and throwing a rapid glance downward came to a sudden halt. With one hand he held the cross well away from him and high above his head. The sun blazed down on the burnished cross; on the white shining robes of the priest; on his calm benignant face thrown into fine relief by the white of the falling sleeve.

In a moment a low murmur arose from the valley, then a sudden silence. Father Carillo, glancing downward, saw that the people had prostrated themselves.

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He began the descent, holding the cross aloft, chanting solemnly; his Indians, to whom he had given a swift signal, following and lifting up their voices likewise. The mountain on this side was bare, as if from fire, the incline shorter and steeper. The priest noted all things, although he never forgot his lines.

Below was a little band of men and women. A broad plain swept from the mountain's foot, a forest broke its sweep, and the ocean thundered near. The people were clad in garments made from the feathered skins of birds, and were all past middle age. The foot of the mountain was perforated with caves.

When he stood before the trembling awe-struck savages, he spoke to them kindly and bade them rise. They did not understand, but lifted their heads and stared appealingly. He raised each in turn. As they once more looked upon his full magnificence, they were about to prostrate themselves again when they caught sight of the Indians. Those dark stolid faces, even that gay attire, they could understand. Glancing askance at the priest, they drew near to their fellow-beings, touched their hands to the strangers' breasts, and finally kissed them.

Father Carillo was a man of tact.

"My children," he said to his flock, "do you explain as best you-can to these our new friends what it is we have come to do. I will go into the forest and rest."

He walked swiftly across the plain, and parting the clinging branches of two gigantic ferns, entered the dim wood. He laid the heavy cross beneath a tree, and strolled idly. It was a forest of fronds. Lofty fern trees waved above wide-leaved palms. Here and there a little marsh with crowding plant life held the riotous groves apart. Down the mountain up which the forest spread tumbled a creek over coloured rocks, then wound its way through avenues, dark in the shadows, sparkling where the sunlight glinted through the tall tree-tops. Red lilies were everywhere. The aisles were vocal with whispering sound.

The priest threw himself down on a bed of dry leaves by the creek. After a time his eyes closed. He was weary, and slept.

He awoke suddenly, the power of a steadfast gaze dragging his brain from its rest. A girl sat on a log in the middle of the creek. Father Carillo stared incredulously, believing himself to be dreaming. The girl's appearance was unlike anything he had ever seen. Like the other members of her tribe, she wore a garment of feathers, and her dark face was cast in the same careless and gentle mould; but her black eyes had a certain intelligence, unusual to the Indians of California, and the hair that fell to her knees was the colour of flame. Apparently she was not more than eighteen years old.

Father Carillo, belonging to a period when bleached brunettes were unknown, hastily crossed himself.

“Who are you?” he asked.

His voice was deep and musical. It had charmed many a woman’s heart, despite the fact that he had led a life of austerity and sought no woman’s smiles. But this girl at the sound of it gave a loud cry and bounded up the mountain, leaping through the brush like a deer.

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[Illustration: “HE AWOKE SUDDENLY, THE POWER OF A STEADFAST GAZE DRAGGING HIS BRAIN FROM ITS REST.”]

The priest rose, drank of the bubbles in the stream, and retraced his steps. He took up the burden of the cross again and returned to the village. There he found the savage and the Christianized sitting together in brotherly love. The islanders were decked with the rosaries presented to them, and the women in their blankets were swollen with pride. All had eaten of bread and roast fowl, and made the strangers offerings of strange concoctions in magnificent earthen dishes. As the priest appeared the heathen bowed low, then gathered about him. Their awe had been dispelled, and they responded to the magnetism of his voice and smile. He knew many varieties of the Indian language, and succeeded in making them understand that he wished them to return with him, and that he would make them comfortable and happy. They nodded their heads vigorously as he spoke, but pointed to their venerable chief, who sat at the entrance of his cave eating of a turkey’s drumstick. Father Carillo went over to the old man and saluted him respectfully. The chief nodded, waved his hand at a large flat stone, and continued his repast, his strong white teeth crunching bone as well as flesh. The priest spread his handkerchief on the stone, seated himself, and stated the purpose of his visit. He dwelt at length upon the glories of civilization. The chief dropped his bone after a time and listened attentively. When the priest finished, he uttered a volley of short sentences.

“Good. We go. Great sickness come. All die but us. Many, many, many. We are strong no more. No children come. We are old—all. One young girl not die. The young men die. The young women die. The children die. No more will come. Yes, we go.”

“And this young girl with the hair—” The priest looked upward. The sun had gone. He touched the gold of the cross, then his own hair.

“Dorthe,” grunted the old man, regarding his bare drumstick regretfully.

“Who is she? Where did she get such a name? Why has she that hair?”

Out of another set of expletives Father Carillo gathered that Dorthe was the granddaughter of a man who had been washed ashore after a storm, and who had dwelt on the island until he died. He had married a woman of the tribe, and to his daughter had given the name of Dorthe—or so the Indians had interpreted it—and his hair, which was like the yellow fire. This girl had inherited both. He had been very brave and much beloved, but had died while still young. Their ways were not his ways, Father Carillo inferred, and barbarism had killed him.

The priest did not see Dorthe again that day. When night came, he was given a cave to himself. He hung up his robes on a jutting point of rock, and slept the sleep of the

weary. At the first shaft of dawn he rose, intending to stroll down to the beach in search of a bay where he could bathe; but as he stepped across the prostrate Californians, asleep at the entrance of his cave, he paused abruptly, and changed his plans.

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On the far edge of the ocean the rising diadem of the sun sent great bubbles of colour up through a low bank of pale green cloud to the gray night sky and the sulky stars. And, under the shadow of the cacti and palms, in rapt mute worship, knelt the men and women the priest had come to save, their faces and clasped hands uplifted to the waking sun.

Father Carillo awoke his Indians summarily.

“Gather a dozen large stones and build an altar—quick!” he commanded.

The sleepy Indians stumbled to their feet, obeyed orders, and in a few moments a rude altar was erected. The priest propped the cross on the apex, and, kneeling with his Indians, slowly chanted a mass. The savages gathered about curiously; then, impressed by the solemnity of the priest’s voice and manner, sank to their knees once more, although directing to the sun an occasional glance of anxiety. When the priest rose, he gave them to understand that he was deeply gratified by their response to the religion of civilization, and pointed to the sun, now full-orbed, amiably swimming in a jewelled mist. Again they prostrated themselves, first to him, then to their deity, and he knew that the conquest was begun.

After breakfast they were ready to follow him. They had cast their feathered robes into a heap, and wore the blankets, one and all. Still Dorthe had not appeared. The chief sent a man in search of her, and when, after some delay, she entered his presence, commanded her to make herself ready to go with the tribe. For a time she protested angrily. But when she found that she must go or remain alone, she reluctantly joined the forming procession, although refusing to doff her bird garment, and keeping well in the rear that she might not again look upon that terrible presence in white and gold, that face with its strange pallor and piercing eyes. Father Carillo, who was very much bored, would have been glad to talk to her, but recognized that he must keep his distance if he wished to include her among his trophies.

The natives knew of a shorter trail to the harbour, and one of them led the way, Father Carillo urging his footsteps, for the green cloud of dawn was now high and black and full. A swift wind was rustling the tree-tops and tossing the ocean white. As they skirted the plain of the dead, the priest saw a strange sight. The wind had become a gale. It caught up great armfuls of sand from the low dunes, and hurled them upon the skeletons, covering them from sight. Sometimes a gust would snatch the blanket from one to bury another more deeply; and for a moment the old bones would gleam again, to be enveloped in the on-rushing pillar of whirling sand. Through the storm leaped the wild dogs, yelping dismally.

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When the party reached the stretch beyond the banana grove, they saw the schooner tossing and pulling at her anchor. The captain shouted to them to hurry. The boat awaiting them at the beach was obliged to make three trips. Father Carillo went in the first boat; Dorthe remained for the last. She was the last, also, to ascend the ladder at the ship's side. As she put her foot on deck, and confronted again the pale face and shining robes of the young priest, she screamed, and leapt from the vessel into the waves. The chief and his tribe shouted their entreaties to return. But she had disappeared, and the sky was black. The captain refused to lower the boat again. He had already weighed anchor, and he hurriedly represented that to remain longer in the little bay, with its reefs and rocks, its chopping waves, would mean death to all. The priest was obliged to sacrifice the girl to the many lives in his keep.

II

Dorthe darted through the hissing waves, undismayed by the darkness or the screaming wind; she and the ocean had been friends since her baby days. When a breaker finally tossed her on the shore, she scrambled to the bank, then stood long endeavouring to pierce the rain for sight of the vessel. But it was far out in the dark. Dorthe was alone on the island. For a time she howled in dismal fashion. She was wholly without fear, but she had human needs and was lonesome. Then reason told her that when the storm was over the ship would return to seek her; and she fled and hid in the banana grove. The next morning the storm had passed; but the ship was nowhere to be seen, and she started for home.

The wind still blew, but it had veered. This time it caught the sand from the skeletons, and bore it rapidly back to the dunes. Dorthe watched the old bones start into view. Sometimes a skull would thrust itself suddenly forth, sometimes a pair of polished knees; and once a long finger seemed to beckon. But it was an old story to Dorthe, and she pursued her journey undisturbed.

She climbed the mountain, and went down into the valley and lived alone. Her people had left their cooking utensils. She caught fish in the creek, and shot birds with her bow and arrow. Wild fruits and nuts were abundant. Of creature comforts she lacked nothing. But the days were long and the island was very still. For a while she talked aloud in the limited vocabulary of her tribe. After a time she entered into companionship with the frogs and birds, imitating their speech. Restlessness vanished, and she existed contentedly enough.

Two years passed. The moon flooded the valley one midnight. Dorthe lay on the bank of the creek in the fern forest. She and the frogs had held long converse, and she was staring up through the feathery branches, waving in the night wind, at the calm silver face which had ignored her overtures. Upon this scene entered a man. He was

attenuated and ragged. Hair and beard fell nearly to his waist. He leaned on a staff, and tottered like an old man.

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He stared about him sullenly. “Curse them!” he said aloud. “Why could they not have died and rotted before we heard of them?”

Dorthe, at the sound of a human voice, sprang to her feet with a cry. The man, too, gave a cry—the ecstatic cry of the unwilling hermit who looks again upon the human face.

“Dorthe! Thou? I thought thou wast dead—drowned in the sea.”

Dorthe had forgotten the meaning of words, but her name came to her familiarly. Then something stirred within her, filling her eyes with tears. She went forward and touched the stranger, drawing her hand over his trembling arms.

“Do you not remember me, Dorthe?” asked the man, softly. “I am the priest—was, for I am not fit for the priesthood now. I have forgotten how to pray.”

She shook her head, but smiling, the instinct of gregariousness awakening.

He remembered his needs, and made a gesture which she understood. She took his hand, and led him from the forest to her cave. She struck fire from flint into a heap of fagots beneath a swinging pot. In a little time she set before him a savoury mess of birds. He ate of it ravenously. Dorthe watched him with deep curiosity. She had never seen hunger before. She offered him a gourd of water, and he drank thirstily. When he raised his face his cheeks were flushed, his eyes brighter.

He took her hand and drew her down beside him.

“I must talk,” he said. “Even if you cannot understand, I must talk to a human being. I must tell some one the story of these awful years. The very thought intoxicates me. We were shipwrecked, Dorthe. The wind drove us out of our course, and we went to pieces on the rocks at the foot of this island. Until to-night I did not know that it was this island. I alone was washed on shore. In the days that came I grew to wish that I, too, had perished. You know nothing of what solitude and savagery mean to the man of civilization—and to the man of ambition. Oh, my God! I dared not leave the shore lest I miss the chance to signal a passing vessel. There was scarcely anything to maintain life on that rocky coast. Now and again I caught a seagull or a fish. Sometimes I ventured inland and found fruit, running back lest a ship should pass. There I stayed through God knows how many months and years. I fell ill many times. My limbs are cramped and twisted with rheumatism. Finally, I grew to hate the place beyond endurance. I determined to walk to the other end of the island. It was only when I passed, now and again, the unburied dead and the pottery that I suspected I might be on your island. Oh, that ghastly company! When night came, they seemed to rise and walk before me. I cried aloud and cursed them. My manhood has gone, I fear. I cannot

tell how long that terrible journey lasted,—months and months, for my feet are bare and my legs twisted. What kind fate guided me to you?”

He gazed upon her, not as man looks at woman, but as mortal looks adoringly upon the face of mortal long withheld.

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Dorthe smiled sympathetically. His speech and general appearance struck a long-dormant chord; but in her mind was no recognition of him.

He fell asleep suddenly and profoundly. As Dorthe watched, she gradually recalled the appearance of the old who had lain screaming on the ground drawing up their cramped limbs. She also recalled the remedy. Not far from the edge of the forest was a line of temascals, excavations covered with mud huts, into which her people had gone for every ill. She ran to one, and made a large fire within; the smoke escaped through an aperture in the roof. Then she returned, and, taking the emaciated figure in her arms, bore him to the hut and placed him in the corner farthest from the fire. She went out and closed the door, but thrust her head in from time to time. He did not awaken for an hour. When he did, he thought he had entered upon the fiery sequel of unfaith. The sweat was pouring from his body. The atmosphere could only be that of the nether world. As his brain cleared he understood, and made no effort to escape: he knew the virtues of the temascal. As the intense heat sapped his remaining vitality he sank into lethargy. He was aroused by the shock of cold water, and opened his eyes to find himself struggling in the creek, Dorthe holding him down with firm arms. After a moment she carried him back to the plain and laid him in the sun to dry. His rags still clung to him. She regarded them with disfavour, and fetched the Chief's discarded plumage. As soon as he could summon strength he tottered into the forest and made his toilet. As he was a foot and a half taller than the Chief had been, he determined to add a flounce as soon as his health would permit. Dorthe, however, looked approval when he emerged, and set a bowl of steaming soup before him.

He took the temascal twice again, and at the end of a week the drastic cure had routed his rheumatism. Although far from strong, he felt twenty years younger. His manhood returned, and with it his man's vanity. He did not like the appearance of his reflected image in the still pools of the wood. The long beard and head locks smote him sorely. He disliked the idea of being a fright, even though Dorthe had no standards of comparison; but his razors were at the bottom of the sea.

After much excogitation he arrived at a solution. One day, when Dorthe was on the other side of the mountain shooting birds,—she would kill none of her friends in the fern forest,—he tore dried palm leaves into strips, and setting fire to them singed his hair and beard to the roots. It was a long and tedious task. When it was finished the pool told him that his chin and head were like unto a stubbled field. But he was young and well-looking once more.

He went out and confronted Dorthe. She dropped her birds, her bow and arrow, and stared at him. Then he saw recognition leap to her eyes; but this time no fear. He was far from being the gorgeous apparition of many moons ago. And, so quickly does solitude forge its links, she smiled brightly, approvingly, and he experienced a glow of content.

