

REID MAYNE

THE SCALP
HUNTERS

Томас Майн Рид
The Scalp Hunters

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Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Chapter One. | 5 |
| Chapter Two. | 8 |
| Chapter Three. | 11 |
| Chapter Four. | 13 |
| Chapter Five. | 17 |
| Chapter Six. | 21 |
| Chapter Seven. | 25 |
| Chapter Eight. | 31 |
| Chapter Nine. | 34 |
| Chapter Ten. | 37 |
| Chapter Eleven. | 39 |
| Chapter Twelve. | 42 |
| Chapter Thirteen. | 45 |
| Chapter Fourteen. | 47 |
| Chapter Fifteen. | 49 |
| Chapter Sixteen. | 52 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 56 |

Mayne Reid

The Scalp Hunters

Chapter One. The Wild West

Unroll the world's map, and look upon the great northern continent of America. Away to the wild west, away toward the setting sun, away beyond many a far meridian, let your eyes wander. Rest them where golden rivers rise among peaks that carry the eternal snow. Rest them there.

You are looking upon a land whose features are un-furrowed by human hands, still bearing the marks of the Almighty mould, as upon the morning of creation; a region whose every object wears the impress of God's image. His ambient spirit lives in the silent grandeur of its mountains, and speaks in the roar of its mighty rivers: a region redolent of romance, rich in the reality of adventure.

Follow me, with the eye of your mind, through scenes of wild beauty, of savage sublimity.

I stand in an open plain. I turn my face to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west; and on all sides behold the blue circle of the heavens girdling around me. Nor rock, nor tree, breaks the ring of the horizon. What covers the broad expanse between? Wood? water? grass? No; flowers. As far as my eye can range, it rests only on flowers, on beautiful flowers!

I am looking as on a tinted map, an enamelled picture brilliant with every hue of the prism.

Yonder is golden yellow, where the helianthus turns her dial-like face to the sun. Yonder, scarlet, where the malva erects its red banner. Here is a parterre of the purple monarda, there the euphorbia sheds its silver leaf. Yonder the orange predominates in the showy flowers of the asclepia; and beyond, the eye roams over the pink blossoms of the cleome.

The breeze stirs them. Millions of corollas are waving their gaudy standards. The tall stalks of the helianthus bend and rise in long undulations, like billows on a golden sea.

They are at rest again. The air is filled with odours sweet as the perfumes of Araby or Ind. Myriads of insects flap their gay wings: flowers of themselves. The bee-birds skirr around, glancing like stray sunbeams; or, poised on whirring wings, drink from the nectared cups; and the wild bee, with laden limbs, clings among the honeyed pistils, or leaves for his far hive with a song of joy.

Who planted these flowers? Who hath woven them into these pictured parterres? Nature. It is her richest mantle, richer in its hues than the scarfs of Cashmere.

This is the "weed prairie." It is misnamed. It is "the garden of God."

The scene is changed. I am in a plain as before, with the unbroken horizon circling around me. What do I behold? Flowers? No; there is not a flower in sight, but one vast expanse of living verdure. From north to south, from east to west, stretches the prairie meadow, green as an emerald, and smooth as the surface of a sleeping lake.

The wind is upon its bosom, sweeping the silken blades. They are in motion; and the verdure is dappled into lighter and darker shades, as the shadows of summer clouds flitting across the sun.

The eye wanders without resistance. Perchance it encounters the dark hirsute forms of the buffalo, or traces the tiny outlines of the antelope. Perchance it follows, in pleased wonder, the far-wild gallop of a snow-white steed.

This is the "grass prairie," the boundless pasture of the bison.

The scene changes. The earth is no longer level, but treeless and verdant as ever. Its surface exhibits a succession of parallel undulations, here and there swelling into smooth round hills. It is covered with a soft turf of brilliant greenness. These undulations remind one of the ocean after a mighty storm, when the crisped foam has died upon the waves, and the big swell comes bowling

in. They look as though they had once been such waves, that by an omnipotent mandate had been transformed to earth and suddenly stood still.

This is the “rolling prairie.”

Again the scene changes. I am among greenswards and bright flowers; but the view is broken by groves and clumps of copse-wood. The frondage is varied, its tints are vivid, its outlines soft and graceful. As I move forward, new landscapes open up continuously: views park-like and picturesque. Gangs of buffalo, herds of antelope, and droves of wild horses, mottle the far vistas. Turkeys run into the coppice, and pheasants whirr up from the path.

Where are the owners of these lands, of these flocks and fowls? Where are the houses, the palaces, that should appertain to these lordly parks? I look forward, expecting to see the turrets of tall mansions spring up over the groves. But no. For hundreds of miles around no chimney sends forth its smoke. Although with a cultivated aspect, this region is only trodden by the moccasined foot of the hunter, and his enemy, the Red Indian.

These are the *mottes*— the “islands” of the prairie sea.

I am in the deep forest. It is night, and the log fire throws out its vermilion glare, painting the objects that surround our bivouac. Huge trunks stand thickly around us; and massive limbs, grey and giant-like, stretch out and over. I notice the bark. It is cracked, and clings in broad scales crusting outward. Long snake-like parasites creep from tree to tree, coiling the trunks as though they were serpents, and would crush them! There are no leaves overhead. They have ripened and fallen; but the white Spanish moss, festooned along the branches, hangs weeping down like the drapery of a deathbed.

Prostrate trunks, yards in diameter and half-decayed, lie along the ground. Their ends exhibit vast cavities where the porcupine and opossum have taken shelter from the cold.

My comrades, wrapped in their blankets, and stretched upon the dead leaves, have gone to sleep. They lie with their feet to the fire, and their heads resting in the hollow of their saddles. The horses, standing around a tree, and tied to its lower branches, seem also to sleep. I am awake and listening. The wind is high up, whistling among the twigs and causing the long white streamers to oscillate. It utters a wild and melancholy music. There are few other sounds, for it is winter, and the tree-frog and cicada are silent. I hear the crackling knots in the fire, the rustling of dry leaves swirled up by a stray gust, the “coo-whoa” of the white owl, the bark of the raccoon, and, at intervals, the dismal howling of wolves. These are the nocturnal voices of the winter forest. They are savage sounds; yet there is a chord in my bosom that vibrates under their influence, and my spirit is tinged with romance as I lie and listen.

The forest in autumn; still bearing its full frondage. The leaves resemble flowers, so bright are their hues. They are red and yellow, and golden and brown. The woods are warm and glorious now, and the birds flutter among the laden branches. The eye wanders delighted down long vistas and over sunlit glades. It is caught by the flashing of gaudy plumage, the golden green of the paroquet, the blue of the jay, and the orange wing of the oriole. The red-bird flutters lower down in the coppice of green pawpaws, or amidst the amber leaflets of the beechen thicket. Hundreds of tiny wings flit through the openings, twinkling in the sun like the glancing of gems.

The air is filled with music: sweet sounds of love. The bark of the squirrel, the cooing of mated doves, the “rat-ta-ta” of the pecker, and the constant and measured chirrup of the cicada, are all ringing together. High up, on a topmost twig, the mocking-bird pours forth his mimic note, as though he would shame all other songsters into silence.

I am in a country of brown barren earth and broken outlines. There are rocks and clefts and patches of sterile soil. Strange vegetable forms grow in the clefts and hang over the rocks. Others are spheroidal in shape, resting upon the surface of the parched earth. Others rise vertically to a great height, like carved and fluted columns. Some throw out branches, crooked, shaggy branches, with hirsute oval leaves. Yet there is a homogeneousness about all these vegetable forms, in their colour, in

their fruit and flowers, that proclaims them of one family. They are cacti. It is a forest of the Mexican nopal. Another singular plant is here. It throws out long, thorny leaves that curve downward. It is the agave, the far-famed mezcal-plant of Mexico. Here and there, mingling with the cacti, are trees of acacia and mezquite, the denizens of the desert-land. No bright object relieves the eye; no bird pours its melody into the ear. The lonely owl flaps away into the impassable thicket, the rattlesnake glides under its scanty shade, and the coyote skulks through its silent glades.

I have climbed mountain after mountain, and still I behold peaks soaring far above, crowned with the snow that never melts. I stand upon beetling cliffs, and look into chasms that yawn beneath, sleeping in the silence of desolation. Great fragments have fallen into them, and lie piled one upon another. Others hang threatening over, as if waiting for some concussion of the atmosphere to hurl them from their balance. Dark precipices frown me into fear, and my head reels with a dizzy faintness. I hold by the pine-tree shaft, or the angle of the firmer rock.

Above, and below, and around me, are mountains piled on mountains in chaotic confusion. Some are bald and bleak; others exhibit traces of vegetation in the dark needles of the pine and cedar, whose stunted forms half-grow, half-hang from the cliffs. Here, a cone-shaped peak soars up till it is lost in snow and clouds. There, a ridge elevates its sharp outline against the sky; while along its side, lie huge boulders of granite, as though they had been hurled from the hands of Titan giants!

A fearful monster, the grizzly bear, drags his body along the high ridges; the carcajou squats upon the projecting rock, waiting the elk that must pass to the water below; and the bighorn bounds from crag to crag in search of his shy mate. Along the pine branch the bald buzzard whets his filthy beak; and the war-eagle, soaring over all, cuts sharply against the blue field of the heavens.

These are the Rocky Mountains, the American Andes, the colossal vertebras of the continent!
Such are the aspects of the wild west; such is the scenery of our drama.

Let us raise the curtain, and bring on the characters.

Chapter Two. The Prairie Merchants

“New Orleans, *April 3rd*, 18 —

“Dear Saint Vrain – Our young friend, Monsieur Henry Haller, goes to Saint Louis in ‘search of the picturesque.’ See that he be put through a ‘regular course of sprouts.’

“Yours, —

“Luis Walton.

“Charles Saint Vrain, Esquire, Planters’ Hotel, Saint Louis.”

With this laconic epistle in my waistcoat pocket, I debarked at Saint Louis on the 10th of April, and drove to the “Planters’.”

After getting my baggage stowed and my horse (a favourite I had brought with me) stabled, I put on a clean shirt, and, descending to the office, inquired for Monsieur Saint Vrain.

He was not there. He had gone up the Missouri river several days before.

This was a disappointment, as I had brought no other introduction to Saint Louis. But I endeavoured to wait with patience the return of Monsieur Saint Vrain. He was expected back in less than a week.

Day after day I mounted my horse, I rode up to the “Mounds” and out upon the prairies. I lounged about the hotel, and smoked my cigar in its fine piazza. I drank sherry cobbler in the saloon, and read the journals in the reading-room.

With these and such like occupations, I killed time for three whole days.

There was a party of gentlemen stopping at the hotel, who seemed to know each other well. I might call them a clique; but that is not a good word, and does not express what I mean. They appeared rather a band of friendly, jovial fellows. They strolled together through the streets, and sat side by side at the table-d’hôte, where they usually remained long after the regular diners had retired. I noticed that they drank the most expensive wines, and smoked the finest cigars the house afforded.

My attention was attracted to these men. I was struck with their peculiar bearing; their erect, Indian-like carriage in the streets, combined with a boyish gaiety, so characteristic of the western American.

They dressed nearly alike: in fine black cloth, white linen, satin waistcoats, and diamond pins. They wore the whisker full, but smoothly trimmed; and several of them sported moustaches. Their hair fell curling over their shoulders; and most of them wore their collars turned down, displaying healthy-looking, sun-tanned throats. I was struck with a resemblance in their physiognomy. Their faces did not resemble each other; but there was an unmistakable similarity in the expression of the eye; no doubt, the mark that had been made by like occupations and experience.

Were they sportsmen? No: the sportsman’s hands are whiter; there is more jewellery on his fingers; his waistcoat is of a gayer pattern, and altogether his dress will be more gaudy and super-elegant. Moreover, the sportsman lacks that air of free-and-easy confidence. He dares not assume it. He may live in the hotel, but he must be quiet and unobtrusive. The sportsman is a bird of prey; hence, like all birds of prey, his habits are silent and solitary. They are not of his profession.

“Who are these gentlemen?” I inquired from a person who sat by me, indicating to him the men of whom I have spoken.

“The prairie men.”

“The prairie men!”

“Yes; the Santa Fé traders.”

“Traders!” I echoed, in some surprise, not being able to connect such “elegants” with any ideas of trade or the prairies.

“Yes,” continued my informant. “That large, fine-looking man in the middle is Bent – Bill Bent, as he is called. The gentleman on his right is young Sublette; the other, standing on his left, is one of the Choteaus; and that is the sober Jerry Folger.”

“These, then, are the celebrated prairie merchants?”

“Precisely so.”

I sat eyeing them with increased curiosity. I observed that they were looking at me, and that I was the subject of their conversation.

Presently, one of them, a dashing-like young fellow, parted from the group, and walked up to me.

“Were you inquiring for Monsieur Saint Vrain?” he asked.

“I was.”

“Charles?”

“Yes, that is the name.”

“I am – ”

I pulled out my note of introduction, and banded it to the gentleman, who glanced over its contents.

“My dear friend,” said he, grasping me cordially, “very sorry I have not been here. I came down the river this morning. How stupid of Walton not to superscribe to Bill Bent! How long have you been up?”

“Three days. I arrived on the 10th.”

“You are lost. Come, let me make you acquainted. Here, Bent! Bill! Jerry!”

And the next moment I had shaken hands with one and all of the traders, of which fraternity I found that my new friend, Saint Vrain, was a member.

“First gong that?” asked one, as the loud scream of a gong came through the gallery.

“Yes,” replied Bent, consulting his watch. “Just time to ‘licker.’ Come along!”

Bent moved towards the saloon, and we all followed, *nemine dissentiente*.

The spring season was setting in, and the young mint had sprouted – a botanical fact with which my new acquaintances appeared to be familiar, as one and all of them ordered a mint julep. This beverage, in the mixing and drinking, occupied our time until the second scream of the gong summoned us to dinner.

“Sit with us, Mr Haller,” said Bent; “I am sorry we didn’t know you sooner. You have been lonely.”

And so saying, he led the way into the dining-room, followed by his companions and myself.

I need not describe a dinner at the “Planters’,” with its venison steaks, its buffalo tongues, its prairie chickens, and its delicious frog fixings from the Illinois “bottom.” No; I would not describe the dinner, and what followed I am afraid I could not.

We sat until we had the table to ourselves. Then the cloth was removed, and we commenced smoking regalias and drinking madeira at twelve dollars a bottle! This was ordered in by someone, not in single bottles, but by the half-dozen. I remembered thus far well enough; and that, whenever I took up a wine-card, or a pencil, these articles were snatched out of my fingers.

I remember listening to stories of wild adventures among the Pawnees, and the Comanches, and the Blackfeet, until I was filled with interest, and became enthusiastic about prairie life. Then someone asked me, would I not like to join them in “a trip”? Upon this I made a speech, and proposed to accompany my new acquaintances on their next expedition: and then Saint Vrain said I was just the man for their life; and this pleased me highly. Then someone sang a Spanish song, with a guitar, I think, and someone else danced an Indian war-dance; and then we all rose to our feet, and chorused the “Star-spangled Banner”; and I remember nothing else after this, until next morning, when I remember well that I awoke with a splitting headache.

I had hardly time to reflect on my previous night's folly, when the door opened, and Saint Vrain, with half a dozen of my table companions, rushed into the room. They were followed by a waiter, who carried several large glasses topped with ice, and filled with a pale amber-coloured liquid.

"A sherry cobbler, Mr Haller," cried one; "best thing in the world for you: drain it, my boy. It'll cool you in a squirrel's jump."

I drank off the refreshing beverage as desired.

"Now, my dear friend," said Saint Vrain, "you feel a hundred per cent, better! But, tell me, were you in earnest when you spoke of going with us across the plains? We start in a week; I shall be sorry to part with you so soon."

"But I was in earnest. I am going with you, if you will only show me how I am to set about it."

"Nothing easier: buy yourself a horse."

"I have got one."

"Then a few coarse articles of dress, a rifle, a pair of pistols, a –"

"Stop, stop! I have all these things. That is not what I would be at, but this: You, gentlemen, carry goods to Santa Fé. You double or treble your money on them. Now, I have ten thousand dollars in a bank here. What should hinder me to combine profit with pleasure, and invest it as you do?"

"Nothing; nothing! A good idea," answered several.

"Well, then, if any of you will have the goodness to go with me, and show me what sort of merchandise I am to lay in for the Santa Fé market, I will pay his wine bill at dinner, and that's no small commission, I think."

The prairie men laughed loudly, declaring they would all go a-shopping with me; and, after breakfast, we started in a body, arm-in-arm.

Before dinner I had invested nearly all my disposable funds in printed calicoes, long knives, and looking-glasses, leaving just money enough to purchase mule-waggon and hire teamsters at Independence, our point of departure for the plains.

A few days after, with my new companions, I was steaming up the Missouri, on our way to the trackless prairies of the "Far West."

Chapter Three. The Prairie Fever

After a week spent in Independence buying mules and waggons, we took the route over the plains. There were a hundred waggons in the caravan, and nearly twice that number of teamsters and attendants. Two of the capacious vehicles contained all my “plunder;” and, to manage them, I had hired a couple of lathy, long-haired Missourians. I had also engaged a Canadian voyageur named Gode, as a sort of attendant or *compagnon*.

Where are the glossy gentlemen of the Planters’ Hotel? One would suppose they had been left behind, as here are none but men in hunting-shirts and slouch hats. Yes; but under these hats we recognise their faces, and in these rude shirts we have the same jovial fellows as ever. The silky black and the diamonds have disappeared, for now the traders flourish under the prairie costume. I will endeavour to give an idea of the appearance of my companions by describing my own; for I am tricked out very much like themselves.

I wear a hunting-shirt of dressed deerskin. It is a garment more after the style of an ancient tunic than anything I can think of. It is of a light yellow colour, beautifully stitched and embroidered; and the cape, for it has a short cape, is fringed by tags cut out of the leather itself. The skirt is also bordered by a similar fringe, and hangs full and low. A pair of “savers” of scarlet cloth cover my limbs to the thigh; and under these are strong jean pantaloons, heavy boots, and big brass spurs. A coloured cotton shirt, a blue neck-tie, and a broad-brimmed Guayaquil hat, complete the articles of my everyday dress. Behind me, on the cantle of my saddle, may be observed a bright red object folded into a cylindrical form. That is my “Mackinaw,” a great favourite, for it makes my bed by night and my greatcoat on other occasions. There is a small slit in the middle of it, through which I thrust my head in cold or rainy weather; and I am thus covered to the ankles.

As I have said, my *compagnons de voyage* are similarly attired. There may be a difference of colour in the blanket or the leggings, or the shirt may be of other materials; but that I have described may be taken as a character dress.

We are all somewhat similarly armed and equipped. For my part, I may say that I am “armed to the teeth.” In my holsters I carry a pair of Colt’s large-sized revolvers, six shots each. In my belt is another pair of the small size, with five shots each. In addition, I have a light rifle, making in all twenty-three shots, which I have learned to deliver in as many seconds of time. Failing with all these, I carry in my belt a long shining blade known as a “bowie knife.” This last is my hunting knife, my dining knife, and, in short, my knife of all work. For accoutrements I have a pouch and a flask, both slung under the right arm. I have also a large gourd canteen and haversack for my rations. So have all my companions.

But we are differently mounted. Some ride saddle mules, others bestride mustangs, while a few have brought their favourite American horses. I am of this number. I ride a dark-brown stallion, with black legs, and muzzle like the withered fern. He is half-Arab, and of perfect proportions. He is called Moro, a Spanish name given him by the Louisiana planter from whom I bought him, but why I do not know. I have retained the name, and he answers to it readily. He is strong, fleet, and beautiful. Many of my friends fancy him on the route, and offer large prices for him; but these do not tempt me, for my Moro serves me well. Every day I grow more and more attached to him. My dog Alp, a Saint Bernard that I bought from a Swiss *émigré* in Saint Louis, hardly comes in for a tithe of my affections.

I find on referring to my note-book that for weeks we travelled over the prairies without any incident of unusual interest. To me the scenery was interest enough; and I do not remember a more striking picture than to see the long caravan of waggons, “the prairie ships,” deployed over the plain, or crawling slowly up some gentle slope, their white tilts contrasting beautifully with the deep green of

the earth. At night, too, the camp, with its corralled waggons, and horses picketed around, was equally a picture. The scenery was altogether new to me, and imbued me with impressions of a peculiar character. The streams were fringed with tall groves of cottonwood trees, whose column-like stems supported a thick frondage of silvery leaves. These groves meeting at different points, walled in the view, so dividing the prairies from one another, that we seemed to travel through vast fields fenced by colossal hedges.

We crossed many rivers, fording some, and floating our waggons over others that were deeper and wider. Occasionally we saw deer and antelope, and our hunters shot a few of these; but we had not yet reached the range of the buffalo. Once we stopped a day to recruit in a wooded bottom, where the grass was plentiful and the water pure. Now and then, too, we were halted to mend a broken tongue or an axle, or help a “stalled” waggon from its miry bed.

I had very little trouble with my particular division of the caravan. My Missourians turned out to be a pair of staunch hands, who could assist one another without making a desperate affair of every slight accident.

The grass had sprung up, and our mules and oxen, instead of thinning down, every day grew fatter upon it. Moro, therefore, came in for a better share of the maize that I had brought in my waggons, and which kept my favourite in fine travelling condition.

As we approached the Arkansas, we saw mounted Indians disappearing over the swells. They were Pawnees; and for several days clouds of these dusky warriors hung upon the skirts of the caravan. But they knew our strength, and kept at a wary distance from our long rifles.

To me every day brought something new, either in the incidents of the “voyage” or the features of the landscape.

Gode, who has been by turns a voyageur, a hunter, a trapper, and a *coureur du bois*, in our private dialogues had given me an insight into many an item of prairie-craft, thus enabling me to cut quite a respectable figure among my new comrades. Saint Vrain, too, whose frank, generous manner had already won my confidence, spared no pains to make the trip agreeable to me. What with gallops by day and the wilder tales by the night watch-fires, I became intoxicated with the romance of my new life. I had caught the “prairie-fever!”

So my companions told me, laughing. I did not understand them then. I knew what they meant afterwards. The prairie fever! Yes. I was just then in process of being inoculated by that strange disease. It grew upon me apace. The dreams of home began to die within me; and with these the illusory ideas of many a young and foolish ambition.

My strength increased, both physically and intellectually. I experienced a buoyancy of spirits and a vigour of body I had never known before. I felt a pleasure in action. My blood seemed to rush warmer and swifter through my veins, and I fancied that my eyes reached to a more distant vision. I could look boldly upon the sun without quivering in my glance.

Had I imbibed a portion of the divine essence that lives, and moves, and has its being in those vast solitudes? Who can answer this?

Chapter Four.

A Ride upon a Buffalo Bull

We had been out about two weeks when we struck the Arkansas “bend,” about six miles below the Plum Buttes. Here our waggons corralled and camped. So far we had seen but little of the buffalo; only a stray bull, or, at most, two or three together, and these shy. It was now the running season, but none of the great droves, love-maddened, had crossed us.

“Yonder!” cried Saint Vrain; “fresh hump for supper!”

We looked north-west, as indicated by our friend.

Along the escarpment of a low table, five dark objects broke the line of the horizon. A glance was enough: they were buffaloes.

As Saint Vrain spoke, we were about slipping off our saddles. Back went the girth buckles with a sneck, down came the stirrups, up went we, and off in the “twinkling of a goat’s eye.”

Half a score or so started; some, like myself, for the sport; while others, old hunters, had the “meat” in their eye.

We had made but a short day’s march; our horses were still fresh, and in three times as many minutes, the three miles that lay between us and the game were reduced to one. Here, however, we were winded. Some of the party, like myself, green upon the prairies, disregarding advice, had ridden straight ahead; and the bulls snuffed us on the wind. When within a mile, one of them threw up his shaggy front, snorted, struck the ground with his hoof, rolled over, rose up again, and dashed off at full speed, followed by his four companions.