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The next day he taught her the verbal synonym of many things, and she spoke the words after him with rapt attention. When he finished the lesson, she pounded, in a wondrous mortar, the dried flour of the banana with the eggs of wild fowl, then fried the paste over the fire he had built. She brought a dish of nuts and showed him gravely how to crack them with a stone, smiling patronizingly at his ready skill. When the dinner was cooked, she offered him one end of the dish as usual, but he thought it was time for another lesson. He laid a flat stone with palm leaves, and set two smaller dishes at opposite ends. Then with a flat stick he lifted the cakes from the fry-pan, and placed an equal number on each plate. Dorthe watched these proceedings with expanded eyes, but many gestures of impatience. She was hungry. He took her hand and led her ceremoniously to the head of the table, motioning to her to be seated. She promptly went down on her knees, and dived at the cakes with both hands. But again he restrained her. He had employed a part of his large leisure fashioning rude wood forks with his ragged pocket-knife. There were plenty of bone knives on the island. He sat himself opposite, and gave her a practical illustration of the use of the knife and fork. She watched attentively, surreptitiously whisking morsels of cake into her mouth. Finally, she seized the implements of civilization beside her plate, and made an awkward attempt to use them. The priest tactfully devoted himself to his own dinner. Suddenly he heard a cry of rage, and simultaneously the knife and fork flew in different directions. Dorthe seized a cake in each hand, and stuffed them into her mouth, her eyes flashing defiance. The priest looked at her reproachfully, then lowered his eyes. Presently she got up, found the knife and fork, and made a patient effort to guide the food to its proper place by the new and trying method This time the attempt resulted in tears—a wild thunder shower. The priest went over, knelt beside her, and guided the knife through the cake, the fork to her mouth. Dorthe finished the meal, then put her head on his shoulder and wept bitterly. The priest soothed her, and made her understand that she had acquitted herself with credit; and the sun shone once more.

An hour later she took his hand, and led him to the creek in the forest.

“C—c—ruck! C—c—ruck!” she cried.

“C—c—ruck! C—c—ruck!” came promptly from the rushes. She looked at him triumphantly.

“Curruck,” he said, acknowledging the introduction.

She laughed outright at his poor attempt, startling even him with the discordant sound. She sprang to his side, her eyes rolling with terror. But he laughed himself, and in a few moments she was attempting to imitate him. Awhile later she introduced him to the birds; but he forbore to trill, having a saving sense of humour.

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The comrades of her solitude were deserted. She made rapid progress in human speech. Gradually her voice lost its cross between a croak and a trill and acquired a feminine resemblance to her instructor's. At the end of a month they could speak together after a fashion. When she made her first sentence, haltingly but surely, she leaped to her feet and executed a wild war dance. They were on the plain of the dead. She flung her supple legs among the skeletons, sending the bones flying, her bright hair tossing about her like waves of fire. The priest watched her with bated breath, half expecting to see the outraged warriors arise in wrath. The gaunt dogs that were always prowling about the plain fled in dismay.

The month had passed very agreeably to the priest. After the horrors of his earlier experience it seemed for a time that he had little more to ask of life. Dorthe knew nothing of love; but he knew that if no ship came, she would learn, and he would teach her. He had loved no woman, but he felt that in this vast solitude he could love Dorthe and be happy with her. In the languor of convalescence he dreamed of the hour when he should take her in his arms and see the frank regard in her eyes for the last time. The tranquil air was heavy with the perfumes of spring. The palms were rigid. The blue butterflies sat with folded wings. The birds hung their drowsy heads.

But with returning strength came the desire for civilization, the awakening of his ambitions, the desire for intellectual activity. He stood on the beach for hours at a time, straining his eyes for passing ships. He kept a fire on the cliffs constantly burning. Dorthe's instincts were awakening, and she was vaguely troubled. The common inheritance was close upon her.

The priest now put all thoughts of love sternly from him. Love meant a lifetime on the island, for he would not desert her, and to take her to Santa Barbara would mean the death of all his hopes. And yet in his way he loved her, and there were nights when he sat by the watch-fire and shed bitter tears. He had read the story of Juan and Haidee, by no means without sympathy, and he wished more than once that he had the mind and nature of the poet; but to violate his own would be productive of misery to both. He was no amorous youth, but a man with a purpose, and that, for him, was the end of it. But he spent many hours with her, talking to her of life beyond the island, a story to which she listened with eager interest.

One night as he was about to leave her, she dropped her face into her hands and cried heavily. Instinctively he put his arms about her, and she as instinctively clung to him, terrified and appealing. He kissed her, not once, but many times, intoxicated and happy. She broke from him suddenly and ran to her cave; and he, chilled and angry, went to his camp-fire.

It was a very brilliant night. An hour later he saw something skim the horizon. Later still he saw that the object was closer, and that it was steering for the harbour. He ran to meet it.

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Twice he stopped. The magnetism of the only woman that had ever awakened his love drew him back. He thought of her despair, her utter and, this time, unsupportable loneliness; the careless girl with the risen sun would be a broken-hearted woman.

But he ran on.

Spain beckoned. The highest dignities of the Church were his. He saw his political influence a byword in Europe. He felt Dorthe's arms about him, her soft breath on his cheek, and uttered a short savage scream; but he went on.

When he reached the harbour three men had already landed. They recognized him, and fell at his feet. And when he told them that he was alone on the island, they reembarked without question. And he lived, and forgot, and realized his great ambitions.

Thirty years later a sloop put into the harbour of the island for repairs. Several of the men went on shore. They discovered footprints in the sand. Wondering, for they had sailed the length of the island and seen no sign of habitation, they followed the steps. They came upon a curious creature which was scraping with a bone knife the blubber from a seal. At first they thought it was a bird of some unknown species, so sharp was its beak, so brilliant its plumage. But when they spoke to it and it sprang aside and confronted them, they saw that the creature was an aged woman. Her face was like an old black apple, within whose skin the pulp had shrunk and withered as it lay forgotten on the ground. Her tawny hair hung along her back like a ragged mat. There was no light in the dim vacuous eyes. She wore a garment made of the unplucked skins of birds. They spoke to her. She uttered a gibberish unknown to them with a voice that croaked like a frog's, then went down on her creaking knees and lifted her hands to the sun.

THE HEAD OF A PRIEST

I

"Dona Concepcion had the greatest romance of us all; so she should not chide too bitterly."

"But she has such a sense of her duty! Such a sense of her duty! Ay, Dios de mi alma! Shall we ever grow like that?"

"If we have a Russian lover who is killed in the far North, and we have a convent built for us, and teach troublesome girls. Surely, if one goes through fire, one can become anything—"

“Ay, yi! Look! Look!”

Six dark heads were set in a row along the edge of a secluded corner of the high adobe wall surrounding the Convent of Monterey. They looked for all the world like a row of charming gargoyles—every mouth was open—although there was no blankness in those active mischief-hunting eyes. Their bodies, propped on boxes, were concealed by the wall from the passer-by, and from the sharp eyes of duenas by a group of trees just behind them. Their section of the wall faced the Presidio, which in the early days of the eighteenth century had not lost an adobe,

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and was full of active life. At one end was the house of the Governor of all the Californias, at another the church, which is all that stands to-day. Under other walls of the square were barracks, quarters for officers and their families, store-rooms for ammunition and general supplies in case of a raid by hostile tribes (when all the town must be accommodated within the security of those four great walls), and a large hall in which many a ball was given. The aristocratic pioneers of California loved play as well as work. Beyond were great green plains alive with cattle, and above all curved the hills dark with pines. Three soldiers had left the Presidio and were sauntering toward the convent.

“It is Enrico Ortega!” whispered Eustaquia Carillo, excitedly.

“And Ramon de Castro!” scarcely breathed Elena Estudillo.

“And Jose Yorba!”

“Not Pepe Gomez? Ay, yi!”

“Nor Manuel Ameste!”

The only girl who did not speak stood at the end of the row. Her eyes were fixed on the church, whose windows were dazzling with the reflected sunlight of the late afternoon.

The officers, who apparently had been absorbed in conversation and their fragrant cigaritos, suddenly looked up and saw the row of handsome and mischievous faces. They ran forward, and dashed their sombreros into the dust before the wall.

“At your feet, senoritas! At your feet!” they cried.

“Have they any?” whispered one. “How unreal they look! How symbolical!”

“The rose in your hair, Senorita Eustaquia, for the love of Heaven!” cried Ortega, in a loud whisper.

She detached the rose, touched it with her lips, and cast it to the officer. He almost swallowed it in the ardour of his caresses.

None of the girls spoke. That would have seemed to them the height of impropriety. But Elena extended her arm over the wall so that her little hand hung just above young Castro’s head. He leaped three times in the air, and finally succeeded in brushing his mustache against those coveted finger-tips: rewarded with an approving but tantalizing laugh. Meanwhile, Jose Yorba had torn a silver eagle from his sombrero, and flung it to Lola de Castro, who caught and thrust it in her hair.

“Ay, Dios! Dios! that the cruel wall divides us,” cried Yorba.

“We will mount each upon the other’s shoulder—”

“We will make a ladder from the limbs of the pines on the mountain—”

“*Senoritas*!”

The six heads dropped from the wall like so many Humpty-Dumpties. As they flashed about the officers caught a glimpse of horror in twelve expanded eyes. A tall woman, serenely beautiful, clad in a long gray gown fastened at her throat with a cross, stood just within the trees. The six culprits thought of the tragic romance which had given them the honour of being educated by Concepcion de Arguello, and hoped for some small measure of mercy. The girl who had looked over the heads of the officers, letting her gaze rest on the holy walls of the church, alone looked coldly unconcerned, and encountered steadily the sombre eyes of the convent’s mistress.

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“Was thy lover in the road below, Pilar?” asked Dona Concepcion, with what meaning five of the girls could not divine. For Pilar, the prettiest and most studious girl in the convent, cared for no man.

Pilar’s bosom rose once, but she made no reply.

“Come,” said Dona Concepcion, and the six followed meekly in her wake. She led them to her private sala, a bare cold room, even in summer. It was uncarpeted; a few religious prints were on the whitewashed walls; there were eight chairs, and a table covered with books and papers. The six shivered. To be invited to this room meant the greatest of honours or a lecture precursory to the severest punishment in the system of the convent. Dona Concepcion seated herself in a large chair, but her guests were not invited to relieve their weakened knees.

“Did you speak—any of you?” she asked in a moment.

Five heads shook emphatically.

“But?”

Eustaquia, Elena, and Lola drew a long breath, then confessed their misdoings glibly enough.

“And the others?”

“They had no chance,” said Eustaquia, with some sarcasm.

“Thou wouldst have found a chance,” replied the Lady Superior, coldly. “Thou art the first in all naughtiness, and thy path in life will be stormy if thou dost not curb thy love of adventure and insubordination.”

She covered her face with her hand and regarded the floor for some moments in silence. It was the first performance of the kind that had come to her knowledge, and she was at a loss what to do. Finally she said severely: “Go each to your bed and remain there on bread and water for twenty-four hours. Your punishment shall be known at the Presidio. And if it ever happens again, I shall send you home in disgrace. Now go.”

The luckless six slunk out of the room. Only Pilar stole a hasty glance at the Lady Superior. Dona Concepcion half rose from her chair, and opened her lips as if to speak again; then sank back with a heavy sigh.

The girls were serenaded that night; but the second song broke abruptly, and a heavy gate clanged just afterward. Concepcion de Arguello was still young, but suffering had matured her character, and she knew how to deal sternly with those who infringed her

few but inflexible rules. It was by no means the first serenade she had interrupted, for she educated the flower of California, and it was no simple matter to prevent communication between the girls in her charge and the ardent caballeros. She herself had been serenaded more than once since the sudden death of her Russian lover; for she who had been the belle of California for three years before the coming of Rezanof was not lightly relinquished by the impassioned men of her own race; but both at Casa Grande, in Santa Barbara, where she found seclusion until her convent was built, and after her immolation in Monterey, she turned so cold an ear to all men's ardours that

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she soon came to be regarded as a part of four gray walls. How long it took her to find actual serenity none but herself and the dead priests know, but the old women who are dying off to-day remember her as consistently placid as she was firm. She was deeply troubled by the escapade of the little wretches on the wall, although she had dealt with it summarily and feared no further outbreak of the sort. But she was haunted by a suspicion that there was more behind, and to come. Pilar de la Torre and Eustaquia Carillo were the two most notable girls in the convent, for they easily took precedence of their more indolent mates and were constantly racing for honours. There the resemblance ended. Eustaquia, with her small brilliant eyes, irregular features, and brilliant colour, was handsome rather than beautiful, but full of fire, fascination, and spirit. Half the Presidio was in love with her, and that she was a shameless coquette she would have been the last to deny. Pilar was beautiful, and although the close long lashes of her eyes hid dreams, rather than fire, and her profile and poise of head expressed all the pride of the purest aristocracy California has had, nothing could divert attention from the beauty of her contours of cheek and figure, and of her rich soft colouring. The officers in church stood up to look at her; and at the balls and meriendas she attended in vacations the homage she received stifled and annoyed her. She was as cold and unresponsive as Concepcion de Arguello. People shrugged their shoulders and said it was as well. Her mother, Dona Brigida de la Torre of the great Rancho Diablo, twenty miles from Monterey, was the sternest old lady in California. It was whispered that she had literally ruled her husband with a greenhide reata, and certain it was that two years after the birth of Pilar (the thirteenth, and only living child) he had taken a trip to Mexico and never returned. It was known that he had sent his wife a deed of the rancho; and that was the last she ever heard of him. Her daughter, according to her imperious decree, was to marry Ygnacio Pina, the heir of the neighbouring rancho. Dona Brigida anticipated no resistance, not only because her will had never been crossed, but because Pilar was the most docile of daughters. Pilar was Dona Concepcion's favourite pupil, and when at home spent her time reading, embroidering, or riding about the rancho, closely attended. She rarely talked, even to her mother. She paid not the slightest attention to Ygnacio's serenades, and greeted him with scant courtesy when he dashed up to the ranch-house in all the bravery of silk and fine lawn, silver and lace. But he knew the value of Dona Brigida as an ally, and was content to amuse himself elsewhere.

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The girls passed their twenty-four hours of repressed energy as patiently as necessity compelled. Pilar, alone, lay impassive in her bed, rarely opening her eyes. The others groaned and sighed and rolled and bounced about; but they dared not speak, for stern Sister Augusta was in close attendance. When the last lagging minute had gone and they were bidden to rise, they sprang from the beds, flung on their clothes, and ran noisily down the long corridors to the refectory. Dona Concepcion stood at the door and greeted them with a forgiving smile. Pilar followed some moments later. There was something more than coldness in her eyes as she bent her head to the Lady Superior, who drew a quick breath.

“She feels that she has been humiliated, and she will not forgive,” thought Dona Concepcion. “Ay de mi! And she may need my advice and protection. I should have known better than to have treated her like the rest.”

After supper the girls went at once to the great sala of the convent, and sat in silence, with bent heads and folded hands and every appearance of prayerful revery.

It was Saturday evening, and the good priest of the Presidio church would come to confess them, that they might commune on the early morrow. They heard the loud bell of the convent gate, then the opening and shutting of several doors; and many a glance flashed up to the ceiling as the brain behind scurried the sins of the week together. It had been arranged that the six leading misdemeanants were to go first and receive much sound advice, before the old priest had begun to feel the fatigue of the confessional. The door opened, and Dona Concepcion stood on the threshold. Her face was whiter than usual, and her manner almost ruffled.