It remained to us now either to abandon the chase or put our horses to their mettle and catch up. The latter course was adopted, and we galloped forward. All at once we found ourselves riding up to what appeared to be a clay wall, six feet high. It was a stair between two tables, and ran right and left as far as the eye could reach, without the semblance of a gap.

This was an obstacle that caused us to rein up and reflect. Some wheeled their horses, and commenced riding back, while half a dozen of us, better mounted, among whom were Saint Vrain and my voyageur Gode, not wishing to give up the chase so easily, put to the spur, and cleared the scarp.

From this point it caused us a five miles’ gallop, and our horses a white sweat, to come up with the hindmost, a young cow, which fell, bored by a bullet from every rifle in the party.

As the others had gained some distance ahead, and we had meat enough for all, we reined up, and, dismounting, set about “removing the hair.” This operation was a short one under the skilful knives of the hunters. We had now leisure to look back, and calculate the distance we had ridden from camp.

“Eight miles, every inch!” cried one.

“We’re close to the trail,” said Saint Vrain, pointing to some old waggon tracks that marked the route of the Santa Fé traders.

“Well?”

“If we ride into camp, we shall have to ride back in the morning. It will be sixteen extra miles for our cattle.”

“True.”

“Let us stay here, then. Here’s water and grass. There’s buffalo meat; and yonder’s a waggon load of ‘chips.’ We have our blankets; what more do we want?”

“I say, camp where we are.”

“And I.”

“And I.”

In a minute the girth buckles flew open, our saddles were lifted off, and our panting horses were cropping the curly bunches of the prairie grass, within the circles of their *cabriestos*.

A crystal rivulet, the arroyo of the Spaniards, stole away southward to the Arkansas. On the bank of this rivulet, and under one of its bluffs, we chose a spot for our bivouac. The *bois de vache* was collected, a fire was kindled, and hump steaks, spitted on sticks, were soon sputtering in the blaze. Luckily, Saint Vrain and I had our flasks along; and as each of them contained a pint of pure Cognac, we managed to make a tolerable supper. The old hunters had their pipes and tobacco, my friend and I our cigars, and we sat round the ashes till a late hour, smoking and listening to wild tales of mountain adventure.

At length the watch was told off, the lariats were shortened, the picket-pins driven home, and my comrades, rolling themselves up in their blankets, rested their heads in the hollow of their saddles, and went to sleep.

There was a man named Hibbets in our party, who, from his habits of somnolency, had earned the sobriquet of “Sleepy-head.” For this reason the first watch had been assigned to him, being the least dangerous, as Indians seldom made their attacks until the hour of soundest sleep – that before daybreak.

Hibbets had climbed to his post, the top of the bluff, where he could command a view of the surrounding prairie.

Before night had set in, I had noticed a very beautiful spot on the bank of the arroyo, about two hundred yards from where my comrades lay. A sudden fancy came into my head to sleep there; and taking up my rifle, robe, and blanket, at the same time calling to “Sleepy-head” to awake me in case of alarm, I proceeded thither.

The ground, shelving gradually down to the arroyo, was covered with soft buffalo grass, thick and dry – as good a bed as was ever pressed by sleepy mortal. On this I spread my robe, and, folding my blanket around me, lay down, cigar in mouth, to smoke myself asleep.

It was a lovely moonlight, so clear that I could easily distinguish the colours of the prairie flowers – the silver euphorbias, the golden sunflowers, and the scarlet malvas, that fringed the banks of the arroyo at my feet. There was an enchanting stillness in the air, broken only by an occasional whine from the prairie wolf, the distant snoring of my companions, and the “crop, crop” of our horses shortening the crisp grass.

I lay a good while awake, until my cigar burnt up to my lips (we smoke them close on the prairies); then, spitting out the stump, I turned over on my side, and was soon in the land of dreams.

I could not have been asleep many minutes when I felt sensible of a strange noise, like distant thunder, or the roaring of a waterfall. The ground seemed to tremble beneath me.

“We are going to have a dash of a thunder-shower,” thought I, still half-dreaming, half-sensible to impressions from without; and I drew the folds of my blanket closer around me, and again slept.

I was awakened by a noise like thunder – indeed, like the trampling of a thousand hoofs, and the lowing of a thousand oxen! The earth echoed and trembled. I could hear the shouts of my comrades; the voices of Saint Vrain and Gode, the latter calling out —

“Sac-r-ré! monsieur; prenez garde des buffles!”

I saw that they had drawn the horses, and were hurrying them under the bluff.

I sprang to my feet, flinging aside my blanket. A fearful spectacle was before me. Away to the west, as far as the eye could reach, the prairie seemed in motion. Black waves rolled over its undulating outlines, as though some burning mountain were pouring down its lava upon the plains. A thousand bright spots flashed and flitted along the moving surface like jets of fire. The ground shook, men shouted, horses reared upon their ropes, neighing wildly. My dog barked, and bowled, running around me!

For a moment I thought I was dreaming; but no, the scene was too real to be mistaken for a vision. I saw the border of a black wave within ten paces of me, and still approaching! Then, and not till then, did I recognise the shaggy crests and glaring eyeballs of the buffalo!

“Oh, God; I am in their track. I shall be trampled to death!”

It was too late to attempt an escape by running. I seized my rifle and fired at the foremost of the band. The effect of my shot was not perceptible. The water of the arroyo was dashed in my face. A huge bull, ahead of the rest, furious and snorting, plunged through the stream and up the slope. I was lifted and tossed high into the air. I was thrown rearwards, and fell upon a moving mass. I did not feel hurt or stunned. I felt myself carried onward upon the backs of several animals, that, in the dense drove, ran close together. These, frightened at their strange burden, bellowed loudly, and dashed on to the front. A sudden thought struck me, and, fixing on that which was most under me, I dropped my legs astride of him, embracing his hump, and clutching the long woolly hair that grew upon his neck. The animal “routed” with extreme terror, and, plunging forward, soon headed the band.

This was exactly what I wanted; and on we went over the prairie, the bull running at top speed, believing, no doubt, that he had a panther or a catamount between his shoulders.

I had no desire to disabuse him of this belief, and, lest he should deem me altogether harmless, and come to a halt, I slipped out my bowie, which happened to be handy, and pricked him up whenever he showed symptoms of lagging. At every fresh touch of the spur he roared out, and ran forward at a redoubled pace.

My danger was still extreme. The drove was coming on behind with the front of nearly a mile. I could not have cleared it had the bull stopped and left me on the prairie.

Notwithstanding the peril I was in, I could not resist laughing at my ludicrous situation. I felt as one does when looking at a good comedy.

We struck through a village of prairie dogs. Here I fancied the animal was about to turn and run back. This brought my mirth to a sudden pause; but the buffalo usually runs in a bee-line, and fortunately mine made no exception to the law. On he went, sinking to the knees, kicking the dust from the conical hills, snorting and bellowing with rage and terror.

The Plum Buttes were directly in the line of our course. I had seen this from the start, and knew that if I could reach them I would be safe. They were nearly three miles from the bluff where we had bivouacked, but in my ride I fancied them ten.

A small one rose over the prairie, several hundred yards nearer than the main heights. Towards this I pricked the foaming bull in a last stretch, and he brought me cleverly within a hundred yards of its base.

It was now time to take leave of my dusky companion. I could have slaughtered him as I leaned over his back. My knife rested upon the most vulnerable part of his huge body. No! I could not have slain that buffalo for the Koh-i-noor.

Untwisting my fingers from his thick fleece, I slipped down over his tail, and without as much as saying “Goodnight!” ran with all my speed towards the knoll. I climbed up; and sitting down upon a loose boulder of rock, looked over the prairie.

The moon was still shining brightly. My late companion had halted not far from where I had left him, and stood glaring back with an air of extreme bewilderment. There was something so comical in the sight that I yelled with laughter as I sat securely on my perch.

I looked to the south-west. As far as the eye could see, the prairie was black, and moving. The living wave came rolling onward and toward me; but I could now observe it in safety. The myriads of glancing eyes, sparkling like phosphoric gleams, no longer flashed terror.

The drove was still half a mile distant. I thought I saw quick gleams, and heard the report of firearms away over its left border; but I could not be certain. I had begun to think of the fate of my comrades, and this gave me hopes that they were safe.

The buffaloes approached the butte on which I was seated; and, perceiving the obstacle, suddenly forked into two great belts, and swept right and left around it. What struck me at this moment as curious was, that my bull, my particular bull, instead of waiting till his comrades had come up, and falling in among the foremost, suddenly tossed up his head, and galloped off as if a pack of wolves had been after him. He ran towards the outside of the band. When he had reached a point that placed him fairly beyond the flank, I could see him closing in, and moving on with the rest.

This strange tactic of my late companion puzzled me at the time, but I afterwards learned that it was sound strategy on his part. Had he remained where I had parted with him, the foremost bulls coming up would have mistaken him for an individual of some other tribe, and would certainly have gored him to death.

I sat upon the rock for nearly two hours, silently watching the sable stream as it poured past. I was on an island in the midst of a black and glittering sea. At one time I fancied I was moving, that the butte was sailing onward, and the buffaloes were standing still. My head swam with dizziness, and I leaped to my feet to drive away the strange illusion.

The torrent rolled onward, and at length the hindmost went straggling past. I descended from the knoll, and commenced groping my way over the black, trodden earth. What was lately a green sward now presented the aspect of ground freshly ploughed, and trampled by droves of oxen.

A number of white animals, resembling a flock of sheep, passed near me. They were wolves hanging upon the skirts of the herd.

I pushed on, keeping to the southward. At length I heard voices; and, in the clear moonlight, could see several horsemen galloping in circles over the plain. I shouted "Hollo!" A voice answered mine, and one of the horsemen came galloping up; it was Saint Vrain.

"Why, bless me, Haller!" cried he, reining up, and bending from his saddle to get a better view of me, "is it you or your ghost? As I sit here, it's the man himself, and alive!"

"Never in better condition," I replied.

"But where did you come from? the clouds? the sky? where?" And his questions were echoed by the others, who at this moment were shaking me by the hand, as if they had not seen me for a twelvemonth.

Gode seemed to be the most perplexed man of the party.

"Mon Dieu! run over; tramp by von million buffles, et ne pas mort! 'Cr-r-ré matin!"

"We were hunting for your body, or rather, the fragments of it," said Saint Vrain. "We had searched every foot of the prairie for a mile round, and had almost come to the conclusion that the fierce brutes had eaten you up."

"Eat monsieur up! No! tre million buffles no him eat. Mon Dieu! Ha, Sleep-head!"

This exclamation of the Canadian was addressed to Hibbets, who had failed to warn my comrades of where I lay, and thus placed me in such a dangerous predicament.

"We saw you tossed in the air," continued Saint Vrain, "and fall right into the thick of them. Then, of course, we gave you up. But how, in Heaven's name, have you got clear?"

I related my adventure to my wondering comrades.

"Par Dieu!" cried Gode, "un garçon très bizarre: une aventure très merveilleuse!"

From that hour I was looked upon as a "captain" on the prairies.

My comrades had made good work of it, as a dozen dark objects that lay upon the plain testified. They had found my rifle and blankets, the latter trodden into the earth.

Saint Vrain had still a few drops in his flask; and after swallowing these, and again placing the guard, we returned to our prairie couches and slept out the night.

Chapter Five. In a Bad Fix

A few days afterwards, another adventure befell me; and I began to think that I was destined to become a hero among the “mountain men.” A small party of the traders, myself among the number, had pushed forward ahead of the caravan. Our object was to arrive at Santa Fé a day or two before the waggons, in order to have everything arranged with the Governor for their entrance into that capital. We took the route by the Cimmaron.

Our road, for a hundred miles or so, lay through a barren desert, without game, and almost without water. The buffalo had already disappeared, and deer were equally scarce. We had to content ourselves with the dried meat which we had brought from the settlements. We were in the deserts of the artemisia. Now and then we could see a stray antelope bounding away before us, but keeping far out of range. They, too, seemed to be unusually shy.

On the third day after leaving the caravan, as we were riding near the Cimmaron, I thought I observed a pronged head disappearing behind a swell in the prairie. My companions were sceptical, and none of them would go with me; so, wheeling out of the trail, I started alone. One of the men, for Gode was behind, kept charge of my dog, as I did not choose to take him with me, lest he might alarm the antelopes. My horse was fresh and willing; and whether successful or not, I knew that I could easily overtake the party by camping-time.

I struck directly towards the spot where I had seen the object. It appeared to be only half a mile or so from the trail. It proved more distant – a common illusion in the crystal atmosphere of these upland regions.

A curiously-formed ridge, a *couteau des prairies* on a small scale, traversed the plain from east to west. A thicket of cactus covered part of its summit. Towards this thicket I directed myself.

I dismounted at the bottom of the slope, and leading my horse silently up among the cacti plants, tied him to one of their branches. I then crept cautiously through the thorny leaves towards the point where I fancied I had seen the game. To my joy, not one antelope, but a brace of those beautiful animals were quietly grazing beyond; but, alas! too far off for the range of my rifle. They were fully three hundred yards distant, upon a smooth, grassy slope. There was not even a sage bush to cover me, should I attempt to approach them. What was to be done?

I lay for several minutes, thinking over the different tricks known in hunter-craft for taking the antelope. Should I imitate their call? Should I hoist my handkerchief, and try to lure them up? I saw that they were too shy; for, at short intervals, they threw up their graceful heads and looked inquiringly around them. I remembered the red blanket on my saddle. I could display this upon the cactus bushes; perhaps it would attract them.

I had no alternative, and was turning to go back for the blanket, when, all at once, my eye rested upon a clay-coloured line running across the prairie beyond where the animals were feeding. It was a break in the surface of the plain, a buffalo road, or the channel of an arroyo; in either case the very cover I wanted, for the animals were not a hundred yards from it, and were getting still nearer to it as they fed.

Creeping back out of the thicket, I ran along the side of the slope towards a point where I had noticed that the ridge was depressed to the prairie level. Here, to my surprise, I found myself on the banks of a broad arroyo, whose water, clear and shallow, ran slowly over a bed of sand and gypsum.

The banks were low, not over three feet above the surface of the water, except where the ridge impinged upon the stream. Here there was a high bluff; and, hurrying round its base, I entered the channel, and commenced wading upward.

As I had anticipated, I soon came to a bend where the stream, after running parallel to the ridge, swept round and cañoned through it. At this place I stopped, and looked cautiously over the bank. The antelopes had approached within less than rifle range of the arroyo; but they were yet far above my position. They were still quietly feeding and unconscious of danger. I again bent down and waded on.

It was a difficult task proceeding in this way. The bed of the creek was soft and yielding, and I was compelled to tread slowly and silently lest I should alarm the game; but I was cheered in my exertions by the prospect of fresh venison for my supper.

After a weary drag of several hundred yards, I came opposite to a small clump of wormwood bushes growing out of the bank. "I may be high enough," thought I; "these will serve for cover."

I raised my body gradually until I could see through the leaves. I was in the right spot.

I brought my rifle to a level, sighted for the heart of the buck, and fired. The animal leaped from the ground, and fell back lifeless.

I was about to rush forward and secure my prize, when I observed the doe, instead of running off as I had expected, go up to her fallen partner and press her tapering nose to his body. She was not more than twenty yards from me; and I could plainly see that her look was one of inquiry and bewilderment. All at once she seemed to comprehend the fatal truth; and throwing back her head, commenced uttering the most piteous cries, at the same time running in circles around the body.

I stood wavering between two minds. My first impulse had been to reload and kill the doe; but her plaintive voice entered my heart, disarming me of all hostile intentions. Had I dreamt of witnessing this painful spectacle, I should not have left the trail. But the mischief was now done. "I have worse than killed her," thought I; "it will be better to despatch her at once."

Actuated by these principles of a common, but to her fatal, humanity, I rested the butt of my rifle and reloaded. With a faltering hand I again levelled the piece and fired.

My nerves were steady enough to do the work. When the smoke floated aside, I could see the little creature bleeding upon the grass, her head resting against the body of her murdered mate.

I shouldered my rifle, and was about to move forward, when to my astonishment, I found that I was caught by the feet. I was held firmly, as if my legs had been screwed in a vice!

I made an effort to extricate myself; another, more violent, and equally unsuccessful; and, with a third, I lost my balance, and fell back upon the water.

Half-suffocated, I regained my upright position, but only to find that I was held as fast as ever.

Again I struggled to free my limbs. I could neither move them backward nor forward, to the right nor to the left; and I became sensible that I was gradually going down. Then the fearful truth flashed upon me: I was sinking in a quicksand.

A feeling of horror came over me. I renewed my efforts with the energy of desperation. I leant to one side, then to the other, almost wrenching my knees from their sockets. My feet remained fast as ever. I could not move them an inch.

The soft, clinging sand already overtopped my horseskin boots, wedging them around my ankles, so that I was unable to draw them off; and I could feel that I was still sinking, slowly but surely, as though some subterranean monster were leisurely dragging me down! This very thought caused me a fresh thrill of horror, and I called aloud for help. To whom? There was no one within miles of me – no living thing. Yes! the neigh of my horse answered me from the hill, mocking my despair.

I bent forward as well as my constrained position would permit, and, with frenzied fingers, commenced tearing up the sand. I could barely reach the surface; and the little hollow I was able to make filled up almost as soon as it had been formed.

A thought occurred to me. My rifle might support me, placed horizontally. I looked around for it. It was not to be seen. It had sunk beneath the sand.

Could I throw my body flat, and prevent myself from sinking deeper? No. The water was two feet in depth. I should drown at once.

This last last hope left me as soon as formed. I could think of no plan to save myself. I could make no further effort. A strange stupor seized upon me. My very thoughts became paralysed. I knew that I was going mad. For a moment I was mad!

After an interval my senses returned. I made an effort to rouse my mind from its paralysis, in order that I might meet death, which I now believed to be certain, as a man should.

I stood erect. My eyes had sunk to the prairie level, and rested upon the still bleeding victims of my cruelty. My heart smote me at the sight. Was I suffering a retribution of God?

With humble and penitent thoughts I turned my face to heaven, almost dreading that some sign of omnipotent anger would scowl upon me from above. But no! The sun was shining as brightly as ever, and the blue canopy of the world was without a cloud.

I gazed upward, and prayed with an earnestness known only to the hearts of men in positions of peril like mine.

As I continued to look up, an object attracted my attention. Against the sky I distinguished the outlines of a large bird. I knew it to be the obscene bird of the plains, the buzzard vulture. Whence had it come? Who knows? Far beyond the reach of human eye it had seen or scented the slaughtered antelopes, and on broad, silent wing was now descending to the feast of death.

Presently another, and another, and many others, mottled the blue field of the heavens, curving and wheeling silently earthward. Then the foremost swooped down upon the bank, and after gazing around for a moment, flapped off towards its prey.

In a few seconds the prairie was black with filthy birds, which clambered over the dead antelopes, and beat their wings against each other, while they tore out the eyes of the quarry with their fetid beaks.

And now came gaunt wolves, sneaking and hungry, stealing out of the cactus thicket, and loping, coward-like, over the green swells of the prairie. These, after a battle, drove away the vultures, and tore up the prey, all the while growling and snapping vengefully at each other.

“Thank Heaven! I shall at least be saved from this!”

I was soon relieved from the sight. My eyes had sunk below the level of the bank. I had looked my last on the fair green earth. I could now see only the clayey walls that contained the river, and the water that ran unheeding by me.

Once more I fixed my gaze upon the sky, and with prayerful heart endeavoured to resign myself to my fate.

In spite of my efforts to be calm, the memories of earthly pleasures, and friends, and home came over me, causing me at intervals to break into wild paroxysms, and make fresh, though fruitless, struggles.

Again I was attracted by the neighing of my horse.

A thought entered my mind, filling me with fresh hopes. “Perhaps my horse – ”

I lost not a moment. I raised my voice to its highest pitch, and called the animal by name. I knew that he would come at my call. I had tied him but slightly. The cactus limb would snap off. I called again, repeating words that were well known to him. I listened with a bounding heart. For a moment there was silence. Then I heard the quick sounds of his hoofs, as though the animal were rearing and struggling to free himself. Then I could distinguish the stroke of his heels in a measured and regular gallop.

Nearer came the sounds; nearer and clearer, until the gallant brute appeared upon the bank above me. There he halted, and, flinging back his tossed mane, uttered a shrill neigh. He was bewildered, and looked to every side, snorting loudly.

I knew that, having once seen me, he would not stop until he had pressed his nose against my cheek, for this was his usual custom. Holding out my hands, I again uttered the magic words.

Now glancing downward, he perceived me, and stretching himself, sprang out into the channel. The next moment I held him by the bridle.

There was no time to be lost. I was still going down; and my armpits were fast nearing the surface of the quicksand.

I caught the lariat, and, passing it under the saddle-girths, fastened it in a tight, firm knot. I then looped the trailing end, making it secure around my body. I had left enough of the rope, between the bit-ring and the girths, to enable me to check and guide the animal, in case the drag upon my body should be too painful.

All this while the dumb brute seemed to comprehend what I was about. He knew, too, the nature of the ground on which he stood, for during the operation he kept lifting his feet alternately to prevent himself from sinking.

My arrangements were at length completed; and with a feeling of terrible anxiety I gave my horse the signal to move forward. Instead of going off with a start, the intelligent animal stepped away slowly, as though he understood my situation. The lariat tightened, I felt my body moving, and the next moment experienced a wild delight, a feeling I cannot describe, as I found myself dragged out of the sand!

I sprang to my feet with a shout of joy. I rushed up to my steed, and throwing my arms around his neck, kissed him. He answered my embrace with a low whimper, that told me I was understood.

I looked for my rifle. Fortunately, it had not sunk deeply, and I soon found it. My boots were behind me, but I stayed not to look for them, being smitten with a wholesome dread of the place where I had left them.

It was sundown before I reached camp, where I was met by the inquiries of my wondering companions. "Did you come across the 'goats'?" "Where's your boots?" "Whether have you been hunting or fishing?"

I answered all these questions by relating my adventures; and that night I was again the hero of the camp-fire.

Chapter Six. Santa Fé

After a week's climbing through the Rocky Mountains, we descended into the Valley of the Del Norte, and arrived at the capital of New Mexico, the far-famed Santa Fé. Next day the caravan itself came in, for we had lost time on the southern route; and the waggons, travelling by the Raton Pass, had made a good journey of it.

We had no difficulty about their entrance into the country, with the proviso that we paid five hundred dollars of "Alcavala" tax upon each waggon. This was a greater extortion than usual; but the traders were compelled to accept the impost.

Santa Fé is the entrepôt of the province, and the chief seat of its trade. On reaching it we halted, camping without the walls.

Saint Vrain, several other *propriétaires*, and myself, took up our quarters at the Fonda, where we endeavoured, by means of the sparkling vintage of El Paso, to make ourselves oblivious of the hardships we had endured in the passage of the plains.

The night of our arrival was given to feasting and making merry.

Next morning I was awakened by the voice of my man Gode, who appeared to be in high spirits, singing a snatch of a Canadian boat-song.

"Ah, monsieur!" cried he, seeing me awake, "to-night – aujourd'hui – une grande fonction – one bal – vat le Mexicain he call fandango. Très bien, monsieur. You vill sure have grand plaisir to see un fandango Mexicain?"

"Not I, Gode. My countrymen are not so fond of dancing as yours."

"C'est vrai, monsieur; but von fandango is très curieux. You sall see ver many sort of de pas. Bolero, et valse, wis de Coona, and ver many more pas, all mix up in von puchero. Allons! monsieur, you vill see ver many pretty girl, avec les yeux très noir, and ver short – ah! ver short – vat you call em in Americaine?"

"I do not know what you allude to."

"Cela! Zis, monsieur," holding out the skirt of his hunting-shirt; "par Dieu! now I have him – petticoes; ver short petticoes. Ah! you sall see vat you sall see en un fandango Mexicaine.

“Las niñas de Durango
Commigo bailandas,
Al cielo saltandas,
En el fandango – en el fan-dang – o.’

"Ah! here comes Monsieur Saint Vrain. Écoutez! He never go to fandango. Sacré! how monsieur dance! like un maître de ballet. Mais he be de sangre – blood Français. Écoutez!