“It is Padre Dominguez,” she said. “Padre Estudillo is ill. If——if—any of you are tired, or do not wish to confess to the strange priest, you may go to bed.”

Not a girl moved. Padre Dominguez was twenty-five and as handsome as the marble head of the young Augustus which stood on a shelf in the Governor’s sala. During the year of his work in Monterey more than one of the older girls had met and talked with him; for he went into society, as became a priest, and holidays were not unfrequent. But, although he talked agreeably, it was a matter for comment that he loved books and illuminated manuscripts more than the world, and that he was as ambitious as his superior abilities justified.

“Very well,” said Dona Concepcion, impatiently. “Eustaquia, go in.”

Eustaquia made short work of her confession. She was followed by Elena, Lola, Mariana, and Amanda. When the last appeared for a moment at the door, then courtesied a good night and vanished, Dona Concepcion did not call the expected name, and several of the girls glanced up in surprise. Pilar raised her eyes at last and

looked steadily at the Lady Superior. The blood rose slowly up the nun's white face, but she said carelessly:—

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“Thou art tired, mijita, no? Wilt thou not go to bed?”

“Not without making my confession, if you will permit me.”

“Very well; go.”

Pilar left the room and closed the door behind her. Alone in the hall, she shook suddenly and twisted her hands together. But, although she could not conquer her agitation, she opened the door of the chapel resolutely and entered. The little arched whitewashed room was almost dark. A few candles burned on the altar, shadowing the gorgeous images of Virgin and saints. Pilar walked slowly down the narrow body of the chapel until she stood behind a priest who knelt beside a table with his back to the door. He wore the brown robes of the Franciscan, but his lean finely proportioned figure manifested itself through the shapeless garment. He looked less like a priest than a masquerading athlete. His face was hidden in his hands.

Pilar did not kneel. She stood immovable and silent, and in a moment it was evident that she had made her presence felt. The priest stirred uneasily. “Kneel, my daughter,” he said. But he did not look up. Pilar caught his hands in hers and forced them down upon the table. The priest, throwing back his head in surprise, met the flaming glance of eyes that dreamed no longer. He sprang to his feet, snatching back his hands. “Dona Pilar!” he exclaimed.

“I choose to make my confession standing,” she said. “I love you!”

The priest stared at her in consternation.

“You knew it—unless you never think at all. You are the only man I have ever thought it worth while to talk to. You have seen how I have treated others with contempt, and that I have been happy with you—and we have had more than one long talk together. You, too, have been happy—”

“I am a priest!”

“You are a Man and I am a Woman.”

“What is it you would have me do?”

“Fling off that hideous garment which becomes you not at all, and fly with me to my father in the City of Mexico. I hear from him constantly, and he is wealthy and will protect us. The barque, *Joven Guipuzcoanoa,* leaves Monterey within a week after the convent closes for vacation.”

The priest raised his clasped hands to heaven. “She is mad! She is mad!” he said. Then he turned on her fiercely. “Go! Go!” he cried. “I hate you!”

“Ay, you love me! you love me!”

The priest slowly set his face. There was no gleam of expression to indicate whether the words that issued through his lips came from his soul or from that section of his brain instinct with self-protection. He spoke slowly:—

“I am a priest, and a priest I shall die. What is more, I shall denounce you to Dona Concepcion, the clergy, and—to your mother. The words that have just violated this chapel were not said under the seal of the confessional, and I shall deal with them as I have said. You shall be punished, that no other man’s soul may be imperilled.”

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Pilar threw out her hands wildly. It was her turn to stare; and her eyes were full of horror and disgust.

“What?” she cried. “You are a coward? A traitor? You not only dare not acknowledge that you love me, but you would betray me—and to my mother? Ah, Madre de Dios!”

“I do not love you. How dare you use such a word to me,—to me, an anointed priest! I shall denounce—and to-night.”

“*And I loved you*!”

He shrank a little under the furious contempt of her eyes. Her whole body quivered with passion. Then, suddenly, she sprang forward and struck him so violent a blow on his cheek that he reeled and clutched the table. But his foot slipped, and he went down with the table on top of him. She laughed into his red unmasked face. “You look what you are down there,” she said,—“less than a man, and only fit to be a priest. I hate you! Do your worst.”

She rushed out of the chapel and across the hall, flinging open the door of the sala. As she stood there with blazing eyes and cheeks, shaking from head to foot, the girls gave little cries of amazement, and Dona Concepcion, shaking, came forward hastily; but she reached the door too late.

“Go to the priest,” cried Pilar. “You will find him on his back squirming under a table, with the mark of my hand on his cheek. He has a tale to tell you.” And she flung off the hand of the nun and ran through the halls, striking herself against the walls.

Dona Concepcion did not leave her sala that night. The indignant young aspirant for honours in Mexico had vowed that he would tell Dona Brigida and the clergy before dawn, and all her arguments had entered smarting ears. She had finally ordered him to leave the convent and never darken its doors again. “And the self-righteous shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven,” she had exclaimed in conclusion. “Who are you that you should judge and punish this helpless girl and ruin a brilliant future? And why? Because she was so inexperienced in men as to trust you.”

“She has committed a deadly sin, and shall suffer,” cried the young man, violently. It was evident that his outraged virtue as well as his face was in flames. “Women were born to be good and meek and virtuous, to teach and to rear children. Such creatures as Pilar de la Torre should be kept under lock and key until they are old and hideous.”

“And men were made strong, that they might protect women. But I have said enough. Go.”

Pilar appeared at the refectory table in the morning, but she exchanged a glance with no one, and ate little. She looked haggard, and it was plain that she had not slept; but

her manner was as composed as ever. When Dona Concepcion sent for her to come to the little sala, she went at once.

“Sit down, my child,” said the nun. “I said all I could to dissuade him, but he would not listen. I will protect thee if I can. Thou hast made a terrible mistake; but it is too late for reproaches. We must think of the future.”

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“I have no desire to escape the consequences. I staked all and lost. And nothing can affect me now. He has proved a dog, a cur, a coward, a brute. I can suffer no more than when I made that discovery; and if my mother chooses to kill me, I shall make no resistance.”

“Thou art young and clever and will forget him. He is not worth remembering. He shall not go unpunished. I shall use my influence to have him sent to the poorest hamlet in California. He is worthy to do only the meanest work of the Church, and my influence with the clergy is stronger than his. But thou? I shall receive your mother when she comes, and beg her to leave you with me during the vacation. Then, later, when her wrath is appeased, I will suggest that she send you to live for two years with your relatives at Santa Barbara.”

Pilar lifted her shoulders and stared out of the window. Suddenly she gave a start and trembled. The bell of the gate was pealing vociferously. Dona Concepcion sprang to her feet.

“Stay here,” she said; “I will receive her in the grand sala.”

But her interview with Dona Brigida lasted two minutes.

“Give her to me!” cried the terrible old woman, her furious tones ringing through the convent. “Give her to me! I came not here to talk with nuns. Stand aside!”

Dona Concepcion was forced to lead her to the little sala. She strode into the room, big and brown and bony, looking like an avenging Amazon, this mother of thirteen children. Her small eyes were blazing, and the thick wrinkles about them quivered. Her lips twitched, her cheeks burned with a dull dark red. In one hand she carried a greenhide reata. With the other she caught her daughter’s long unbound hair, twisted it about her arm like a rope, then brought the reata down on the unprotected shoulders with all her great strength Dona Concepcion fled from the room. Pilar made no sound. She had expected this, and had vowed that it should not unseal her lips. The beating stopped abruptly. Dona Brigida, still with the rope of hair about her arm, pushed Pilar through the door, out of the convent and its gates, then straight down the hill. For the first time the girl faltered.

“Not to the Presidio!” she gasped.

Her mother struck her shoulder with a fist as hard as iron, and Pilar stumbled on. She knew that if she refused to walk, her mother would carry her. They entered the Presidio. Pilar, raising her eyes for one brief terrible moment, saw that Tomaso, her mother’s head vaquero, stood in the middle of the square holding two horses, and that every man, woman, and child of the Presidio was outside the buildings. The

Commandante and the Alcalde were with the Governor and his staff, and Padre Estudillo. They had the air of being present at an important ceremony.

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Amidst a silence so profound that Pilar heard the mingled music of the pines on the hills above the Presidio and of the distant ocean, Dona Brigida marched her to the very middle of the square, then by a dexterous turn of her wrist forced her to her knees. With both hands she shook her daughter's splendid silken hair from the tight rope into which she had coiled it, then stepped back for a moment that all might appreciate the penalty a woman must pay who disgraced her sex. The breeze from the hills lifted the hair of Pilar, and it floated and wreathed upward for a moment—a warm dusky cloud.

Suddenly the intense silence was broken by a loud universal hiss. Pilar, thinking that it was part of her punishment, cowered lower, then, obeying some impulse, looked up, and saw the back of the young priest. He was running. As her dull gaze was about to fall again, it encountered for a moment the indignant blue eyes of a red-haired, hard-featured, but distinguished-looking young man, clad in sober gray. She knew him to be the American, Malcolm Sturges, the guest of the Governor. But her mind rapidly shed all impressions but the wretched horror of her own plight. In another moment she felt the shears at her neck, and knew that her disgrace was passing into the annals of Monterey, and that half her beauty was falling from her. Then she found herself seated on the horse in front of her mother, who encircled her waist with an arm that pressed her vitals like iron. After that there was an interval of unconsciousness.

When she awoke, her first impulse was to raise her head from her mother's bony shoulder, where it bumped uncomfortably. Her listless brain slowly appreciated the fact that she was not on her way to the Rancho Diablo. The mustang was slowly ascending a steep mountain trail. But her head ached, and she dropped her face into her hands. What mattered where she was going? She was shorn, and disgraced, and disillusioned, and unspeakably weary of body and soul.

They travelled through dense forests of redwoods and pine, only the soft footfalls of the unshod mustang or the sudden cry of the wild-cat breaking the primeval silence. It was night when Dona Brigida abruptly dismounted, dragging Pilar with her. They were halfway up a rocky height, surrounded by towering peaks black with rigid trees. Just in front of them was an opening in the ascending wall. Beside it, with his hand on a huge stone, stood the vaquero. Pilar knew that she had nothing to hope from him: her mother had beaten him into submission long since. Dona Brigida, without a word, drove Pilar into the cave, and she and the vaquero, exerting their great strength to the full, pushed the stone into the entrance. There was a narrow rift at the top. The cave was as black as a starless midnight.

Then Dona Brigida spoke for the first time:—

"Once a week I shall come with food and drink. There thou wilt stay until thy teeth fall, the skin bags from thy bones, and thou art so hideous that all men will run from thee. Then thou canst come forth and go and live on the charity of the father to whom thou wouldst have taken a polluted priest."

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Pilar heard the retreating footfalls of the mustangs. She was too stunned to think, to realize the horrible fate that had befallen her. She crouched down against the wall of the cave nearest the light, her ear alert for the growl of a panther or the whir of a rattler's tail.

II

The night after the close of school the Governor gave a grand ball, which was attended by the older of the convent girls who lived in Monterey or were guests in the capital. The dowagers sat against the wall, a coffee-coloured dado; the girls in white, the caballeros in black silk small-clothes, the officers in their uniforms, danced to the music of the flute and the guitar. When Elena Estudillo was alone in the middle of the room dancing El Son and the young men were clapping and shouting and flinging gold and silver at her feet, Sturges and Eustaquia slipped out into the corridor. It was a dark night, the duenas were thinking of naught but the dance and the days of their youth, and the violators of a stringent social law were safe for the moment. A chance word, dropped by Sturges in the dance, and Eustaquia's eager interrogations, had revealed the American's indignation at the barbarous treatment of Pilar, and his deep interest in the beautiful victim.

"Senor," whispered Eustaquia, excitedly, as soon as they reached the end of the corridor, "if you feel pity and perhaps love for my unhappy friend, go to her rescue for the love of Mary. I have heard to-day that her punishment is far worse than what you saw. It is so terrible that I hardly have dared—"

"Surely, that old fiend could think of nothing else," said Sturges. "What is she made of, anyhow?"

"Ay, yi! Her heart is black like the redwood tree that has been burnt out by fire. Before Don Enrique ran away, she beat him many times; but, after, she was a thousand times worse, for it is said that she loved him in her terrible way, and that her heart burnt up when she was left alone—"

"But Dona Pilar, senorita?"

"Ay, yi! Benito, one of the vaqueros of Dona Erigida, was in town to-day, and he told me (I bribed him with whiskey and cigaritos—the Commandante's, whose guest I am, ay, yi!)—he told me that Dona Erigida did not take my unhappy friend home, but—"

"Well?" exclaimed Sturges, who was a man of few words.

Eustaquia jerked down his ear and whispered, "She took her to a cave in the mountains and pushed her in, and rolled a huge stone as big as a house before the entrance, and there she will leave her till she is thirty—or dead!"

“Good God! Does your civilization, such as you’ve got, permit such things?”

“The mother may discipline the child as she will. It is not the business of the Alcalde. And no one would dare interfere for poor Pilar, for she has committed a mortal sin against the Church—”

“I’ll interfere. Where is the cave?”

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“Ay, senor, I knew you would. For that I told you all. I know not where the cave is; but the vaquero—he is in town till to-morrow. But he fears Dona Erigida, senor, as he fears the devil. You must tell him that not only will you give him plenty of whiskey and cigars, but that you will send him to Mexico. Dona Brigida would kill him.”

“I’ll look out for him.”

“Do not falter, senor, for the love of God; for no Californian will go to her rescue. She has been disgraced and none will marry her. But you can take her far away where no one knows—”

“Where is this vaquero to be found?”

“In a little house on the beach, under the fort, where his sweetheart lives.”

“Good night!” And he sprang from the corridor and ran toward the nearest gate.

He found the vaquero, and after an hour’s argument got his way. The man, who had wormed the secret out of Tomaso, had only a general idea of the situation of the cave; but he confessed to a certain familiarity with the mountains. He was not persuaded to go until Sturges had promised to send not only himself but his sweetheart to Mexico. Dona Brigida was violently opposed to matrimony, and would have none of it on her rancho. Sturges promised to ship them both off on the *Joven Guipuzcoanoa*, and to keep them comfortably for a year in Mexico. It was not an offer to be refused.

They started at dawn. Sturges, following Benito’s advice, bought a long gray cloak with a hood, and filled his saddle-bags with nourishing food. The vaquero sent word to Dona Brigida that the horses he had brought in to sell to the officers had escaped and that he was hastening down the coast in pursuit. In spite of his knowledge of the mountains, it was only after two days of weary search in almost trackless forests, and more than one encounter with wild beasts, that they came upon the cave. They would have passed it then but for the sharp eyes of Sturges, who detected the glint of stone behind the branches which Dona Brigida had piled against it.

He sprang down, tossed the brush aside, and inserted his fingers between the side of the stone and the wall of the cave. But he could not move it alone, and was about to call Benito, who was watering the mustangs at a spring, when he happened to glance upward. A small white hand was hanging over the top of the stone. Sturges was not a Californian, but he sprang to his feet and pressed his lips to that hand. It was cold and nerveless, and clasping it in his he applied his gaze to the rift above the stone. In a moment he distinguished two dark eyes and a gleam of white brow above. Then a faint voice said:—

“Take me out! Take me out, senor, for the love of God!”

“I have come for that. Cheer up,” said Sturges, in his best Spanish. “You’ll be out in five minutes.”

“And then you’ll bring me his head,” whispered Pilar. “Ay, Dios, what I have suffered! I have been years here, senor, and I am nearly mad.”

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“Well, I won’t promise you his head, but I’ve thrashed the life out of him, if that will give you any satisfaction. I caught him in the woods, and I laid on my riding-whip until he bit the grass and yelled for mercy.”

The eyes in the cave blazed with a light which reminded him uncomfortably of Dona Erigida.

“That was well! That was well!” said Pilar. “But it is not enough. I must have his head. I never shall sleep again till then, senor. Ay, Dios, what I have suffered!”

“Well, we’ll see about the head later. To get you out of this is the first thing on the program. Benito!”

Benito ran forward, and together they managed to drag the stone aside. But Pilar retreated into the darkness and covered her face with her hands.

“Ay, Dios! Dios! I cannot go out into the sunlight. I am old and hideous.”

“Make some coffee,” said Sturges to Benito. He went within and took her hands. “Come,” he said. “You have been here a week only. Your brain is a little turned, and no wonder. You’ve put a lifetime of suffering into that week. But I’m going to take care of you hereafter, and that she-devil will have no more to say about it. I’ll either take you to your father, or to my mother in Boston—whichever you like.”

Benito brought in the coffee and some fresh bread and dried meat. Pilar ate and drank ravenously. She had found only stale bread and water in the cave. When she had finished, she looked at Sturges with a more intelligent light in her eyes, then thrust her straggling locks behind her ears. She also resumed something of her old dignified composure.

“You are very kind, senor,” she said graciously. “It is true that I should have been mad in a few more days. At first I did nothing but run, run, run—the cave is miles in the mountain; but since when I cannot remember I have huddled against that stone, listening—listening; and at last you came.”

Sturges thought her more beautiful than ever. The light was streaming upon her now, and although she was white and haggard she looked far less cold and unapproachable than when he had endeavoured in vain to win a glance from her in the church. He put his hand on her tangled hair. “You shall suffer no more,” he repeated; “and this will grow again. And that beautiful mane—it is mine. I begged it from the Alcalde, and it is safe in my trunk.”

“Ah, you love me!” she said softly.

“Yes, I love you!” And then, as her eyes grew softer and she caught his hand in hers with an exclamation of passionate gratitude for his gallant rescue, he took her in his arms without more ado and kissed her.

“Yes, I could love you,” she said in a moment. “For, though you are not handsome, like the men of my race, you are true and good and brave: all I dreamed that a man should be until that creature made all men seem loathsome. But I will not marry you till you bring me his head—”

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“Oh! come. So lovely a woman should not be so blood-thirsty. He has been punished enough. Besides what I gave him, he’s been sent off to spend the rest of his life in some hole where he’ll have neither books nor society—”

“It is not enough! When a man betrays a woman, and causes her to be beaten and publicly disgraced—it will be written in the books of the Alcalde, senor!—and shut up in a cave to suffer the tortures of the damned in hell, he should die.”

“Well, I think he should myself, but I’m not the public executioner, and one can’t fight a duel with a priest—”

“Senor! Senor! Quick! Pull, for the love of God!”

It was Benito who spoke, and he was pushing with all his might against the stone. “She comes—Dona Brigida!” he cried. “I saw her far off just now. Stay both in there. I will take the mustangs and hide them on the other side of the mountain and return when she is gone. That is the best way.”

“We can all go—”

“No, no! She would follow; and then—ay, Dios de mi alma! No, it is best the senorita be there when she comes; then she will go away quietly.”

They replaced the stone. Benito piled the brush against it, then made off with the mustangs.

“Go far,” whispered Pilar. “Dios, if she sees you!”

“I shall not leave you again. And even if she enter, she need not see me. I can stand in that crevice, and I will keep quiet so long as she does not touch you.”

Dona Brigida was a half-hour reaching the cave, and meanwhile Sturges restored the lost illusions of Pilar. Not only did he make love to her without any of the rhetorical nonsense of the caballero, but he was big and strong, and it was evident that he was afraid of nothing, not even of Dona Brigida. The dreams of her silent girlhood swirled in her imagination, but looked vague and shapeless before this vigorous reality. For some moments she forgot everything and was happy. But there was a black spot in her heart, and when Sturges left her for a moment to listen, it ached for the head of the priest. She had much bad as well as much good in her, this innocent Californian maiden; and the last week had forced an already well-developed brain and temperament close to maturity. She vowed that she would make herself so dear to this fiery American that he would deny her nothing. Then, her lust for vengeance satisfied, she would make him the most delightful of wives.

“She is coming!” whispered Sturges, “and she has the big vaquero with her.”

“Ay, Dios! If she knows all, what can we do?”

“I’ve told you that I have no love of killing, but I don’t hesitate when there is no alternative. If she sees me and declares war, and I cannot get you away, I shall shoot them both. I don’t know that it would keep me awake a night. Now, you do the talking for the present.”

Dona Brigida rode up to the cave and dismounted. “Pilar!” she shouted, as if she believed that her daughter was wandering through the heart of the mountain.

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Pilar presented her eyes at the rift.

“Ay, take me out! take me out!” she wailed, with sudden diplomacy.

Her mother gave a short laugh, then broke off and sniffed.

“What is this?” she cried. “Coffee? I smell coffee!”

“Yes, I have had coffee,” replied Pilar, calmly. “Benito has brought me that, and many dulces.”

“Dios!” shouted Dona Brigida. “I will tie him to a tree and beat him till he is as green as my reata—”

“Give me the bread!—quick, quick, for the love of Heaven! It is two days since he has been, and I have nothing left, not even a drop of coffee.”

“Then live on the memory of thy dulces and coffee! The bread and water go back with me. Three days from now I bring them again. Meanwhile, thou canst enjoy the fangs at thy vitals.”

Pilar breathed freely again, but she cried sharply, “Ay, no! no!”

“Ay, yes! yes!”

Dona Brigida stalked up and down, while Pilar twisted her hands together, and Sturges mused upon his future wife’s talent for dramatic invention. Suddenly Dona Brigida shouted: “Tomaso, come here! The spring! A horse has watered here to-day—two horses! I see the little hoof-mark and the big.” She ran back to the cave, dragging Tomaso with her. “Quick! It is well I brought my reata. Ten minutes, and I shall have the truth. Pull there; I pull here.”

“The game is up,” whispered Sturges to Pilar. “And I have another plan.” He took a pistol from his hip-pocket and handed it to her. “You have a cool head,” he said; “now is the time to use it. As soon as this stone gives way do you point that pistol at the vaquero’s head, and don’t let your hand tremble or your eye falter as you value your liberty. I’ll take care of her.”

Pilar nodded. Sturges threw himself against the rock and pushed with all his strength. In a moment it gave, and the long brown talons of Pilar’s mother darted in to clasp the curve of the stone. Sturges was tempted to cut them off; but he was a sportsman, and liked fair play. The stone gave again, and this time he encountered two small malignant eyes. Dona Brigida dropped her hands and screamed; but, before she could alter her plans, Sturges gave a final push and rushed out, closely followed by Pilar.

It was his intention to throw the woman and bind her, hand and foot; but he had no mean opponent. Dona Brigida's surprise had not paralyzed her. She could not prevent his exit, for she went back with the stone, but she had sprung to the open before he reached it himself, and was striking at him furiously with her reata. One glance satisfied Sturges that Pilar had covered the vaquero, and he devoted the next few moments to dodging the reata. Finally, a well-directed blow knocked it from her hand, and then he flung himself upon her, intending to bear her to the ground. But she stood like a rock, and closed with him, and they reeled about the little

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plateau in the hard embrace of two fighting grizzlies. There could be no doubt about the issue, for Sturges was young and wiry and muscular; but Dona Brigida had the strength of three women, and, moreover, was not above employing methods which he could not with dignity resort to and could with difficulty parry. She bit at him. She clawed at his back and shoulders. She got hold of his hair. And she was so nimble that he could not trip her. She even roared in his ears, and once it seemed to him that her bony shoulder was cutting through his garments and skin. But after a struggle of some twenty minutes, little by little her embrace relaxed; she ceased to roar, even to hiss, her breath came in shorter and shorter gasps. Finally, her knees trembled violently, she gave a hard sob, and her arms fell to her sides. Sturges dragged her promptly into the cave and laid her down.

"You are a plucky old lady, and I respect you," he said. "But here you must stay until your daughter is safely out of the country. I shall take her far beyond your reach, and I shall marry her. When we are well out at sea, Tomaso will come back and release you. If he attempts to do so sooner, I shall blow his head off. Meanwhile you can be as comfortable here as you made your daughter; and as you brought a week's supply of bread, you will not starve."

The old woman lay and glared at him, but she made no reply. She might be violent and cruel, but she was indomitable of spirit, and she would sue to no man.

Sturges placed the bread and water beside her, then, aided by Tomaso, pushed the stone into place. As he turned about and wiped his brow, he met the eyes of the vaquero. They were averted hastily, but not before Sturges had surprised a twinkle of satisfaction in those usually impassive orbs. He shouted for Benito, then took the pistol from Pilar, who suddenly looked tired and frightened.

"You are a wonderful woman," he said; "and upon my word, I believe you get a good deal of it from your mother."

Benito came running, leading the mustangs. Sturges wrapped Pilar in the long cloak, lifted her upon one of the mustangs, and sprang to his own. He ordered Tomaso and Benito to precede them by a few paces and to take the shortest cut for Monterey. It was now close upon noon, and it was impossible to reach Monterey before dawn next day, for the mustangs were weary; but the *Joven* did not sail until ten o'clock.

"These are my plans," said Sturges to Pilar, as they walked their mustangs for a few moments after a hard gallop. "When we reach the foot of the mountain, Benito will leave us, go to your rancho, gather as much of your clothing as he can strap on a horse, and join us at the barque. He will have a good hour to spare, and can get fresh horses at the ranch. We will be married at Mazatlan. Thence we will cross Mexico to the Gulf,

and take passage for New Orleans. When we are in the United States, your new life will have really begun."

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“And Tomaso will surely bring my mother from that cave, senor? I am afraid—I feel sure he was glad to shut her in there.”

“I will leave a note for the Governor. Your mother will be free within three days, and meanwhile a little solitary meditation will do her good.”

When night came Sturges lifted Pilar from her horse to his, and pressed her head against his shoulder. “Sleep,” he said. “You are worn out.”

She flung her hand over his shoulder, made herself comfortable, and was asleep in a moment, oblivious of the dark forest and the echoing cries of wild beasts. The strong arm of Sturges would have inspired confidence even had it done less in her rescue. Once only she shook and cried out, but with rage, not fear, in her tones. Her words were coherent enough:—

“His head! His head! Ay, Dios, what I have suffered!”

An hour before dawn Benito left them, mounted on the rested mustang and leading his own. The others pushed on, over and around the foothills, with what speed they could; for even here the trail was narrow, the pine woods dense. It was just after dawn that Sturges saw Tomaso rein in his mustang and peer into the shrubbery beside the trail. When he reached the spot himself, he saw signs of a struggle. The brush was trampled for some distance into the thicket, and several of the young trees were wrenched almost from their roots.

“It has been a struggle between a man and a wild beast, senor,” whispered Tomaso, for Filar still slept. “Shall I go in? The man may breathe yet.”

“Go, by all means.”

Tomaso dismounted and entered the thicket. He came running back with blinking eyes.

“Madre de Dios!” he exclaimed in a loud whisper. “It is the young priest—Padre Dominguez. It must have been a panther, for they spring at the breast, and his very heart is torn out, senor. Ay, yi!”

“Ah! You must inform the Church as soon as we have gone. Go on.”

They had proceeded a few moments in silence, when Sturges suddenly reined in his mustang.

“Tomaso,” he whispered, “come here.”

The vaquero joined him at once.

“Tomaso,” said Sturges, “have you any objection to cutting off a dead man’s head?”

“No, senor.”

“Then go back and cut off that priest’s and wrap it in a piece of his cassock, and carry it the best way you can.”

Tomaso disappeared, and Sturges pushed back the gray hood and looked upon the pure noble face of the girl he had chosen for wife.

“I believe in gratifying a woman’s whims whenever it is practicable,” he thought.

But she made him a very good wife.

LA PERDIDA

On her fourteenth birthday they had married her to an old man, and at sixteen she had met and loved a fire-hearted young vaquero. The old husband had twisted his skinny fingers around her arm and dragged her before the Alcalde, who had ordered her beautiful black braids cut close to her neck, and sentenced her to sweep the streets. Carlos, the tempter of that childish unhappy heart, was flung into prison. Such were law and justice in California before the Americans came.

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The haughty elegant women of Monterey drew their mantillas more closely about their shocked faces as they passed La Perdida sweeping the dirt into little heaps. The soft-eyed girls, lovely in their white or flowered gowns, peered curiously through the gratings of their homes at the “lost one,” whose sin they did not understand, but whose sad face and sorry plight appealed to their youthful sympathies. The caballeros, dashing up and down the street, and dazzling in bright silken jackets, gold embroidered, lace-trimmed, the sun reflected in the silver of their saddles, shot bold admiring glances from beneath their sombreros. No one spoke to her, and she asked no one for sympathy.

She slept alone in a little hut on the outskirts of the town. With the dawn she rose, put on her coarse smock and black skirt, made herself a tortilla, then went forth and swept the streets. The children mocked her sometimes, and she looked at them in wonder. Why should she be mocked or punished? She felt no repentance; neither the Alcalde nor her husband had convinced her of her sin’s enormity; she felt only bitter resentment that it should have been so brief. Her husband, a blear-eyed crippled old man, loathsome to all the youth and imagination in her, had beaten her and made her work. A man, young, strong, and good to look upon, had come and kissed her with passionate tenderness. Love had meant to her the glorification of a wretched sordid life; a green spot and a patch of blue sky in the desert. If punishment followed upon such happiness, must not the Catholic religion be all wrong in its teachings? Must not purgatory follow heaven, instead of heaven purgatory?

She watched the graceful girls of the wealthy class flit to and fro on the long corridors of the houses, or sweep the strings of the guitar behind their gratings as the caballeros passed. Watchful old women were always near them, their ears alert for every word. La Perdida thanked God that she had had no duena.

One night, on her way home, she passed the long low prison where her lover was confined. The large crystal moon flooded the red-tiled roof projecting over the deep windows and the shallow cells. The light sweet music of a guitar floated through iron bars, and a warm voice sang:—

“Adios, adios, de ti al ausentarme,
Para ir en poz de mi fatal estrella,
Yo llevo grabada tu imagen bella,
Aqui en mi palpitante corazon.

“Pero aunque lejos de tu lado me halle
No olvides, no, que por tu amor deliro
Enviame siquiera un suspiro,
Que de consuelo, a mi alma en su dolor.