“Al cielo saltandas,
En el fandango – en el fan-dang – .”

"Ha! Gode!"

"Monsieur?"

"Trot over to the cantina, and beg, borrow, buy, or steal, a bottle of the best Paso."

"Sall I try steal 'im, Monsieur Saint Vrain?" inquired Gode, with a knowing grin.

"No, you old Canadian thief! Pay for it. There's the money. Best Paso, do you hear? – cool and sparkling. Now, voya! Bon jour, my bold rider of buffalo bulls I still abed, I see."

“My head aches as if it would split.”

“Ha, ha, ha! so does mine; but Gode’s gone for medicine. Hair of the dog good for the bite. Come, jump up!”

“Wait till I get a dose of your medicine.”

“True; you will feel better then. I say, city life don’t agree with us, eh?”

“You call this a city, do you?”

“Ay, so it is styled in these parts: ‘la ciudad de Santa Fé;’ the famous city of Santa Fé; the capital of Nuevo Mexico; the metropolis of all prairiedom; the paradise of traders, trappers, and thieves!”

“And this is the progress of three hundred years! Why, these people have hardly passed the first stages of civilisation.”

“Rather say they are passing the last stages of it. Here, on this fair oasis, you will find painting, poetry, dancing, theatres, and music, fêtes and fireworks, with all the little amorous arts that characterise a nation’s decline. You will meet with numerous Don Quixotes, *soi-disant* knights-errant, Romeos without the heart, and ruffians without the courage. You will meet with many things before you encounter either virtue or honesty. Hola! muchacho!”

“Que es, señor?”

“Hay cafe?”

“Si, señor.”

“Bring us a couple of tazas, then – dos tazas, do you hear? and quick – aprisa! aprisa!”

“Si, señor.”

“Ah! here comes le voyageur Canadien. So, old Nor’-west! you’ve brought the wine?”

“Vin délicieux, Monsieur Saint Vrain! equal to ze vintage Français.”

“He is right, Haller! Tsap – tsap! delicious you may say, good Gode. Tsap – tsap! Come, drink! it’ll make you feel as strong as a buffalo. See! it seethes like a soda spring! like ‘Fontaine-qui-bouille’; eh, Gode?”

“Oui, monsieur; ver like Fontaine-qui-bouille. Oui.”

“Drink, man, drink! Don’t fear it: it’s the pure juice. Smell the flavour; taste the bouquet. What wine the Yankees will one day squeeze out of these New Mexican grapes!”

“Why? Do you think the Yankees have an eye to this quarter?”

“Think! I know it; and why not? What use are these manikins in creation? Only to cumber the earth. Well, mozo, you have brought the coffee?”

“Ya, esta, señor.”

“Here! try some of this; it will help to set you on your feet. They can make coffee, and no mistake. It takes a Spaniard to do that.”

“What is this fandango Gode has been telling me about?”

“Ah! true. We are to have a famous one to-night. You’ll go, of course?”

“Out of curiosity.”

“Very well, you will have your curiosity gratified. The blustering old grampus of a Governor is to honour the ball with his presence; and it is said, his pretty señora; that I don’t believe.”

“Why not?”

“He’s too much afraid lest one of these wild Americanos might whip her off on the cantle of his saddle. Such things have been done in this very valley. By Saint Mary! she is good-looking,” continued Saint Vrain, in a half-soliloquy, “and I knew a man – the cursed old tyrant! only think of it!”

“Of what?”

“The way he has bled us. Five hundred dollars a waggon, and a hundred of them at that; in all, fifty thousand dollars!”

“But will he pocket all this? Will not the Government – ?”

“Government! no, every cent of it. He is the Government here; and, with the help of this instalment, he will rule these miserable wretches with an iron rod.”

“And yet they hate him, do they not?”

“Him and his. And they have reason.”

“It is strange they do not rebel.”

“They have at times; but what can they do? Like all true tyrants, he has divided them, and makes them spend their heart’s hatred on one another.”

“But he seems not to have a very large army; no bodyguard – ”

“Bodyguard!” cried Saint Vrain, interrupting me; “look out! there’s his bodyguard!”

“Indios bravos! les Navajoes!” exclaimed Gode, at the same instant.

I looked forth into the street. Half a dozen tall savages, wrapped in striped serapes, were passing. Their wild, hungry looks, and slow, proud walk at once distinguished them from “Indios manzos,” the water-drawing, wood-hewing pueblos.

“Are they Navajoes?” I asked.

“Oui, monsieur, oui!” replied Gode, apparently with some excitement. “Navajoes!”

“There’s no mistaking them,” added Saint Vrain.

“But the Navajoes are the notorious enemies of the New Mexicans! How come they to be here? Prisoners?”

“Do they look like prisoners?”

They certainly showed no signs of captivity in either look or gesture. They strode proudly up the street, occasionally glancing at the passers with an air of savage and lordly contempt.

“Why, then, are they here? Their country lies far to the west.”

“That is one of the secrets of Nuevo Mexico, about which I will enlighten you some other time. They are now protected by a treaty of peace, which is only binding upon them so long as it may suit their convenience to recognise it. At present they are as free here as you or I; indeed, more so, when it comes to that. I wouldn’t wonder it we were to meet them at the fandango to-night.”

“I have heard that the Navajoes are cannibals.”

“It is true. Look at them this minute! See how they gloat upon that chubby little fellow, who seems instinctively to fear them. Lucky for the urchin it’s broad daylight, or he might get chucked under one of those striped blankets.”

“Are you in earnest, Saint Vrain?”

“By my word, I am not jesting! If I mistake not, Gode’s experience will confirm what I have said. Eh, voyageur?”

“C’est vrai, monsieur. I vas prisonnier in le nation; not Navagh, but l’Apache – moch de same – pour tree mons. I have les sauvages seen manger – eat – one – deux – tree – tree enfants rotis, like hump rib of de buffles. C’est vrai, messieurs, c’est vrai.”

“It is quite true; both Apaches and Navajoes carry off children from the valley, here, in their grand forays; and it is said by those who should know, that most of them are used in that way. Whether as a sacrifice to the fiery god Quetzalcoatl, or whether from a fondness lor human flesh, no one has yet been able to determine. In fact, with all their propinquity to this place, there is little known about them. Few who have visited their towns have had Gode’s luck to get away again. No man of these parts ever ventures across the western Sierras.”

“And how came you, Monsieur Gode, to save your scalp?”

“Pourquoi, monsieur, je n’ai pas. I not haves scalp-lock: vat de trappare Yankee call ‘har,’ mon scalp-lock is fabriqué of von barbier de Saint Louis. Voilà monsieur!”

So saying, the Canadian lifted his cap, and along with it what I had, up to this time, looked upon as a beautiful curling head of hair, but which now proved to be only a wig!

“Now, messieurs!” cried he, in good humour, “how les sauvages my scalp take? Indien no have cash hold. Sacr–r–r!”

Saint Vrain and I were unable to restrain our laughter at the altered and comical appearance of the Canadian.

“Come, Gode! the least you can do after that is to take a drink. Here, help yourself!”

“Très-oblige, Monsieur Saint Vrain. Je vous remercie.” And the ever-thirsty voyageur quaffed off the nectar of El Paso, like so much fresh milk.

“Come, Haller! we must to the waggons. Business first, then pleasure; such as we may find here among these brick stacks. But we’ll have some fun in Chihuahua.”

“And you think we shall go there?”

“Certainly. They do not want the fourth part of our stuff here. We must carry it on to the head market. To the camp! Allons!”

Chapter Seven. The Fandango

In the evening I sat in my room waiting for Saint Vrain. His voice reached me from without —

“Las niñas de Durango
Commigo bailandas,
Al cielo — !”

“Ha! Are you ready, my bold rider?”

“Not quite. Sit down a minute and wait.”

“Hurry, then! the dancing’s begun. I have just come that way. What! that your ball-dress? Ha! ha! ha!” screamed Saint Vrain, seeing me unpack a blue coat and a pair of dark pantaloons, in a tolerable state of preservation.

“Why, yes,” replied I, looking up; “what fault do you find? But is that your ball-dress?”

No change had taken place in the ordinary raiment of my friend. The fringed hunting-shirt and leggings, the belt, the bowie, and the pistols, were all before me.

“Yes, my dandy; this is my ball-dress: it ain’t anything shorter; and if you’ll take my advice, you’ll wear what you have got on your back. How will your long-tailed blue look, with a broad belt and bowie strapped round the skirts? Ha! ha! ha!”

“But why take either belt or bowie? You are surely not going into a ball-room with your pistols in that fashion?”

“And how else should I carry them? In my hands?”

“Leave them here.”

“Ha! ha! that would be a green trick. No, no. Once bit, twice shy. You don’t catch this ’coon going into any fandango in Santa Fé without his six-shooters. Come, keep on that shirt; let your leggings sweat where they are, and buckle this about you. That’s the *costume du bal* in these parts.”

“If you assure me that my dress will be *comme il faut*, I’m agreed.”

“It won’t be with the long-tailed blue, I promise you.”

The long-tailed blue was restored forthwith to its nook in my portmanteau.

Saint Vrain was right. On arriving at the room, a large sala in the neighbourhood of the Plaza, we found it filled with hunters, trappers, traders, and teamsters, all swaggering about in their usual mountain rig. Mixed among them were some two or three score of the natives, with an equal number of señoritas, all of whom, by their style of dress, I recognise as poblanas, or persons of the lower class, — the only class, in fact, to be met with in Santa Fé.

As we entered, most of the men had thrown aside their serapes for the dance, and appeared in all the finery of embroidered velvet, stamped leather, and shining “castletops.” The women looked not less picturesque in their bright naguas, snowy chemisettes, and small satin slippers. Some of them flounced it in polka jackets; for even to that remote region the famous dance had found its way.

“Have you heard of the electric telegraph?”

“No, señor.”

“Can you tell me what a railroad is?”

“Quien sabe?”

“La polka?”

“Ah! señor, la polka, la polka! cosa buenita, tan graciosa! vaya!”

The ball-room was a long, oblong sala with a banquette running all round it. Upon this the dancers seated themselves, drew out their husk cigarettes, chatted, and smoked, during the intervals of

the dance. In one corner half a dozen sons of Orpheus twanged away upon harp, guitar, and bandolin; occasionally helping out the music with a shrill half-Indian chant. In another angle of the apartment, puros, and Taos whisky were dealt out to the thirsty mountaineers, who made the sala ring with their wild ejaculations. There were scenes like the following: —

“Hyar, my little muchacha! vamos, vamos, ter dance! Mucho bueno! Mucho bueno? Will ye?”

This is from a great rough fellow of six feet and over, addressed to a trim little poblana.

“Mucho bueno, Señor Americano!” replies the lady.

“Hooraw for you! Come along! Let’s licker fust! You’re the gal for my beaver. What’ll yer drink? Agwardent or vino?”

“Copitita de vino, señor.” (A small glass of wine, sir.)

“Hyar, yer darned greaser! Set out yer vino in a squ’ll’s jump! Now, my little un’, hyar’s luck, and a good husband!”

“Gracias, Señor Americano!”

“What! you understand that? You intende, do yer?”

“Si, señor!”

“Hooraw, then! Look hyar, little ‘un, kin yer go the b’ar dance?”

“No entiende.”

“Yer don’t understan’ it! Hyar it is; thisa-way;” and the clumsy hunter began to show off before his partner, in an imitation of the grizzly bear.

“Hollo, Bill!” cries a comrade, “yer’ll be trapped if yer don’t look sharp.”

“I’m dog-gone, Jim, if I don’t feel queery about hyar,” replies the hunter, spreading his great paw over the region of the heart.

“Don’t be skeert, man; it’s a nice gal, anyways.”

“Hooray for old Missouri!” shouts a teamster.

“Come, boys! Let’s show these yer greasers a Virginny break-down. ‘Cl’ar the kitchen, old folks, young folks.”

“Go it hoe and toe! ‘Old Virginny nebir tire!’”

“Viva el Gobernador! Viva Armijo! Viva! viva!”

An arrival at this moment caused a sensation in the room. A stout, fat, priest-like man entered, accompanied by several others, it was the Governor and his suite, with a number of well-dressed citizens, who were no doubt the elite of New Mexican society. Some of the new-comers were militaires, dressed in gaudy and foolish-looking uniforms that were soon seen spinning round the room in the mazes of the waltz.

“Where is the Señora Armijo?” I whispered to Saint Vrain.

“I told you as much. She! she won’t be out. Stay here; I am going for a short while. Help yourself to a partner, and see some tun. I will be back presently. *Au revoir!*”

Without any further explanation, Saint Vrain squeezed himself through the crowd and disappeared.

I had been seated on the banquette since entering the sala, Saint Vrain beside me, in a retired corner of the room. A man of peculiar appearance occupied the seat next to Saint Vrain, but farther into the shadow of a piece of furniture. I had noticed this man as we entered, and noticed, too, that Saint Vrain spoke to him; but I was not introduced, and the interposition of my friend prevented me from making any further observation of him until the latter had retired. We were now side by side; and I commenced a sort of angular reconnaissance of a face and figure that had somewhat strangely arrested my attention. He was not an American; that was evident from his dress; and yet the face was not Mexican. Its outlines were too bold for a Spanish face, though the complexion, from tan and exposure, was brown and swarth. His face was clean-shaven except his chin, which carried a pointed, darkish beard. The eye, if I saw it aright under the shadow of a slouched brim, was blue and mild; the hair brown and wavy, with here and there a strand of silver. These were not Spanish characteristics,

much less Hispano-American; and I should have at once placed my neighbour elsewhere, but that his dress puzzled me. It was purely a Mexican costume, and consisted of a purple manga, with dark velvet embroidery around the vent and along the borders. As this garment covered the greater part of his person, I could only see that underneath was a pair of green velveteen calzoneros, with yellow buttons, and snow-white calzoncillos puffing out along the seams. The bottoms of the calzoneros were trimmed with stamped black leather; and under these were yellow boots, with a heavy steel spur upon the heel of each. The broad peaked strap that confined the spur, passing over the foot, gave to it that peculiar contour that we observe in the pictures of armed knights of the olden time. He wore a black, broad-brimmed sombrero, girdled by a thick band of gold bullion. A pair of tags of the same material stuck out from the sides: the fashion of the country.

The man kept his sombrero slouched towards the light, as I thought or suspected, for the concealment of his face. And yet it was not an ill-favoured one. On the contrary, it was open and pleasing; no doubt had been handsome beforetime, and whatever caused its melancholy expression had lined and clouded it. It was this expression that had struck me on first seeing the man.

Whilst I was making these observations, eyeing him cross-wise all the while, I discovered that he was eyeing me in a similar manner, and with an interest apparently equal to my own. This caused us to face round to each other, when the stranger drew from under his manga a small beaded cigarero, and, gracefully holding it out to me, said —

“Quiere a fumar, caballero?” (Would you smoke, sir?)

“Thank you, yes,” I replied in Spanish, at the same time taking a cigar from the case.

We had hardly lit our cigarettes when the man again turned to me with the unexpected question

—
“Will you sell your horse?”

“No.”

“Not for a good price?”

“Not for any price.”

“I would give five hundred dollars for him.”

“I would not part with him for twice the amount.”

“I will give twice the amount.”

“I have become attached to him: money is no object.”

“I am sorry to hear it. I have travelled two hundred miles to buy that horse.”

I looked at my new acquaintance with astonishment, involuntarily repeating his last words.

“You must have followed us from the Arkansas, then?”

“No, I came from the Rio Abajo.”

“The Rio Abajo! You mean from down the Del Norte?”

“Yes.”

“Then, my dear sir, it is a mistake. You think you are talking to somebody else, and bidding for some other horse.”

“Oh, no! He is yours. A black stallion with red nose and long full tail, half-bred Arabian. There is a small mark over the left eye.”

This was certainly the description of Moro; and I began to feel a sort of superstitious awe in regard to my mysterious neighbour.

“True,” replied I; “that is all correct; but I bought that stallion many months ago from a Louisiana planter. If you have just arrived from two hundred miles down the Rio Grande, how, may I ask, could you have known anything about me or my horse?”

“Dispensadme, caballero! I did not mean that. I came from below to meet the caravan, for the purpose of buying an American horse. Yours is the only one in the caballada I would buy, and, it seems, the only one that is not for sale!”

“I am sorry for that; but I have tested the qualities of this animal. We have become friends. No common motive would induce me to part with him.”

“Ah, señor! it is not a common motive that makes me so eager to purchase him. If you knew that, perhaps – ” he hesitated a moment; “but no, no, no!” and after muttering some half-coherent words, among which I could recognise the “Buenos noches, caballero!” the stranger rose up with the same mysterious air that had all along characterised him, and left me. I could hear the tinkling of the small bells upon the rowels of his spurs, as he slowly warped himself through the gay crowd, and disappeared into the night.

The vacated seat was soon occupied by a dusky manola, whose bright *nagua*, embroidered chemisette, brown ankles, and small blue slippers, drew my attention. This was all I could see of her, except the occasional flash of a very black eye through the loophole of the *rebozo tapado*. By degrees, the *rebozo* became more generous, the loophole expanded, and the outlines of a very pretty and very malicious little face were displayed before me. The end of the scarf was adroitly removed from the left shoulder; and a nude, plump arm, ending in a bunch of small jewelled fingers, hung carelessly down.

I am tolerably bashful; but at the sight of this tempting partner, I could hold in no longer, and bending towards her, I said in my best Spanish, “Do me the favour, miss, to waltz with me.”

The wicked little manola first held down her head and blushed; then, raising the long fringes of her eyes, looked up again, and with a voice as sweet as that of a canary-bird, replied —

“Con gusto, señor.” (With pleasure, sir.)

“Nos vamos!” cried I, elated with my triumph; and pairing off with my brilliant partner, we were soon whirling about in the mazy.

We returned to our seats again, and after refreshing with a glass of Albuquerque, a sponge-cake, and a husk cigarette, again took the floor. This pleasurable programme we repeated some half-dozen times, only varying the dance from waltz to polka, for my manola danced the polka as if she had been a born Bohemian.

On one of my fingers was a fifty-dollar diamond, which my partner seemed to think was *muy buenito*. As her igneous eyes softened my heart, and the champagne was producing a similar effect upon my head, I began to speculate on the propriety of transferring the diamond from the smallest of my fingers to the largest of hers, which it would, no doubt, have fitted exactly. All at once I became conscious of being under the surveillance of a large and very fierce-looking lepero, a regular *pelado*, who followed us with his eyes, and sometimes *in persona*, to every part of the room. The expression of his swarth face was a mixture of jealousy and vengeance, which my partner noticed, but, as I thought, took no pains to soften down.

“Who is he?” I whispered, as the man swung past us in his chequered serape.

“Esta mi marido, señor,” (It is my husband, sir), was the cool reply.

I pushed the ring close up to the root of my finger, shutting my hand upon it tight as a vice.

“Vamos a tomar otra copita!” (Let us take another glass of wine!) said I, resolving to bid my pretty *poblana*, as soon as possible, a good-night.

The Taos whisky had by this time produced its effect upon the dancers. The trappers and teamsters had become noisy and riotous. The leperos, who now half-filled the room, stimulated by wine, jealousy, old hatreds, and the dance, began to look more savage and sulky. The fringed hunting-shirts and brown homespun frocks found favour with the dark-eyed *majas* of Mexico, partly out of a respect for, and a fear of, courage, which is often at the bottom of a love like theirs.

Although the trading caravans supplied almost all the commerce of Santa Fé, and it was clearly the interest of its inhabitants to be on good terms with the traders, the two races, Anglo-American and Hispano-Indian, hated each other thoroughly; and that hate was now displaying itself on one side in bullying contempt, on the other in muttered *carrajos* and fierce looks of vengeance.

I was still chatting with my lively partner. We were seated on the banquette where I had introduced myself. On looking casually up, a bright object met my eyes. It appeared to be a naked

knife in the hands of *su marido* who was just then lowering over us like the shadow of an evil spirit. I was favoured with only a slight glimpse of this dangerous meteor, and had made up my mind to “ware steel,” when someone plucked me by the sleeve, and turning, I beheld my quondam acquaintance of the purple magna.

“Dispensadme, señor,” said he, nodding graciously, “I have just learned that the caravan is going on to Chihuahua.”

“True, there is no market here for our goods.”

“You go on then, of course?”

“Certainly, I must.”

“Will you return this way, señor?”

“It is very likely; I have no other intention at present.”

“Perhaps then you might be willing to part with your horse? You will find many as good in the great valley of the Mississippi.”

“Neither is likely.”

“But, señor, should you be inclined to do so, will you promise me the refusal of him?”

“Oh! that I will promise you, with all my heart.”

Our conversation was here interrupted by a huge, gaunt, half-drunken Missourian, who, tramping rudely upon the stranger’s toes, vociferated —

“Ye – up, old greaser! gi’ mi a char.”

“Y porque?” (And why?) demanded the Mexican, drawing in his feet, and looking up with astonished indignation.

“I’m tired jumpin’. I want a seat, that’s it, old hoss.”

There was something so bullying and brutal in the conduct of this man, that I felt called upon to interfere.

“Come!” said I, addressing him, “you have no right to deprive this gentleman of his seat, much less in such a fashion.”

“Eh, mister? who asked you to open yer head? Ye – up, I say!” and at the word, he seized the Mexican by the corner of his manga, as if to drag him from his seat.

Before I had time to reply to this rude speech and gesture, the stranger leaped to his feet, and with a well-planted blow felled the bully upon the floor.

This seemed to act as a signal for bringing several other quarrels to a climax. There was a rush through all parts of the sala, drunken shouts mingled with yells of vengeance, knives glanced from their sheaths, women screamed, pistols flashed and cracked, filling the rooms with smoke and dust. The lights went out, fierce struggles could be heard in the darkness, the fall of heavy bodies amidst groans and curses, and for five minutes these were the only sounds.

Having no cause to be particularly *angry* with anybody, I stood where I had risen, without using either knife or pistol, my frightened *maja* all the while holding me by the hand. A painful sensation near my left shoulder caused me suddenly to drop my partner; and with that unaccountable weakness consequent upon the reception of a wound, I felt myself staggering towards the banquette. Here I dropped into a sitting posture, and remained till the struggle was over, conscious all the while that a stream of blood was oozing down my back, and saturating my undergarments.

I sat thus till the struggle had ended. A light was brought, and I could distinguish a number of men in hunting-shirts moving to-and-fro with violent gesticulations. Some of them were advocating the justice of the “spree,” as they termed it; while others, the more respectable of the traders, were denouncing it. The leperos with the women, had all disappeared, and I could perceive that the Americanos had carried the day. Several dark objects lay along the floor: they were bodies of men dead or dying! One was an American, the Missourian who had been the immediate cause of the fracas; the others were pelodos. I could see nothing of my late acquaintance. My fandanguera, too

—*con su marido*— had disappeared; and on glancing at my left hand, I came to the conclusion that so also had my diamond ring!

“Saint Vrain! Saint Vrain!” I called, seeing the figure of my friend enter at the door.

“Where are you, H., old boy. How is it with you? all right, eh?”

“Not quite, I tear.”

“Good heavens! what’s this? why, you’re stabbed in the hump ribs! Not bad, I hope. Off with your shirt and let’s see.”

“First, let us to my room.”

“Come, then, my dear boy, lean on me – so, so!”

The fandango was over.

Chapter Eight. Seguin the Scalp-Hunter

I have had the pleasure of being wounded in the field of battle. I say pleasure. Under certain circumstances, wounds are luxuries. How different were the feelings I experienced while smarting under wounds that came by the steel of the assassin!

My earliest anxiety was about the depth of my wound. Was it mortal? This is generally the first question a man puts to himself, after discovering that he has been shot or stabbed. A wounded man cannot always answer it either. One's life-blood may be spurting from an artery at each palpitation, while the actual pain felt is not worth the pricking of a pin.

On reaching the Fonda, I sank exhausted on my bed. Saint Vrain split my hunting-shirt from cape to skirt, and commenced examining my wound. I could not see my friend's face as he stood behind me, and I waited with impatience.