“Y de tu pecho la emocion sentida
Llegue hasta herir mi lacerado oido,

Y arranque de mi pecho dolorido
Un eco que repita, adios! adios!”

La Perdida’s blood leaped through her body. Her aimless hands struck the spiked surface of a cactus-bush, but she never knew it. When the song finished, she crept to the grating and looked in.

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“Carlos!” she whispered.

A man who lay on the straw at the back of the cell sprang to his feet and came forward.

“My little one!” he said. “I knew that song would bring thee. I begged them for a guitar, then to be put into a front cell.” He forced his hands through the bars and gave her life again with his strong warm clasp.

“Come out,” she said.

“Ay! they have me fast. But when they do let me out, nina, I will take thee in my arms; and whosoever tries to tear thee away again will have a dagger in his heart. Dios de mi vida! I could tear their flesh from their bones for the shame and the pain they have given thee, thou poor little innocent girl!”

“But thou lovest me, Carlos?”

“There is not an hour I am not mad for thee, not a corner of my heart that does not ache for thee! Ay, little one, never mind; life is long, and we are young.”

She pressed nearer and laid his hand on her heart.

“Ay!” she said, “life is long.”

“Holy Mary!” he cried. “The hills are on fire!”

A shout went up in the town. A flame, midway on the curving hills, leaped to the sky, narrow as a ribbon, then swept out like a fan. The moon grew dark behind a rolling pillar of smoke. The upcurved arms of the pines were burnt into a wall of liquid shifting red. The caballeros sprang to their horses, and driving the Indians before them, fled to the hills to save the town. The indolent women of Monterey mingled their screams with the shrill cries of the populace and the hoarse shouts of their men. The prison sentries stood to their posts for a few moments; then the panic claimed them, and they threw down their guns and ran with the rest to the hills.

Carlos gave a cry of derision and triumph. “My little one, our hour has come! Run and find the keys.”

The big bunch of keys had been flung hastily into a corner. A moment later Carlos held the shaking form of the girl in his powerful arms. Slender and delicate as she was, she made no protest against the fierceness of that embrace.

“But come,” he said. “We have only this hour for escape. When we are safe in the mountains—Come!”

He lifted her in his arms and ran down the crooked street to a corral where an hidalgo kept his finest horses. Carlos had been the vaquero of the band. The iron bars of the great doors were down—only one horse was in the corral; the others had carried the hidalgo and his friends to the fire. The brute neighed with delight as Carlos flung saddle and aquera into place, then, with La Perdida in his arms, sprang upon its back. The vaquero dug his spurs into the shining flanks, the mustang reared, shook his small head and silver mane, and bounded through the doors.

A lean, bent, and wiry thing darted from the shadows and hung upon the horse's neck. It was the husband of La Perdida, and his little brown face looked like an old walnut.

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“Take me with thee!” he cried. “I will give thee the old man’s blessing,” and, clinging like a crab to the neck of the galloping mustang, he drove a knife toward the heart of La Perdida. The blade turned upon itself as lightning sometimes does, and went through stringy tissues instead of fresh young blood.

Carlos plucked the limp body from the neck of the horse and flung it upon a cactus-bush, where it sprawled and stiffened among the spikes and the blood-red flowers. But the mustang never paused; and as the fires died on the hills, the mountains opened their great arms and sheltered the happiness of two wayward hearts.

LUKARI’S STORY

“Ay, senor! So terreeblay thing! It is many years before—1837, I theenk, is the year; the Americanos no have come to take California; but I remember like it is yesterday.

“You see, I living with her—Dona Juana Ybarra her name is—ever since I am little girl, and she too. It is like this: the padres make me Christian in the mission, and her family take me to work in the house; I no living on the rancheria like the Indians who work outside. Bime by Dona Juana marrying and I go live with her. Bime by I marrying too, and she is comadre—godmother, you call, no?—to my little one, and steel I living with her, and in few years my husband and little one die and I love her children like they are my own, and her too; we grow old together.

“You never see the San Ysidro rancho? It is near to San Diego and have many, many leagues. Don Carlos Ybarra, the husband de my senora, is very reech and very brave and proud—too brave and proud, ay, yi! We have a beeg adobe house with more than twenty rooms, and a corridor for the front more than one hundred feets. Ou’side are plenty other houses where make all the things was need for eat and wear: all but the fine closes. They come from far,—from Boston and Mejico. All stand away from the hills and trees, right in the middle the valley, so can see the bad Indians when coming. Far off, a mile I theenk, is the rancheria; no can see from the house. No so far is the corral, where keeping the fine horses.

“Ay, we have plenty to eat and no much to do in those days. Don Carlos and Dona Juana are very devot the one to the other, so the family living very happy, and I am in the house like before and take care the little ones. Every night I braid my senora’s long black hair and tuck her in bed like she is a baby. She no grow stout when she grow more old, like others, but always is muy elegante.

“Bime by the childrens grow up; and the two firs boys, Roldan and Enrique, marrying and living in San Diego. Then are left only the senor and the senora, one little boy, Carlos, and my two beautiful senoritas, Beatriz and Ester. Ay! How pretty they are. Dios de mi alma! Where they are now?

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“Dona Beatriz is tall like the mother, and sway when she walk, like you see the tules in the little wind. She have the eyes very black and long, and look like she feel sleep till she get mad; then, Madre de Dios! they opa wide and look like she is on fire inside and go to burn you too. She have the skin very white, but I see it hot like the blood go to burst out. Once she get furioso cause one the vaqueros hurch her horse, and she wheep him till he yell like he is in purgatory and no have no one say mass and get him out. But she have the disposition very sweet, and after, she is sorry and make him a cake hersel; and we all loving her like she is a queen, and she can do it all whatte she want.

“Dona Ester have the eyes more brown and soft, and the disposition more mild, but very feerm, and she having her own way more often than Dona Beatriz. She no is so tall, but very gracerful too, and walk like she think she is tall. All the Spanish so dignify, no? She maka very kind with the Indians when they are seek, and all loving her, but no so much like Dona Beatriz.

“Both girls very industrioso, sewing and make the broidery; make beautiful closes to wear at the ball. Ay, the balls! No have balls like those in California now. Sometimes have one fifty miles away, but they no care; jump on the horse and go, dance till the sun wake up and no feel tire at all. Sometimes when is wedding, or rodeo, dance for one week, then ride home like nothing have happen. In the winter the family living in San Diego; have big house there and dance every night, horseback in day when no rain, and have so many races and games. Ay, yi! All the girls so pretty. No wear hats then; the reboso, no more, or the mantilla; fix it so gracerful; and the dresses so bright colours, sometimes with flowers all over; the skirt make very fule, and the waist have the point. And the closes de mens! Madre de Dios! The beautiful velvet and silk closes, broider by silver and gold! And the saddles so fine! But you think I never go to tell you the story.

“One summer we are more gay than ever. So many caballeros love my senoritas, but I think they never love any one, and never go to marry at all. For a month we have the house fule; meriendas—peek-neeks, you call, no? And races every day, dance in the night. Then all go to stay at another rancho; it is costumbre to visit the one to the other. I feel very sorry for two so handsome caballeros, who are more devot than any. They looking very sad when they go, and I am sure they propose and no was accep.

“In the evening it is very quiet, and I am sweep the corridor when I hear two horses gallop down the valley. I fix my hand—so—like the barrel de gun, and look, and I see, riding very hard, Don Carmelo Pelajo and Don Rafael Arguello. The firs, he loving Dona Beatriz, the other, he want Dona Ester. I go queeck and tell the girls, and Beatriz toss her head and look very scornfule, but Ester blushing and the eyes look very happy. The young mens come in in few minutes and are well treat by Don Carlos and Dona Juana, for like them very much and are glad si the girls marry with them.

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“After supper I am turn down the bed in my senora’s room when I hear somebody spik very low ou’side on the corridor. I kneel on the window-seat and look out, and there I see Don Rafael have his arms roun Dona Ester and kissing her and she no mine at all. I wonder how they get out there by themselfs, for the Spanish very streect with the girls and no ’low that. But the young peoples always very—how you say it?—smart, no? After while all go to bed, and I braid Dona Juana’s hair and she tell me Ester go to marry Don Rafael, and she feel very happy and I no say one word. Then I go to Dona Beatriz’s bedroom; always I fix her for the bed, too. Ester have other woman take care her, but Beatriz love me. She keeck me when she is little, and pull my hair, when I no give her the dulces; but I no mine, for she have the good heart and so sweet spression when she no is mad and always maka very kind with me. I comb her hair and I see she look very cross and I ask her why, and she say she hate mens, they are fools, and womens too. I ask her why she think that, and she say she no can be spect have reason for all whatte she think; and she throw her head aroun so I no can comb at all and keeck out her little foot.

“‘You no go to marry with Don Carlos?’ I asking.

“‘No!’ she say, and youbetcherlife her eyes flash. ’You think I marrying a singing, sighing, gambling, sleepy caballero? Si no can marry man I no marry at all. Madre de Dios!’ (She spik beautiful; but I no spik good Eenglish, and you no ondrestan the Spanish.)

“‘But all are very much like,’ I say; ’and you no want die old maid, no?’

“‘I no care!’ and then she fling hersel roun on the chair and throw her arms roun me and cry and sob on my estomac. ‘Ay, my Lukari!’ she cry when she can spik,’ I hate everybody! I am tire out to exista! I want to live! I am tire stay all alone! Oh, I want—I no know what I want! Life is terreeblay thing, macheppa!’

“I no know at all whatte she mean, for have plenty peoples all the time, and she never walk, so I no can think why she feel tire; but I kissing her and smoothe her hair, for I jus love her, and tell her no cry. Bime by she fine it some one she loving, and she is very young yet,—twenty, no more.

“‘I no stay here any longer,’ she say. ’I go to ask my father take me to Mejico, where can see something cept hills and trees and missions and forts, and where perhaps—ay, Dios de mi alma!’ Then she jump up and take me by the shoulders and just throw me out the room and lock the door; but I no mine, for I am use to her.

“Bueno, I think I go for walk, and bime by I come to the rancheria, and while I am there I hear terreeblay thing from old Pepe. He say he hear for sure that the bad Indians—who was no make Christian by the padres and living very wild in the mountains—come killing

all the white peoples on the ranchos. He say he know sure it is true, and tell me beg Don Carlos send to San Diego

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for the soldiers come take care us. I feel so fright I hardly can walk back to the house, and I no sleep that night. In the morning firs thing I telling Don Carlos, but he say is nonsense and no will lissen. He is very brave and no care for nothing; fight the Indians and killing them plenty times. The two caballeros go away after breakfas, and when they are gone I can see my senora alone, and I telling her. She feel very fright and beg Don Carlos send for the soldiers, but he no will. Ay, yi! Ester is fright too; but Beatriz laugh and say she like have some excite and killing the Indians hersel. After while old Pepe come up to the house and tell he hear ’gain, but Don Carlos no will ask him even where he hear, and tell him to go back to the rancheria where belong, and make the reatas; he is so old he no can make anything else.

“Bueno! The nex morning—bout nine o’clock—Don Carlos is at the corral with two vaqueros and I am in the keetchen with the cook and one Indian boy, call Franco. Never I like that boy. Something so sneak, and he steal the dulces plenty times and walk so soffit. I am help the cook—very good woman, but no have much sense—fry lard, when I hear terreeblay noise—horses gallop like they jump out the earth near the house, and many mens yell and scream and shout.

“I run to the window and whatte I see?—Indians, Indians, Indians, thick like black ants on hill, jus race for the house, yelling like the horses’ backs been fule de pins; and Don Carlos and the two vaqueros run like they have wings for the kitchen door, so can get in and get the guns and fight from the windows. I know whatte they want, so I run to the door to throw wide, and whatte I see but that devil Franco lock it and stan in front. I jump on him so can scratch his eyes out, but he keeck me in the estomac and for few minutes I no know it nothing.

“When I opa my eyes, the room is fule de Indians, and in the iron the house I hear my senora and Dona Ester scream, scream, scream. I crawl up by the window-seat and look out, and there—ay, Madre de Dios!—see on the groun my senor dead, stuck fule de arrows; and the vaqueros, too, of course. That maka me crazy and I run among the Indians, hitting them with my fists, to my senora and my senoritas. Jus as I run into the sala they go to killing my senora, but I snatch the knife and fall down on my knees and beg and cry they no hurcha her, and bime by they say all right. But—santa Dios!—-whatte you think they do it? They tear all the closes offa her till she is naked like my ban, and drive her out the house with the reatas. They no letting me follow and I look out the window and see her reel like she is drunk down the valley and scream, scream!—Ay, Dios!

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“Ester, she faint and no know it nothing. Beatriz, she have kill one Indian with her pistol, but they take way from her, and she stan look like the dead woman with eyes that have been in hell, in front the chief, who looka her very hard. He is very fine look, that chief, so tall and strong, like he can kill by sweep his arm roun, and he have fierce black eyes and no bad nose for Indian, with nostrils that jump. His mouth no is cruel like mos the bad Indians, nor the forehead so low. He wear the crown de feathers, and botas, and scrape de goaskin; the others no wear much at all. In a minute he pick up Beatriz and fling her over his shoulder like she is the dead deer, and he tell other do the same by Ester, and he stalk out and ride away hard. The others set fire everything, then ride after him. They no care for me and I stand there shriek after my senoritas and the beautiful housses burn up.

“Then I think de my senora and I run after the way she going. Bime by I find her in a wheat field, kissing and hugging little Carlos, who go out early and no meet the Indians; and he no ondrestan what is the matter and dance up and down he is so fright. I tell him run fas to San Diego and tell Don Roldan and Don Enrique whatte have happen, and he run like he is glad to get away. Then I take off my closes and put them on my senora and drag her along, and, bime by, we coming to a little house, and a good woman give me some closes and in the night we coming to San Diego. Ay! but was excite, everybody. Carlos been there two or three hours before, and Don Roldan and Don Enrique go with the soldiers to the hills. Everybody do it all whatte they can for my poor senora, but she no want to speak by anybody, and go shut hersel up in a room in Don Enrique’s house and jus moan and I sit ou’side the door and moan too.

“Of course, I no am with the soldiers, but many times I hear all and I tell you.

“The Indians have good start, and the white peoples no even see them, but they fine the trail and follow hard. Bime by they coming to the mountains. You ever been in the mountains back de San Diego? No the hills, but the mountains. Ay! So bare and rofe and sharp, and the canons so narrow and the trails so steep! No is safe to go in at all, for the Indians can hide on the rocks, and jus shoot the white peoples down one at the time, si they like it, when climb the gorges. The soldiers say they no go in, for it is the duty de them to living and protec California from the Americanos; but Don Enrique and Don Roldan say they go, and they ride right in and no one ever spect see them any more. It is night, so they have good chancacum to look and no be seen si Indians no watch.