"Is it deep?" I asked.

"Not deep as a draw-well, nor wide as a waggon-track," was the reply. "You're quite safe, old fellow; thank God, and not the man who handled that knife, for the fellow plainly intended to do for you. It is the cut of a Spanish knife, and a devilish gash it is. Haller, it was a close shave. One inch more, and the spine, my boy! but you're safe, I say. Here, Gode! that sponge!"

"Sacré!" muttered Gode, with true Gallic aspirate, as he handed the wet rag.

I felt the cold application. Then a bunch of soft raw cotton, the best dressing it could have, was laid over the wound, and fastened by strips. The most skilful surgeon could have done no more.

"Close as a clamp," added Saint Vrain, as he fastened the last pin, and placed me in the easiest position. "But what started the row? and how came you to cut such a figure in it? I was out, thank God!"

"Did you observe a strange-looking man?"

"What! with the purple manga?"

"Yes."

"He sat beside us?"

"Yes."

"Ha! No wonder you say a strange-looking man; stranger than he looks, too. I saw him, I know him, and perhaps not another in the room could say that. Ay, there was another," continued Saint Vrain, with a peculiar smile; "but what could have brought him there is that which puzzles me. Armijo could not have seen him: but go on."

I related to Saint Vrain the whole of my conversation with the stranger, and the incidents that led to the breaking up of the fandango.

"It is odd – very odd! What could he want with your horse? Two hundred miles, and offers a thousand dollars!"

"Capitaine!" (Gode had called me captain ever since the ride upon the buffalo), "if monsieur come two hundred mile, and vill pay un mille thousan dollar, he Moro like ver, ver moch. Un grand passion pour le cheval. Pourquoi: vy he no like him ver sheep? vy he no steal 'im?"

I started at the suggestion, and looked towards Saint Vrain.

"Vith permiss of le capitaine, I vill le cheval cache," continued the Canadian, moving towards the door.

"You need not trouble yourself, old Nor'-west, as far as that gentleman is concerned. He'll not steal your horse; though that's no reason why you should not fulfil your intention, and 'cache' the animal. There are thieves enough in Santa Fé to steal the horses of a whole regiment. You had better fasten him by the door here."

Gode passed to the door and disappeared.

“Who is he?” I asked, “this man about whom there seems to be so much that is mysterious?”

“Ah! if you knew. I will tell you some queer passages by and by, but not to-night. You have no need of excitement. That is the famous Seguin – the Scalp-hunter.”

“The Scalp-hunter!”

“Ay! you have heard of him, no doubt; at least you would, had you been much among the mountains.”

“I have. The ruffian! the wholesale butcher of innocent – ”

A dark waif danced against the wall: it was the shadow of a man. I looked up. Seguin was before me!

Saint Vrain on seeing him enter had turned away, and stood looking out of the window.

I was on the point of changing my tirade into the apostrophic form, and at the same time ordering the man out of my sight, when something in his look influenced me to remain silent. I could not tell whether he had heard or understood to whom my abusive epithets had been applied; but there was nothing in his manner that betrayed his having done so. I observed only the same look that had at first attracted me – the same expression of deep melancholy.

Could this man be the hardened and heartless villain I had heard of, the author of so many atrocities?

“Sir,” said he, seeing that I remained silent, “I deeply regret what has happened to you. I was the involuntary cause of your mishap. Is your wound a severe one?”

“It is not,” I replied, with a dryness of manner that seemed somewhat to disconcert him.

“I am glad of that,” he continued, after a pause. “I came to thank you for your generous interference. I leave Santa Fé in ten minutes. I must bid you farewell.”

He held forth his hand. I muttered the word “farewell,” but without offering to exchange the salutation. The stories of cruel atrocity connected with the name of this man came into my mind at the moment, and I felt a loathing for him. His arm remained in its outstretched position, while a strange expression began to steal over his countenance, as he saw that I hesitated.

“I cannot take your hand,” I said at length.

“And why?” he asked, in a mild tone.

“Why? It is red, red! Away, sir, away!”

He fixed his eyes upon me with a sorrowful look. There was not a spark of anger in them. He drew his hand within the folds of his manga, and uttering a deep sigh, turned and walked slowly out of the room.

Saint Vrain, who had wheeled round at the close of this scene, strode forward to the door, and stood looking after him. I could see the Mexican, from where I lay, as he crossed the quadrangular patio. He had shrugged himself closely in his manga, and was moving off in an attitude that betokened the deepest dejection. In a moment he was out of sight, having passed through the saguan, and into the street.

“There is something truly mysterious about that man. Tell me, Saint Vrain – ”

“Hush–sh! look yonder!” interrupted my friend, pointing through the open door.

I looked out into the moonlight. Three human forms were moving along the wall, towards the entrance of the patio. Their height, their peculiar attitudes, and the stealthy silence of their steps, convinced me they were Indians. The next moment they were lost under the dark shadows of the saguan.

“Who are they?” I inquired.

“Worse enemies to poor Seguin than you would be, if you knew him better. I pity him if these hungry hawks overtake him in the dark. But no; he’s worth warning, and a hand to help him, if need be. He shall have it. Keep cool, Harry! I will be back in a jiffy.”

So saying, Saint Vrain left me; and the moment after I could see his light form passing hastily out of the gate.

I lay reflecting on the strangeness of the incidents that seemed to be occurring around me. I was not without some painful reflections. I had wounded the feelings of one who had not injured me, and for whom my friend evidently entertained a high respect. A shod hoof sounded upon the stones outside; it was Gode with my horse; and the next moment I heard him hammering the picket-pin into the pavement.

Shortly after, Saint Vrain himself returned.

“Well,” I inquired, “what happened you?”

“Nothing much. That’s a weasel that never sleeps. He had mounted his horse before they came up with him, and was very soon out of their reach.”

“But may they not follow him on horseback?”

“That is not likely. He has comrades not far from here, I warrant you. Armijo – and it was he sent those villains on his track – has no force that dare follow him when he gets upon the wild hills. No fear for him once he has cleared the houses.”

“But, my dear Saint Vrain, tell me what you know of this singular man. I am wound up to a pitch of curiosity.”

“Not to-night, Harry; not to-night. I do not wish to cause you further excitement; besides, I have reason to leave you now. To-morrow, then. Good-night! Good-night!”

And so saying, my mercurial friend left me to Gode and a night of restlessness.

Chapter Nine. Left Behind

On the third day after the fandango, it is announced that the caravan will move onward to Chihuahua. The day arrives, and I am unable to travel with it. My surgeon, a wretched leech of a Mexican, assures me that it will be certain death to attempt the journey. For want of any opposing evidence, I am constrained to believe him. I have no alternative but to adopt the joyless resolve to remain in Santa Fé until the return of the traders.

Chafing on a feverish bed, I take leave of my late companions. We part with many regrets; but, above all, I am pained at bidding adieu to Saint Vrain, whose light-hearted companionship has been my solace through three days of suffering. He has proved my friend; and has undertaken to take charge of my waggons, and dispose of my goods in the market of Chihuahua.

“Do not fret, man,” says he, taking leave. “Kill time with the champagne of El Paso. We will be back in a squirrel’s jump; and, trust me, I will bring you a mule-load of Mexican shiners. God bless you! Good-bye!”

I can sit up in my bed and, from the open window, see the white tilts of the waggons, as the train rolls over a neighbouring hill. I hear the cracking whips and the deep-toned “wo-ha” of the teamsters; I see the traders mount and gallop after; and I turn upon my couch with a feeling of loneliness and desertion.

For days I lay tossing and fretting, despite the consolatory influence of the champagne, and the rude but kindly attentions of my voyageur valet.

I rise at length, dress myself, and sit in my ventana. I have a good view of the plaza and the adjacent streets, with their rows of brown adobe houses, and dusty ways between.

I gaze, hour after hour, on what is passing without. The scene is not without novelty as well as variety. Swarthy, ill-favoured faces appear behind the folds of dingy rebozos. Fierce glances lower under the slouch of broad sombreros. Poplanas with short skirts and slippered feet pass my window; and groups of “tame” Indians, pueblos, crowd in from the neighbouring rancherías, belabouring their donkeys as they go. These bring baskets of fruit and vegetables. They squat down upon the dusty plaza, behind piles of prickly pears, or pyramids of tomatoes and chile. The women, light-hearted hucksters, laugh and sing and chatter continuously. The tortillera, kneeling by her metate, bruises the boiled maize, claps it into thin flakes, flings it on the heated stone, and then cries, “Tortillas! tortillas calientes!” The cocinera stirs the peppery stew of chile Colorado, lifts the red liquid in her wooden ladle, and invites her customers by the expressions: “Chile bueno! excelente!” “Carbon! carbon!” cries the charcoal-burner. “Agua! agua limpia!” shouts the aguadord. “Pan fino, pan bianco!” screams the baker; and other cries from the vendors of atole, huevos, and leche, are uttered in shrill, discordant voices. Such are the voices of a Mexican plaza.

They are at first interesting. They become monotonous, then disagreeable; until at length I am tortured, and listen to them with a feverish excitement.

After a few days I am able to walk, and go out with my faithful Gode. We stroll through the town. It reminds me of an extensive brick-field before the kilns have been set on fire.

We encounter the same brown adobes everywhere; the same villainous-looking leperos lounging at the corners; the same bare-legged, slippered wenches; the same strings of belaboured donkeys; the same shrill and detestable cries.

We pass by a ruinous-looking house in a remote quarter. Our ears are saluted by voices from within. We hear shouts of “Mueran los Yankies! Abajo los Americanos!” No doubt the pelado to whom I was indebted for my wound is among the ruffians who crowd into the windows; but I know the lawlessness of the place too well to apply for justice.

We hear the same shouts in another street; again in the plaza; and Gode and I re-enter the Fonda with a conviction that our appearance in public might be attended with danger. We resolve, therefore, to keep within doors.

In all my life I never suffered ennui as when cooped up in this semi-barbarous town, and almost confined within the walls of its filthy Fonda. I felt it the more that I had so lately enjoyed the company of such free, jovial spirits, and I could fancy them in their bivouacs on the banks of the Del Norte, carousing, laughing, or listening to some wild mountain story.

Gode shared my feelings, and became as desponding as myself. The light humour of the voyageur disappeared. The song of the Canadian boatman was heard no longer; but, in its place, the “sacré” and English exclamations were spluttered plentifully, and hurled at everything Mexican. I resolved at length to put an end to our sufferings.

“This life will never do, Gode,” said I, addressing my compagnon.

“Ah! monsieur, ne varez! ne varez it vill do. Ah! ver doll. It is like von assemblée of le Quaker.”

“I am determined to endure it no longer.”

“But what can monsieur do? How, capitaine?”

“By leaving this accursed place, and that to-morrow.”

“But is monsieur fort? strongs beau-coup? strongs to ride?”

“I will risk it, Gode. If I break down, there are other towns on the river where we can halt. Anywhere better than here.”

“C’est vrai, capitaine. Beautiful village down the river. Albuquerque; Tome: ver many village. Mon Dieu! all better, Santa Fé is one camp of tief. Ver good for us go, monsieur; ver good.”

“Good or not, Gode, I am going. So make your preparations to-night, for I will leave in the morning before sunrise.”

“It will be von grand plaisir to makes ready.” And the Canadian ran from the room, snapping his fingers with delight.

I had made up my mind to leave Santa Fé at any rate. Should my strength, yet but half restored, hold out, I would follow, and if possible overtake the caravan. I knew it could make but short journeys over the deep sand roads of the Del Norte. Should I not succeed in coming up with it, I could halt in Albuquerque or El Paso, either of which would offer me a residence at least as agreeable as the one I was leaving.

My surgeon endeavoured to dissuade me from setting out. He represented that I was in a most critical condition, my wound far from being cicatrised. He set forth in most eloquent terms the dangers of fever, of gangrene, of haemorrhage. He saw I was obstinate, and concluded his monitions by presenting his bill. It amounted to the modest sum of one hundred dollars! It was an extortion. What could I do? I stormed and protested. The Mexican threatened me with “Governor’s” justice. Gode swore in French, Spanish, English, and Indian. It was all to no purpose. I saw that the bill would have to be paid, and I paid it, though with indifferent grace.