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“Bime by they meet one Indian, who belong to the tribe they want, and ’fore he can shoot they point the pistol and tell him he mus show them where are the girls. He say he taking them, and on the way he telling them the chief and nother chief make the girls their wives. This make them wild, and they tie up the horses so can climb more fast. But it is no till late the nex morning when they come sudden out of a gorge and look right into a place, very flat like a plaza, where is the pueblo de the Indians they want. For moment no one see them, and they see the girls—Dios de mi alma! Have been big feast, I theenk, and right where are all the things no been clear away, Ester, she lie on the groun on the face, and cry and sob and shake. But Beatriz, she stan very straight in the middle, ’fore the door the big wigwam, and never look more hansome. She never take her eyes off the chief who taking her away, and no look discontent at all. Then the Indians see the brothers and yell and run to get the bows and arrows. Don Enrique and Don Roldan fire the pistols, but after all they have to run, for no can do it nothing. They get out live but have arrows in them. And that is the las we ever hear de my senoritas. Many time plenty white peoples watch the mountains and sometimes go in, but no can find nothing and always are wound.

“And my poor senora! For whole year she jus sit in one room and cry so loud all the peoples in San Diego hear her. No can do it nothing with her. Ay, she love the husband so, and the two beautiful girls! Then she die, and I am glad. Much better die than suffer like that. And Don Rafael and Don Carmelo? Oh, they marrying other girls, course.”

NATALIE IVANHOFF: A MEMORY OF FORT ROSS

At Fort Ross, on the northern coast of California, it is told that an astonishing sight may be witnessed in the midnight of the twenty-third of August. The present settlement vanishes. In its place the Fort appears as it was when the Russians abandoned it in 1841. The quadrilateral stockade of redwood beams, pierced with embrasures for carronades, is compact and formidable once more. The ramparts are paced by watchful sentries; mounted cannon are behind the iron-barred gates and in the graceful bastions. Within the enclosure are the low log buildings occupied by the Governor and his officers, the barracks of the soldiers, the arsenal, and storehouses. In one corner stands the Greek chapel, with its cupola and cross-surmounted belfry. The silver chimes have rung this night. The Governor, his beautiful wife, and their guest, Natalie Ivanhoff, have knelt at the jewelled altar.

At the right of the Fort is a small “town” of rude huts which accommodates some eight hundred Indians and Siberian convicts, the working-men of the company. Above the “town,” on a high knoll, is a large grist-mill. Describing an arc of perfect proportions, its midmost depression a mile behind the Fort, a great mountain forms a natural rampart. At either extreme it tapers to the jagged cliffs. On its three lower tables the mountain is green and bare; then abruptly rises a forest of redwoods, tall, rigid, tenebrious.

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The mountain is visible but a moment. An immense white fog-bank which has been crouching on the horizon rears suddenly and rushes across the ocean, whose low mutter rises to a roar. It sweeps like a tidal wave across cliffs and Fort. It halts abruptly against the face of the mountain. In the same moment the ocean stills. It would almost seem that Nature held her breath, awaiting some awful event.

Suddenly, in the very middle of the fog-bank, appears the shadowy figure of a woman. She is gliding—to the right—rapidly and stealthily. Youth is in her slender grace, her delicate profile, dimly outlined. Her long silver-blond hair is unbound and luminously distinct from the white fog. She walks swiftly across the lower table of the mountain, then disappears. One sees, vaguely, a dark figure crouching along the lower fringe of the fog. That, too, disappears.

For a moment the silence seems intensified. Then, suddenly, it is crossed by a low whir—a strange sound in the midnight. Then a shriek whose like is never heard save when a soul is wrenched without warning in frightfullest torture from its body. Then another and another and another in rapid succession, each fainter and more horrible in suggestion than the last. With them has mingled the single frenzied cry of a man. A moment later a confused hubbub arises from the Fort and town, followed by the flashes of many lights and the report of musketry. Then the fog presses downward on the scene. All sound but that of the ocean, which seems to have drawn into its loud dull voice all the angers of all the dead, ceases as though muffled. The fog lingers a moment, then drifts back as it came, and Fort Ross is the Fort Ross of to-day.

And this is the story:—

When the Princess Helene de Gagarin married Alexander Rotscheff, she little anticipated that she would spend her honeymoon in the northern wilds of the Californias. Nevertheless, when her husband was appointed Governor of the Fort Ross and Bodega branch of the great Alaskan Fur Company, she volunteered at once to go with him—being in that stage of devotion which may be termed the emotionally heroic as distinguished from the later of non-resistance. As the exile would last but a few years, and as she was a lady of a somewhat adventurous spirit, to say nothing of the fact that she was deeply in love, her interpretation of wifely duty hardly wore the hue of martyrdom even to herself.

Notwithstanding, and although she had caused to be prepared a large case of books and eight trunks of ravishing raiment, she decided that life in a fort hidden between the mountains and the sea, miles away from even the primitive Spanish civilization, might hang burdensomely at such whiles as her husband's duties claimed him and books ceased to amuse. So she determined to ask the friend of her twenty-three years, the Countess Natalie Ivanhoff, to accompany her. She had, also, an unselfish motive in so doing. Not only did she cherish for the Countess Natalie a real affection, but her friend was as deeply wretched as she was happy.

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Two years before, the Prince Alexis Mikhailof, betrothed of Natalie Ivanhoff, had been, without explanation or chance of parting word, banished to Siberia under sentence of perpetual exile. Later had come rumour of his escape, then of death, then of recapture. Nothing definite could be learned. When the Princess Helene made her invitation, it was accepted gratefully, hope suggesting that in the New World might be found relief from the torture that was relived in every vibration of the invisible wires that held memory fast to the surroundings in which the terrible impressions, etchers of memory, had their genesis.

They arrived in summer, and found the long log house, with its low ceilings and rude finish, admirably comfortable within. By aid of the great case of things Rotscheff had brought, it quickly became an abode of luxury. Thick carpets covered every floor; arras hid the rough walls; books and pictures and handsome ornaments crowded each other; every chair had been designed for comfort as well as elegance; the dining table was hidden beneath finest damask, and glittered with silver and crystal. It was an unwritten law that every one should dress for dinner; and with the rich curtains hiding the gloomy mountain and the long sweep of cliffs intersected by gorge and gulch, it was easy for the gay congenial band of exiles to forget that they were not eating the delicacies of their French cook and drinking their costly wines in the Old World.

In the daytime the women—several of the officers' wives had braved the wilderness—-found much diversion in riding through the dark forests or along the barren cliffs, attended always by an armed guard. Diego Estenega, the Spanish magnate of the North, whose ranchos adjoined Fort Ross, and who was financially interested in the Russian fur trade, soon became an intimate of the Rotscheff household. A Californian by birth, he was, nevertheless, a man of modern civilization, travelled, a student, and a keen lover of masculine sports. Although the most powerful man in the politics of his conservative country, he was an American in appearance and dress. His cloth or tweed suggested the colorous magnificence of the caballeros as little as did his thin nervous figure and grim pallid intellectual face. Rotscheff liked him better than any man he had ever met; with the Princess he usually waged war, that lady being clever, quick, and wedded to her own opinions. For Natalie he felt a sincere friendship at once. Being a man of keen sympathies and strong impulses, he divined her trouble before he heard her story, and desired to help her.

The Countess Natalie, despite the Governor's prohibition, was addicted to roving over the cliffs by herself, finding kinship in the sterile crags and futile restlessness of the ocean. She had learned that although change of scene lightened the burden, only death would release her from herself.

"She will get over it," said the Princess Helene to Estenega. "I was in love twice before I met Alex, so I know. Natalie is so beautiful that some day some man, who will not look in the least like poor Alexis, will make her forget."

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Estenega, being a man of the world and having consequently outgrown the cynicism of youth, also knowing women better than this fair Minerva would know them in twenty lifetimes, thought differently, and a battle ensued.

Natalie, meanwhile, wandered along the cliffs. She passed the town hurriedly. Several times when in its vicinity before, the magnetism of an intense gaze had given her a thrill of alarm, and once or twice she had met face to face the miller's son—a forbidding youth with the skull of the Tartar and the coarse black hair and furtive eyes of the Indian—whose admiration of her beauty had been annoyingly apparent. She was not conscious of observation to-day, however, and skirted the cliffs rapidly, drawing her gray mantle about her as the wind howled by, but did not lift the hood; the massive coils of silver-blond hair kept her head warm.

As the Princess Helene, despite her own faultless blondinity, had pronounced, Natalie Ivanhoff was a beautiful woman. Her profile had the delicate effect produced by the chisel. Her white skin was transparent and untinted, but the mouth was scarlet. The large long eyes of a changeful blue-gray, although limpid of surface, were heavy with the sadness of a sad spirit. Their natural fire was quenched just as the slight compression of her lips had lessened the sensuous fulness of their curves.

But she had suffered so bitterly and so variously that the points had been broken off her nerves, she told herself, and, excepting when her trouble mounted suddenly like a wave within her, her mind was tranquil. Grief with her had expressed itself in all its forms. She had known what it was to be crushed into semi-insensibility; she had thrilled as the tears rushed and the sobs shook her until every nerve ached and her very fingers cramped; and she had gone wild at other times, burying her head, that her screams might not be heard: the last, as imagination pictured her lover's certain physical suffering. But of all agonies, none could approximate to that induced by Death. When that rumour reached her, she realized that hope had given her some measure of support, and how insignificant all other trouble is beside that awful blank, that mystery, whose single revelation is the houseless soul's unreturning flight from the only world we are sure of. When the contradicting rumour came, she clutched at hope and clung to it.

"It is the only reason I do not kill myself," she thought, as she stood on the jutting brow of the cliff and looked down on the masses of huge stones which, with the gaunt outlying rocks, had once hung on the face of the crags. The great breakers boiled over them with the ponderosity peculiar to the waters of the Pacific. The least of those breakers would carry her far into the hospitable ocean.

"It is so easy to die and be at peace; the only thing which makes life supportable is the knowledge of Death's quick obedience. And the tragedy of life is not that we cannot forget, but that we can. Think of being an old woman with not so much as a connecting current between the memory and the heart, the long interval blocked with ten thousand

petty events and trials! It must be worse than this. I shall have gone over the cliff long before that time comes. I would go to-day, but I cannot leave the world while he is in it."

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She drew a case from her pocket, and opened it. It showed the portrait of a young man with the sombre eyes and cynical mouth of the northern European, a face revealing intellect, will, passion, and much recklessness. Eyes and hair were dark, the face smooth but for a slight mustache.

Natalie burst into wild tears, revelling in the solitude that gave her freedom. She pressed the picture against her face, and cried her agony aloud to the ocean. Thrilling memories rushed through her, and she lived again the first ecstasy of grief. She did not fling herself upon the ground, or otherwise indulge in the acrobatics of woe, but she shook from head to foot. Between the heavy sobs her breath came in hard gasps, and tears poured, hiding the gray desolation of the scene.

Suddenly, through it all, she became conscious that some one was watching her. Instinctively she knew that it was the same gaze which so often had alarmed her. Fear routed every other passion. She realized that she was unprotected, a mile from the Fort, out of the line of its vision. The brutal head of the miller's son seemed to thrust itself before her face. Overwhelmed with terror, she turned swiftly and ran, striking blindly among the low bushes, her glance darting from right to left. No one was to be seen for a moment; then she turned the corner of a boulder and came upon a man. She shrieked and covered her face with her hands, now too frightened to move. The man neither stirred nor spoke; and, despite this alarming circumstance, her disordered brain, in the course of a moment, conceived the thought that no subject of Rotscheff would dare to harm her.

Moreover, her brief glance had informed her that this was not the miller's son; which fact, illogically, somewhat tempered her fear. She removed her hands and compelled herself to look sternly at the creature who had dared to raise his eyes to the Countess Natalie Ivanhoff. She was puzzled to find something familiar about him. His grizzled hair was long, but not unkempt. The lower part of his face was covered by a beard. He was almost fleshless; but in his sunken eyes burned unquenchable fire, and there was a determined vigour in his gaunt figure. He might have been any age. Assuredly, the outward seeming of youth was not there, but its suggestion still lingered tenaciously in the spirit which glowed through the worn husk. And about him, in spite of the rough garb and blackened skin, was an unmistakable air of breeding.

Natalie, as she looked, grew rigid. Then she uttered a cry of rapturous horror, staggered, and was caught in a fierce embrace. Her stunned senses awoke in a moment, and she clung to him, crying wildly, holding him with straining arms, filled with bitter happiness.

In a few moments he pushed her from him and regarded her sadly.

"You are as beautiful as ever," he said; "but I—look at me! Old, hideous, ragged! I am not fit to touch you; I never meant to. Go! I shall never blame you."

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For answer she sprang to him again.

“What difference is it how you look?” she cried, still sobbing. “Is it not *you?* Are not you in here just the same? What matter? What matter? No matter what you looked through, you would be the same. Listen,” she continued rapidly, after a moment. “We are in a new country; there is hope for us. If we can reach the Spanish towns of the South, we are safe. I will ask Don Diego Estenega to help us, and he is not the man to refuse. He stays with us to-night, and I will speak alone with him. Meet me to-morrow night—where? At the grist-mill at midnight. We had better not meet by day again. Perhaps we can go then. You will be there?”

“Will I be there? God! Of course I will be there.”

And, the brief details of their flight concluded, they forgot it and all else for the hour.

II

Natalie could not obtain speech alone with Estenega that evening; but the next morning the Princess Helene commanded her household and guest to accompany her up the hill to the orchard at the foot of the forest; and there, while the others wandered over the knolls of the shadowy enclosure, Natalie managed to tell her story. Estenega offered his help spontaneously.

“At twelve to-night,” he said, “I will wait for you in the forest with horses, and will guide you myself to Monterey. I have a house there, and you can leave on the first barque for Boston.”

As soon as the party returned to the Fort, Estenega excused himself and left for his home. The day passed with maddening slowness to Natalie. She spent the greater part of it walking up and down the immediate cliffs, idly watching the men capturing the seals and otters, the ship-builders across the gulch. As she returned at sunset to the enclosure, she saw the miller’s son standing by the gates, gazing at her with hungry admiration. He inspired her with sudden fury.

“Never presume to look at me again,” she said harshly. “If you do, I shall report you to the Governor.”

And without waiting to note how he accepted the mandate, she swept by him and entered the Fort, the gates clashing behind her.

The inmates of Fort Ross were always in bed by eleven o’clock. At that hour not a sound was to be heard but the roar of the ocean, the soft pacing of the sentry on the ramparts, the cry of the panther in the forest. On the evening in question, after the others had retired, Natalie, trembling with excitement, made a hasty toilet, changing her

evening gown for a gray travelling frock. Her heavy hair came unbound, and her shaking hands refused to adjust the close coils. As it fell over her gray mantle it looked so lovely, enveloping her with the silver sheen of mist, that she smiled in sad vanity, remembering happier days, and decided to let her lover see her so. She could braid her hair at the mill.

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A moment or two before twelve she raised the window and swung herself to the ground. The sentry was on the rampart opposite: she could not make her exit by that gate. She walked softly around the buildings, keeping in their shadow, and reached the gates facing the forest. They were not difficult to unbar, and in a moment she stood without, free. She could not see the mountain; a heavy bank of white fog lay against it, resting, after its long flight over the ocean, before it returned, or swept onward to ingulf the redwoods.

She went with noiseless step up the path, then turned and walked swiftly toward the mill. She was very nervous; mingling with the low voice of the ocean she imagined she heard the moans with which beheaded convicts were said to haunt the night. Once she thought she heard a footstep behind her, and paused, her heart beating audibly. But the sound ceased with her own soft footfalls, and the fog was so dense that she could see nothing. The ground was soft, and she was beyond the sentry's earshot; she ran at full speed across the field, down the gorge, and up the steep knoll. As she reached the top, she was taken in Mikhailof's arms. For a few moments she was too breathless to speak; then she told him her plans.

"Let me braid my hair," she said finally, "and we will go."

He drew her within the mill, then lit a lantern and held it above her head, his eyes dwelling passionately on her beauty, enhanced by the colour of excitement and rapid exercise.

"You look like the moon queen," he said. "I missed your hair, apart from yourself."

She lifted her chin with a movement of coquetry most graceful in spite of long disuse, and the answering fire sprang into her eyes. She looked very piquant and a trifle diabolical. He pressed his lips suddenly on hers. A moment later something tugged at the long locks his hand caressed, and at the same time he became conscious that the silence which had fallen between them was shaken by a loud whir. He glanced upward. Natalie was standing with her back to one of the band-wheels. It had begun to revolve; in the moment it increased its speed; and he saw a glittering web on its surface. With an exclamation of horror, he pulled her toward him; but he was too late. The wheel, spinning now with the velocity of midday, caught the whole silver cloud in its spokes, and Natalie was swept suddenly upward. Her feet hit the low rafters, and she was whirled round and round, screams of torture torn from her rather than uttered, her body describing a circular right angle to the shaft, the bones breaking as they struck the opposite one; then, in swift finality, she was sucked between belt and wheel. Mikhailof managed to get into the next room and reverse the lever. The machinery stopped as abruptly as it had started; but Natalie was out of her agony.

Her lover flung himself over the cliffs, shattering bones and skull on the stones at their base. They made her a coffin out of the copper plates used for their ships, and laid her in the straggling unpopulous cemetery on the knoll across the gulch beyond the chapel.

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“When we go, we will take her,” said Rotscheff to his distracted wife.

But when they went, a year or two after, in the hurry of departure they forgot her until too late. They promised to return. But they never came, and she sleeps there still, on the lonely knoll between the sunless forest and the desolate ocean.

THE VENGEANCE OF PADRE ARROYO

I

Pilar, from her little window just above the high wall surrounding the big adobe house set apart for the women neophytes of the Mission of Santa Ines, watched, morning and evening, for Andreo, as he came and went from the rancheria. The old women kept the girls busy, spinning, weaving, sewing; but age nods and youth is crafty. The tall young Indian who was renowned as the best huntsman of all the neophytes, and who supplied Padre Arroyo’s table with deer and quail, never failed to keep his ardent eyes fixed upon the grating so long as it lay within the line of his vision. One day he went to Padre Arroyo and told him that Pilar was the prettiest girl behind the wall—the prettiest girl in all the Californias—and that she should be his wife. But the kind stern old padre shook his head.

“You are both too young. Wait another year, my son, and if thou art still in the same mind, thou shalt have her.”

Andreo dared to make no protest, but he asked permission to prepare a home for his bride. The padre gave it willingly, and the young Indian began to make the big adobes, the bright red tiles. At the end of a month he had built him a cabin among the willows of the rancheria, a little apart from the others: he was in love, and association with his fellows was distasteful. When the cabin was builded his impatience slipped from its curb, and once more he besought the priest to allow him to marry.

Padre Arroyo was sunning himself on the corridor of the mission, shivering in his heavy brown robes, for the day was cold.

“Orion,” he said sternly—he called all his neophytes after the celebrities of earlier days, regardless of the names given them at the font—“have I not told thee thou must wait a year? Do not be impatient, my son. She will keep. Women are like apples: when they are too young, they set the teeth on edge; when ripe and mellow, they please every sense; when they wither and turn brown, it is time to fall from the tree into a hole. Now go and shoot a deer for Sunday: the good padres from San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara are coming to dine with me.”

Andreo, dejected, left the padre. As he passed Pilar's window and saw a pair of wistful black eyes behind the grating, his heart took fire. No one was within sight. By a series of signs he made his lady understand that he would place a note beneath a certain adobe in the wall.

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Pilar, as she went to and fro under the fruit trees in the garden, or sat on the long corridor weaving baskets, watched that adobe with fascinated eyes. She knew that Andreo was tunnelling it, and one day a tiny hole proclaimed that his work was accomplished. But how to get the note? The old women's eyes were very sharp when the girls were in front of the gratings. Then the civilizing development of Christianity upon the heathen intellect triumphantly asserted itself. Pilar, too, conceived a brilliant scheme. That night the padre, who encouraged any evidence of industry, no matter how eccentric, gave her a little garden of her own—a patch where she could raise sweet peas and Castilian roses.

"That is well, that is well, my Nausicaa," he said, stroking her smoky braids. "Go cut the slips and plant them where thou wilt. I will send thee a package of sweet pea seeds."

Pilar spent every spare hour bending over her "patch"; and the hole, at first no bigger than a pin's point, was larger at each setting of the sun behind the mountain. The old women, scolding on the corridor, called to her not to forget vespers.

On the third evening, kneeling on the damp ground, she drew from the little tunnel in the adobe a thin slip of wood covered with the labour of sleepless nights. She hid it in her smock—that first of California's love-letters—then ran with shaking knees and prostrated herself before the altar. That night the moon streamed through her grating, and she deciphered the fact that Andreo had loosened eight adobes above her garden, and would await her every midnight.

Pilar sat up in bed and glanced about the room with terrified delight. It took her but a moment to decide the question; love had kept her awake too many nights. The neophytes were asleep; as they turned now and again, their narrow beds of hide, suspended from the ceiling, swung too gently to awaken them. The old women snored loudly. Pilar slipped from her bed and looked through the grating. Andreo was there, the dignity and repose of primeval man in his bearing. She waved her hand and pointed downward to the wall; then, throwing on the long coarse gray smock that was her only garment, crept from the room and down the stair. The door was protected against hostile tribes by a heavy iron bar, but Pilar's small hands were hard and strong, and in a moment she stood over the adobes which had crushed her roses and sweet peas.

As she crawled through the opening, Andreo took her hand bashfully, for they never had spoken. "Come," he said; "we must be far away before dawn."

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They stole past the long mission, crossing themselves as they glanced askance at the ghostly row of pillars; past the guard-house, where the sentries slept at their post; past the rancheria; then, springing upon a waiting mustang, dashed down the valley. Pilar had never been on a horse before, and she clung in terror to Andreo, who bestrode the unsaddled beast as easily as a cloud rides the wind. His arm held her closely, fear vanished, and she enjoyed the novel sensation. Glancing over Andreo's shoulder she watched the mass of brown and white buildings, the winding river, fade into the mountain. Then they began to ascend an almost perpendicular steep. The horse followed a narrow trail; the crowding trees and shrubs clutched the blankets and smocks of the riders; after a time trail and scene grew white: the snow lay on the heights.

"Where do we go?" she asked.

"To Zaca Lake, on the very top of the mountain, miles above us. No one has ever been there but myself. Often I have shot deer and birds beside it. They never will find us there."

The red sun rose over the mountains of the east. The crystal moon sank in the west. Andreo sprang from the weary mustang and carried Pilar to the lake.

A sheet of water, round as a whirlpool but calm and silver, lay amidst the sweeping willows and pine-forested peaks. The snow glittered beneath the trees, but a canoe was on the lake, a hut on the marge.

II

Padre Arroyo tramped up and down the corridor, smiting his hands together. The Indians bowed lower than usual, as they passed, and hastened their steps. The soldiers scoured the country for the bold violators of mission law. No one asked Padre Arroyo what he would do with the sinners, but all knew that punishment would be sharp and summary: the men hoped that Andreo's mustang had carried him beyond its reach; the girls, horrified as they were, wept and prayed in secret for Pilar.

A week later, in the early morning, Padre Arroyo sat on the corridor. The mission stood on a plateau overlooking a long valley forked and sparkled by the broad river. The valley was planted thick with olive trees, and their silver leaves glittered in the rising sun. The mountain peaks about and beyond were white with snow, but the great red poppies blossomed at their feet. The padre, exiled from the luxury and society of his dear Spain, never tired of the prospect: he loved his mission children, but he loved Nature more.

Suddenly he leaned forward on his staff and lifted the heavy brown hood of his habit from his ear. Down the road winding from the eastern mountains came the echo of

galloping footfalls. He rose expectantly and waddled out upon the plaza, shading his eyes with his hand. A half-dozen soldiers, riding closely about a horse bestridden by a stalwart young Indian supporting a woman, were rapidly approaching the mission. The padre returned to his seat and awaited their coming.

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The soldiers escorted the culprits to the corridor; two held the horse while they descended, then led it away, and Andreo and Pilar were alone with the priest. The bridegroom placed his arm about the bride and looked defiantly at Padre Arroyo, but Pilar drew her long hair about her face and locked her hands together.

Padre Arroyo folded his arms and regarded them with lowered brows, a sneer on his mouth.

“I have new names for you both,” he said, in his thickest voice. “Antony, I hope thou hast enjoyed thy honeymoon. Cleopatra, I hope thy little toes did not get frost-bitten. You both look as if food had been scarce. And your garments have gone in good part to clothe the brambles, I infer. It is too bad you could not wait a year and love in your cabin at the rancheria, by a good fire, and with plenty of frijoles and tortillas in your stomachs.” He dropped his sarcastic tone, and, rising to his feet, extended his right arm with a gesture of malediction. “Do you comprehend the enormity of your sin?” he shouted. “Have you not learned on your knees that the fires of hell are the rewards of unlawful love? Do you not know that even the year of sackcloth and ashes I shall impose here on earth will not save you from those flames a million times hotter than the mountain fire, than the roaring pits in which evil Indians torture one another? A hundred years of their scorching breath, of roasting flesh, for a week of love! Oh, God of my soul!”

Andreo looked somewhat staggered, but unrepentant. Pilar burst into loud sobs of terror.

The padre stared long and gloomily at the flags of the corridor. Then he raised his head and looked sadly at his lost sheep.

“My children,” he said solemnly, “my heart is wrung for you. You have broken the laws of God and of the Holy Catholic Church, and the punishments thereof are awful. Can I do anything for you, excepting to pray? You shall have my prayers, my children. But that is not enough; I cannot—ay! I cannot endure the thought that you shall be damned. Perhaps”—again he stared meditatively at the stones, then, after an impressive silence, raised his eyes. “Heaven vouchsafes me an idea, my children. I will make your punishment here so bitter that Almighty God in His mercy will give you but a few years of purgatory after death. Come with me.”

He turned and led the way slowly to the rear of the mission buildings. Andreo shuddered for the first time, and tightened his arm about Pilar’s shaking body. He knew that they were to be locked in the dungeons. Pilar, almost fainting, shrank back as they reached the narrow spiral stair which led downward to the cells. “Ay! I shall die, my Andreo!” she cried. “Ay! my father, have mercy!”

“I cannot, my children,” said the padre, sadly. “It is for the salvation of your souls.”

“Mother of God! When shall I see thee again, my Pilar?” whispered Andreo. “But, ay! the memory of that week on the mountain will keep us both alive.”

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Padre Arroyo descended the stair and awaited them at its foot. Separating them, and taking each by the hand, he pushed Andreo ahead and dragged Pilar down the narrow passage. At its end he took a great bunch of keys from his pocket, and raising both hands commanded them to kneel. He said a long prayer in a loud monotonous voice which echoed and reechoed down the dark hall and made Pilar shriek with terror. Then he fairly hurled the marriage ceremony at them, and made the couple repeat after him the responses. When it was over, “Arise,” he said.

The poor things stumbled to their feet, and Andreo caught Pilar in a last embrace.

“Now bear your incarceration with fortitude, my children; and if you do not beat the air with your groans, I will let you out in a week. Do not hate your old father, for love alone makes him severe, but pray, pray, pray.”

And then he locked them both in the same cell.

THE BELLS OF SAN GABRIEL

I

The Senor Capitan Don Luis de la Torre walked impatiently up and down before the grist-mill wherein were quartered the soldiers sent by Mexico to protect the building of the Mission of San Gabriel. The Indian workmen were slugs; California, a vast region inhabited only by savages and a few priests, offered slender attractions to a young officer craving the gay pleasures of his capital and the presence of the woman he was to marry. For months he had watched the mission church mount slowly from foundation to towers, then spread into pillared corridors and rooms for the clergy. He could have mapped in his mind every acre of the wide beautiful valley girt by mountains snowed on their crest. He had thought it all very lovely at first: the yellow atmosphere, the soft abiding warmth, the blue reflecting lake; but the green on mountain and flat had waxed to gold, then waned to tan and brown, and he was tired. Not even a hostile Indian had come to be killed.

He was very good-looking, this tall young Spaniard, with his impatient eyes and haughty intelligent face, and it is possible that the lady in Mexico had added to his burden by doleful prayers to return. He took a letter from his pocket, read it half through, then walked rapidly over to the mission, seeking interest in the work of the Indians. Under the keen merciless supervision of the padres,—the cleverest body of men who ever set foot in America,—they were mixing and laying the adobes, making nails and tiles, hewing aqueducts, fashioning great stone fonts and fountains. De la Torre speculated, after his habit, upon the future of a country so beautiful and so fertile, which a dozen priests had made their own. Would these Indians, the poorest apologies for human beings he had ever seen, the laziest and the dirtiest, be Christianized and terrified into

worthy citizens of this fair land? Could the clear white flame that burned in the brains of the padres strike fire in their neophytes' narrow skulls, create a soul in those grovelling bodies? He dismissed the question.

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Would men of race, tempted by the loveliness of this great gold-haired houri sleeping on the Pacific, come from old and new Spain and dream away a life of pleasure? What grapes would grow out of this rich soil to be crushed by Indian slaves into red wine! And did gold vein those velvet hills? How all fruits, all grains, would thrive! what superb beasts would fatten on the thick spring grass! Ay! it was a magnificent discovery for the Church, and great would be the power that could wrest it from her.

There was a new people, somewhere north of Mexico, in the United States of America. Would they ever covet and strive to rob? The worse for them if they molested the fire-blooded Spaniard. How he should like to fight them!

That night the sentinel gave a sudden piercing shout of warning, then dropped dead with a poisoned arrow in his brain. Another moment, and the soldiers had leaped from their swinging beds of hide, and headed by their captain had reached the church they were there to defend. Through plaza and corridors sped and shrieked the savage tribe, whose invasion had been made with the swiftness and cunning of their race. The doors had not been hung in the church, and the naked figures ran in upon the heels of the soldiers, waving torches and yelling like the soulless fiends they were. The few neophytes who retained spirit enough to fight after the bleaching process that had chilled their native fire and produced a result which was neither man nor beast, but a sort of barnyard fowl, hopped about under the weight of their blankets and were promptly despatched.

The brunt of the battle fell upon the small detachment of troops, and at the outset they were overwhelmed by numbers, dazzled by the glare of torches that waved and leaped in the cavern-like darkness of the church. But they fought like Spaniards, hacking blindly with their swords, cleaving dusky skulls with furious maledictions, using their fists, their feet, their teeth—wrenching torches from malignant hands and hurling them upon distorted faces. Curses and wild yells intermingled. De la Torre fought at the head of his men until men and savages, dead and living, were an indivisible mass, then thrust back and front, himself unhurt. The only silent clear-brained man among them, he could reason as he assaulted and defended, and he knew that the Spaniards had little chance of victory—and he less of looking again upon the treasures of Mexico. The Indians swarmed like ants over the great nave and transept. Those who were not fighting smashed the altar and slashed the walls. The callous stars looked through the apertures left for windows, and shed a pallid light upon the writhing mass. The padres had defended their altar, behind the chancel rail; they lay trampled, with arrows vibrating in their hard old muscles.

De la Torre forced his way to the door and stood for a moment, solitary, against the pale light of the open, then turned his face swiftly to the night air as he fell over the threshold of the mission he had so gallantly defended.

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II

Delfina de Capalleja, after months of deferred hope, stood with the crowd at the dock, awaiting the return of the troop which had gone to defend the Mission of San Gabriel in its building. There was no flutter of colour beneath her white skin, and the heavy lids almost concealed the impatient depths of her eyes; the proud repose of her head indicated a profound reserve and self-control. Over her white gown and black dense hair she wore a black lace mantilla, fastened below the throat with a large yellow rose.

The ship swung to anchor and answered the salute from the fort. Boats were lowered, but neither officers nor soldiers descended. The murmur of disappointment on shore rose to a shout of execration. Then, as the ship's captain and passengers landed, a whisper ran through the crowd, a wail, and wild sobbing. They flung themselves to the earth, beating their heads and breasts,—all but Delfina de Capalleja, who drew her mantilla about her face and walked away.

The authorities of the city of Mexico yielded to public clamour and determined to cast a silver bell in honour of the slaughtered captain and his men. The casting was to take place in the great plaza before the cathedral, that all might attend: it was long since any episode of war had caused such excitement and sorrow. The wild character and remoteness of the scene of the tragedy, the meagreness of detail which stung every imagination into action, the brilliancy and popularity of De la Torre, above all, the passionate sympathy felt for Delfina de Capalleja, served to shake society from peak to base, and no event had ever been anticipated with more enthusiasm than the casting of that silver bell.

No one had seen Delfina since the arrival of the news had broken so many hearts, and great was the curiosity regarding her possible presence at the ceremony. Universal belief was against her ever again appearing in public; some said that she was dead, others that she had gone into a convent, but a few maintained that she would be high priestess at the making of the bell which was to be the symbol and monument of her lover's gallantry and death.

The hot sun beat upon the white adobe houses of the stately city. At the upper end of the plaza, bending and swaying, coquetting and languishing, were women clad in rich and vivid satins, their graceful heads and shoulders draped with the black or white mantilla; caballeros, gay in velvet trousers laced with gold, and serape embroidered with silver. Eyes green and black and blue sparkled above the edge of large black fans; fiery eyes responded from beneath silver-laden sombreros. The populace, in gala attire, crowded the rest of the plaza and adjacent streets, chattering and gesticulating. But all looked in vain for Delfina de Capalleja.

Much ceremony attended the melting of the bell. Priests in white robes stiff with gold chanted prayers above the silver bubbling in the caldron. A full-robed choir sang the Te Deum; the regiment to which De la Torre had belonged fired salutes at intervals; the crowd sobbed and shouted.

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Thunder of cannon, passionate swell of voices: the molten silver was about to be poured into the mould. The crowd hushed and parted. Down the way made for her came Delfina de Capalleja. Her black hair hung over her long white gown. Her body bent under the weight of jewels—the jewels of generations and the jewels of troth. Her arms hung at her sides. In her eyes was the peace of the dead.

She walked to the caldron, and taking a heavy gold chain from her neck flung it into the silver. It swirled like a snake, then disappeared. One by one, amidst quivering silence, the magnificent jewels followed the chain. Then, as she took the last bracelet from her arm, madness possessed the breathless crowd. The indifferent self-conscious men, the lanquid coquetting women, the fat drowsy old dowagers, all rushed, scrambling and screaming, to the caldron, tore from their heads and bodies the superb jewels and ropes of gold with which they were bedecked, and flung them into the molten mass, which rose like a tide. The electric current sprang to the people; their baubles sped like hail through the air. So great was the excitement that a sudden convulsing of the earth was unfelt. When not a jewel was left to sacrifice, the caldron held enough element for five bells—the five sweet-voiced bells which rang in the Mission of San Gabriel for more than a century.

Exhausted with shouting, the multitude was silent. Delfina de Capalleja, who had stood with panting chest and dilating nostrils, turned from the sacrificial caldron, the crowd parting for her again, the Laudate Dominum swelling. As she reached the cathedral, a man who loved her, noting a change in her face, sprang to her side. She raised her bewildered eyes to his and thrust out her hands blankly, then fell dead across the threshold.

WHEN THE DEVIL WAS WELL

The Devil locked the copper gates of Hell one night, and sauntered down a Spacian pathway. The later arrivals from the planet Earth had been of a distressingly commonplace character to his Majesty—a gentleman of originality and attainments, whatever his disagreements with the conventions. He was become seriously disturbed about the moral condition of the sensational little twinkler.

“What are my own about?” he thought, as he drifted past planets which yielded up their tributes with monotonous regularity. “What a squeezed old orange would Earth become did I forsake it! I must not neglect it so long again; my debt of gratitude is too great. Let me see. Where shall I begin? It is some years since I have visited America in person, and unquestionably she has most need of my attention; Europe is in magnificent running order. This is a section of her, if my geography does not fail me; but what? I do not recall it.”

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He poised above a country that looked as if it still hung upon the edge of chaos: wild, fertile, massive, barren, luxuriant, crouching on the ragged line of the Pacific. From his point of vantage he saw long ranges of stupendous mountains, some but masses of scowling crags, some green with forests of mammoth trees projecting their gaunt rigid arms above a carpet of violets; indolent valleys and swirling rivers; snow on the black peaks of the North; the riotous colour of eternal summer in the South. Suddenly he uttered a sharp exclamation and swept downward, halting but a mile above the ground. He frowned heavily, then smiled—a long, placid, sardonic smile. There appeared to be but few inhabitants in this country, and those few seemed to live either in great white irregular buildings, surmounted by crosses, in little brown huts near by, in the caves, or in hollowed trees on the mountains. The large buildings were situated about sixty miles apart, in chosen valleys; they were imposing and rambling, built about a plaza. They boasted pillared corridors and bright red tiles on their roofs. Within the belfries were massive silver bells, and the crosses could be seen to the furthermost end of the valley and from the tops of the loftiest mountain.

“California!” exclaimed the Devil. “I know of her. Her scant history is outlined in the Scarlet Book. I remember the points: Climate, the finest, theoretically, in the world; satanically, simply magnificent. I have waited impatiently for the stream of humanity to deflect thitherward, but priests will answer my present purpose exactly—unless they are all too tough. To continue, gold under that grass in chunks—aha! I shall have to throw out an extra wing in Hell! Parched deserts where men will die cursing; fruitful valleys, more gratifying to my genius; about as much of one as of the other, but the latter will get all the advertising, and the former be carefully kept out of sight. Everything in the way of animal life, from grizzly bears to fleas. A very remarkable State! Well, I will begin on the priests.”

He shot downward, and alighted in a valley whose proportions pleased his eye. Its shape was oval; the bare hills enclosing it were as yellow and as bright as hammered gold; the grass was bronze-coloured, baking in the intense heat; but the placid cows and shining horses nibbled it with the contentment of those that know not of better things. A river, almost concealed by bending willows and slender erect cottonwoods, wound capriciously across the valley. The mission, simpler than some of the others, was as neatly kept as the farm of older civilizations. Peace, order, reigned everywhere; all things drowsed under the relentless outpouring of the midsummer sun.

“It is well I do not mind the heat,” thought his Majesty; “but I am sensible of this. I will go within.”

He drew a boot on his cloven foot, thus rendering himself invisible, and entered a room of the long wing that opened upon the corridor. Here the temperature was almost wintry, so thick were the adobe walls.

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Two priests sat before a table, one reading aloud from a bulky manuscript, the other staring absently out of the window. The reader was an old man; his face was pale and spiritual; no fires burned in his sunken eyes; his mouth was stern with the lines of self-repression. The Devil lost all interest in him at once, and turned to the younger man. His face was pale also, but his pallor was that of fasting and the hair shirt; the mouth expressed the determination of the spirit to conquer the restless longing of the eyes; his nostrils were spirited; his figure was lean and nervous; he moved his feet occasionally, and clutched at the brown Franciscan habit.

“Paulo,” said the older priest, reprovingly, as he lifted his eyes and noted the unbowed head, “thou art not listening to the holy counsel of our glorious Master, our saint who has so lately ascended into heaven.”

“I know Junipero Serra by heart,” said Paulo, a little pettishly. “I wish it were not too hot to go out; I should like to take a walk. Surely, San Miguel is the hottest spot on earth. The very fleas are gasping between the bricks.”

“The Lord grant that they may die before the night! Not a wink have I slept for two! But thou shouldest not long for recreation until the hour comes, my son. Do thy duty and think not of when it will be over, for it is a blessed privilege to perform it—far more so than any idle pleasure—just as it is more blessed to give than to receive—”

Here the Devil snorted audibly, and both priests turned with a jump.

“Did you hear that, my father?”

“It is the walls cracking with the intense heat. I will resume my reading, and do thou pay attention, my son.”

“I will, my father.”

And for three hours the Devil was obliged to listen to the droning voice of the old man. He avenged himself by planting wayward and alarming desires in Paulo’s fertile soul.

Suddenly the mission was filled with the sound of clamorous silver: the bells were ringing for vespers—a vast, rapid, unrhythmical, sweet volume of sound which made the Devil stamp his hoofs and gnash his teeth. The priests crossed themselves and hurried to their evening duties, Satan following, furious, but not daring to let them out of his sight.

The church was crowded with dusky half-clothed forms, prostrate before the altar. The Devil, during the long service, wandered amongst them, giving a vicious kick with his cloven foot here, pricking with the sharp point of his tail there, breeding a fine discord and routing devotion. When vespers were over he was obliged to follow the priests to the refectory, but found compensation in noting that Paulo displayed a keen relish for

his meat and wine. The older man put his supper away morsel by morsel, as if he were stuffing a tobacco-pouch.

The meal finished, Paulo sallied forth for his evening walk. The Devil had his chance.

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He was a wise Devil—a Devil of an experience so vast that the world would go crashing through space under its weight in print. He wasted no time with the preliminary temptations—pride, ambition, avarice. He brought out the woman at once.

The young priest, wandering through a grove of cottonwoods, his hands clasped listlessly behind him, his chin sunken dejectedly upon his breast, suddenly raised his eyes and beheld a beautiful woman standing not ten paces away. She was not a girl like her whom he had renounced for the Church, but a woman about whose delicate warm face and slender palpitating bosom hung the vague shadow of maturity. Her hair was the hot brown of copper, thick and rich; her eyes were like the meeting of flame and alcohol. The emotion she inspired was not the pure glow which once had encouraged rather than deprecated renunciation; but at the moment he thought it sweeter.

He sprang forward with arms outstretched, instinct conquering vows in a manner highly satisfactory to the Devil; then, with a bitter imprecation, turned and fled. But he heard light footfalls behind him; he was conscious of a faint perfume, born of no earthly flower, felt a soft panting breath. A light hand touched his face. He flung his vows to anxious Satan, and turned to clasp the woman in his arms. But she coyly retreated, half-resentfully, half-invitingly, wholly lovely. Satan closed his iron hand about the vows, and the priest ran toward the woman, the lines of repression on his face gone, the eyes conquering the mouth. But again she retreated. He quickened his steps; she accelerated hers; his legs were long and agile; but she was fleet of foot. Finally she ran at full speed, her warm bright hair lifted and spreading, her tender passionate face turned and shining through it.

They left the cottonwoods, and raced down the wide silent valley, the cows staring with stolid disapproval, the stars pulsing in sympathy. The priest felt no fatigue; he forgot the Church behind him, the future of reward or torment. He wanted the woman, and was determined to have her. He was wholly lost; and the Devil, satisfied, returned to the mission.

“Now,” thought he, “for revenge on that old fool for defying me for sixty years!”

He raised his index finger and pointed it straight at the planet Hell. Instantly the sky darkened, the air vibrated with the rushing sound of many forms. A moment later he was surrounded by a regiment of abbreviated demons—a flock as thick as a grasshopper plague, twisted, grinning, leering, hideous. He raised his finger again and they leaped to the roofs of the mission, wrenched the tiles from their place and sent them clattering to the pavement. They danced and wrestled on the naked roof, yelling with their hoarse unhuman voices, singing awful chants.

The Devil passed within, and found the good old priest on his knees, a crucifix clasped to his breast, his white face upturned, shouting ave marias and pater nosters at the top of his aged voice as if fearful they would not ascend above the saturnalia on the roof.

The Devil added to his distraction by loud bursts of ribald laughter; but the father, revolving his head as if it were on a pivot, continued to pray. Satan began to curse like a pirate.

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Suddenly, above the crashing of tiles, the hideous voices of Devil and demon, the prayers of the padre, sounded the silver music of the bells. Not the irregular clash which was the daily result of Indian manipulation, but long rhythmic peals, as sweet and clear and true as the singing of angels. The Devil and his minions, with one long, baffled, infuriated howl, shot upward into space. Simultaneously a great wind came roaring down the valley, uprooting trees, shaking the sturdy mission. Thunder detonated, lightning cut its zigzag way through black clouds like moving mountains; hail rattled to the earth; water fell as from an overturned ocean. And through all the bells pealed and the priest prayed.

Morning dawned so calm and clear that but for the swimming ground and the broken tiles bestrewing it, the priest would have thought he had dreamed a terrible nightmare. He opened the door and looked anxiously forth for Paulo. Paulo was not to be seen. He called, but his tired voice would not carry. Clasping his crucifix to his breast, he tottered forth in search of his beloved young colleague. He passed the rancheria of the Indians, and found them all asleep, worn out from a night of terror.

He was too kind to awaken them, and pursued his way alone down the valley, peering fearfully to right and left. The ground was ploughed, dented, and strewn with fallen trees; the river roared like a tidal wave. Shuddering, and crossing himself repeatedly, he passed between the hills and entered a forest, following a path which the storm had blasted. After a time he came to an open glade where he and Paulo had loved to pray whilst the spring and the birds made music. To his surprise he saw a large stone lying along the open. He wondered if some meteor had fallen. Mortal hands—Indian hands, at least—were not strong enough to have brought so heavy a bulk, and he had not seen it in forest or valley before.

He approached and regarded it; then began mumbling aves and paters, running them together as he had not done during the visitation and storm. The stone was outlined with the shape of a man, long, young, and slender. The face was sharply cut, refined, impassioned, and intellectual. A smile of cynical contentment dwelt on the strong mouth. The eyes were fixed on something before him. Involuntarily the priest's followed them, and lingered. A tree also broke the open—one which never had been there before—and it bore an intoxicating similitude to the features and form of a surpassingly beautiful woman.

"Paulo! Paulo!" murmured the old man, with tears in his eyes, "would that I had been thou!"