The leech disappeared, and the landlord came next. He, like the former, made earnest entreaty to prevent me from setting forth. He offered a variety of reasons to detain me.

“Do not go; for your life, señor, do not!”

“And why, good José?” I inquired.

“Oh, señor, los Indios bravos! los Navajoes! carambo!”

“But I am not going into the Indian country. I travel down the river, through the towns of New Mexico.”

“Ah! señor! the towns! no hay seguridad. No, no; there is safety nowhere from the Navajo. Hay novedades: news this very day. Polvidera; pobre polvidera! It was attacked on Sunday last. On Sunday, señor, when they were all en la misa. Pues, señor, the robbers surrounded the church; and oh, carambo! they dragged out the poor people – men, women and children! Pues, señor; they kill the men: and the women: Dios de mi alma!”

“Well, and the women?”

“Oh, señor! they are all gone; they were carried to the mountains by the savages. Pobres mugeres!”

“It is a sad story, truly; but the Indians, I understand, only make these forays at long intervals. I am not likely to meet with them now. At all events, José, I have made up my mind to run the risk.”

“But, señor,” continued José, lowering his voice to a confidential tone, “there are other ladrones besides the Indians: white ones, muchos, muchissimos! Ay, indeed, mi amo, white robbers; blancos, blancos y muy feos, carrai!”

And José closed his fingers as if clutching some imaginary object.

This appeal to my fears was in vain. I answered it by pointing to my revolvers and rifle, and to the well-filled belt of my henchman Gode.

When the Mexican Boniface saw that I was determined to rob him of all the guests he had in his house, he retired sullenly, and shortly after returned with his bill. Like that of the medico, it was out of all proportion; but I could not help myself, and paid it.

By grey dawn I was in my saddle; and, followed by Gode and a couple of heavily packed mules, I rode out of the ill-favoured town, and took the road for the Rio Abajo.

Chapter Ten. The Del Norte

For days we journey down the Del Norte. We pass through numerous villages, many of them types of Santa Fé. We cross the zequias and irrigating canals, and pass along fields of bright green maize plants. We see vineyards and grand haciendas. These appear richer and more prosperous as we approach the southern part of the province, the Rio Abajo.

In the distance, both east and west, we descry dark mountains rolled up against the sky. These are the twin ranges of the Rocky Mountains. Long spurs trend towards the river, and in places appear to close up the valley. They add to the expression of many a beautiful landscape that opens before us as we move onward.

We see picturesque costumes in the villages and along the highways: men dressed in the chequered serape or the striped blankets of the Navajoes; conical sombreros with broad brims; calzoneros of velveteen, with their rows of shining “castletops” and fastened at the waist by the jaunty sash. We see mangas and tilmas, and men wearing the sandal, as in Eastern lands. On the women we observe the graceful rebozo, the short nagua, and the embroidered chemisette.

We see rude implements of husbandry: the creaking carreta, with its block wheels; the primitive plough of the forking tree-branch, scarcely scoring the soil; the horn-yoked oxen; the goad; the clumsy hoe in the hands of the peon serf: these are all objects that are new and curious to our eyes, and that indicate the lowest order of agricultural knowledge.

Along the roads we meet numerous atajos, in charge of their arrieros. We observe the mules, small, smooth, light-limbed, and vicious. We glance at the heavy alparejas and bright worsted apishamores. We notice the tight wiry mustangs, ridden by the arrieros; the high-peaked saddles and hair bridles; the swarth faces and pointed beards of the riders; the huge spurs that tinkle at every step; the exclamations, “Hola, mula! malraya! vaya!” We notice all these, and they tell us we are journeying in the land of the Hispano-American.

Under other circumstances these objects would have interested me. At that time, they appeared to me like the pictures of a panorama, or the changing scenes of a continuous dream. As such have they left their impressions on my memory. I was under the incipient delirium of fever.

It was as yet only incipient; nevertheless, it distorted the images around me, and rendered their impressions unnatural and wearisome. My wound began to pain me afresh, and the hot sun, and the dust, and the thirst, with the miserable accommodations of New Mexican posadas, vexed me to an excess of endurance.

On the fifth day after leaving Santa Fé, we entered the wretched little pueblo of Parida. It was my intention to have remained there all night, but it proved a ruffian sort of place, with meagre chances of comfort, and I moved on to Socorro. This is the last inhabited spot in New Mexico, as you approach the terrible desert, the Jornada del Muerte.

Gode had never made the journey, and at Parida I had obtained one thing that we stood in need of, a guide. He had volunteered; and as I learnt that it would be no easy task to procure one at Socorro, I was fain to take him along. He was a coarse, shaggy-looking customer, and I did not at all like his appearance; but I found, on reaching Socorro, that what I had heard was correct. No guide could be hired on any terms, so great was their dread of the Jornada and its occasional denizens, the Apaches.

Socorro was alive with Indian rumours, “novedades.” The Indians had fallen upon an atajo near the crossing of Fra Cristobal, and murdered the arrieros to a man. The village was full of consternation at the news. The people dreaded an attack, and thought me mad, when I made known my intention of crossing the Jornada.

I began to fear they would frighten my guide from his engagement, but the fellow stood out staunchly, still expressing his willingness to accompany us.

Without the prospect of meeting the Apache savages, I was but ill prepared for the Jornada. The pain of my wound had increased, and I was fatigued and burning with fever.

But the caravan had passed through Socorro only three days before, and I was in hopes of overtaking my old companions before they could leave El Paso. This determined me to proceed in the morning, and I made arrangements for an early start.

Gode and I were awake before dawn. My attendant went out to summon the guide and saddle our animals. I remained in the house, making preparations for a cup of coffee before starting. I was assisted by the landlord of the posada, who had risen, and was stalling about in his serape.

While thus engaged I was startled by the voice of Gode calling from without, “Von maître! von maître! the rascal have him run vay!”

“What do you mean? Who has run away?”

“Oh, monsieur! la Mexicaine, with von mule, has robb, and run vay. Allons, monsieur, allons!”

I followed the Canadian to the stable with a feeling of anxiety. My horse – but no – thank Heaven, he was there! One of the mules, the macho, was gone. It was the one which the guide had ridden from Parida.

“Perhaps he is not off yet,” I suggested. “He may still be in the town.”

We sent and went in all directions to find him, but to no purpose. We were relieved at length from all doubts by the arrival of some early market men, who had met such a man as our guide far up the river, and riding a mule at full gallop.

What should we do? Follow him to Parida? No; that would be a journey for nothing. I knew that he would not be fool enough to go that way. Even if he did, it would have been a fool’s errand to seek for justice there, so I determined on leaving it over until the return of the traders would enable me to find the thief, and demand his punishment from the authorities.

My regrets at the loss of my macho were not unmixed with a sort of gratitude to the fellow when I laid my hand upon the nose of my whimpering charger. What hindered him from taking the horse instead of the mule? It is a question I have never been able to answer to this day. I can only account for the fellow’s preference for the mule on the score of downright honesty, or the most perverse stupidity.

I made overtures for another guide. I applied to the Boniface of Socorro, but without success. He knew no mozo who would undertake the journey.

“Los Apaches! los Apaches!”

I appealed to the peons and loiterers of the plaza.

“Los Apaches!”

Wherever I went, I was answered with “Los Apaches,” and a shake of the forefinger in front of the nose – a negative sign over all Mexico.

“It is plain, Gode, we can get no guide. We must try this Jornada without one. What say you, voyageur?”

“I am agree, mon maître; allons!”

And, followed by my faithful companion, with our remaining pack-mule, I took the road that leads to the desert. That night we slept among the ruins of Valverde; and the next morning, after an early start, embarked upon the “Journey of Death.”

Chapter Eleven. The “Journey of Death.”

In two hours we reached the crossing at Fra Cristobal. Here the road parts from the river, and strikes into the waterless desert. We plunge through the shallow ford, coming out on the eastern bank. We fill our “xuages” with care, and give our animals as much as they will drink. After a short halt to refresh ourselves, we ride onward.

We have not travelled far before we recognise the appropriate name of this terrible journey. Scattered along the path we see the bones of many animals. There are human bones too! That white spheroidal mass, with its grinning rows and serrated sutures, that is a human skull. It lies beside the skeleton of a horse. Horse and rider have fallen together. The wolves have stripped them at the same time. They have dropped down on their thirsty track, and perished in despair, although water, had they known it, was within reach of another effort!

We see the skeleton of a mule, with the alpareja still buckled around it, and an old blanket, flapped and tossed by many a whistling wind.

Other objects, that have been brought there by human aid, strike the eye as we proceed. A bruised canteen, the fragments of a glass bottle, an old hat, a piece of saddle-cloth, a stirrup red with rust, a broken strap, with many like symbols, are strewn along our path, speaking a melancholy language.

We are still only on the border of the desert. We are fresh. How when we have travelled over and neared the opposite side? Shall we leave such souvenirs?

We are filled with painful forebodings, as we look across the arid waste that stretches indefinitely before us. We do not dread the Apache. Nature herself is the enemy we fear.

Taking the waggon-tracks for our guide, we creep on. We grow silent, as if we were dumb. The mountains of Cristobal sink behind us, and we are almost “out of sight of land.” We can see the ridges of the Sierra Blanca away to the eastward; but before us, to the south, the eye encounters no mark or limit.

We push forward without guide or any object to indicate our course. We are soon in the midst of bewilderment. A scene of seeming enchantment springs up around us. Vast towers of sand, borne up by the whirlblast, rise vertically to the sky. They move to and fro over the plain. They are yellow and luminous. The sun glistens among their floating crystals. They move slowly, but they are approaching us.

I behold them with feelings of awe. I have heard of travellers lifted in their whirling vortex, and dashed back again from fearful heights.

The pack-mule, frightened at the phenomenon, breaks the lasso and scampers away among the ridges. Gode has galloped in pursuit. I am alone.

Nine or ten gigantic columns now appear, stalking over the plain and circling gradually around me. There is something unearthly in the sight. They resemble creatures of a phantom world. They seem endowed with demon life.

Two of them approach each other. There is a short, ghastly struggle that ends in their mutual destruction. The sand is precipitated to the earth, and the dust floats off in dun, shapeless masses.

Several have shut me within a space, and are slowly closing upon me. My dog howls and barks. The horse cowers with affright, and shivers between my thighs, uttering terrified expressions.

My brain reels. Strange objects appear. The fever is upon me! The laden currents clash in their wild torsion. I am twisted around and torn from my saddle. My eyes, mouth, and ears are filled with dust. Sand, stones, and branches strike me spitefully in the face; and I am flung with violence to the earth!

I lay for a moment where I had fallen, half-buried and blind. I was neither stunned nor hurt; and I began to grope around me, for as yet I could see nothing. My eyes were full of sand, and pained me exceedingly. Throwing out my arms, I felt for my horse; I called him by name. A low whimper answered me. I staggered towards the spot, and laid my hands upon him; he was down upon his flank. I seized the bridle, and he sprang up; but I could feel that he was shivering like an aspen.

I stood by his head for nearly half an hour, rubbing the dust from my eyes; and waiting until the simoom might settle away. At length the atmosphere grew clearer, and I could see the sky; but the sand still drifted along the ridges, and I could not distinguish the surface of the plain. There were no signs of Gode.

I mounted and commenced riding over the plain in search of my comrade. I had no idea of what direction he had taken.

I made a circuit of a mile or so, still calling his name as I went. I received no reply, and could see no traces upon the ground. I rode for an hour, galloping from ridge to ridge, but still without meeting any signs of my comrade or the mules. I pulled up in despair. I had shouted until I was faint and hoarse. I could search no longer.

I was thirsty, and would drink. O God! my “xuages” are broken! The pack-mule has carried off the water-skin.

The crushed calabash still hung upon its thong; but the last drops it had contained were trickling down the flanks of my horse. I knew that I might be fifty miles from water!

You cannot understand the fearfulness of this situation. You live in a northern zone, in a land of pools and streams and limpid springs. How unlike the denizen of the desert, the voyageur of the prairie sea! Water is his chief care, his ever-present solicitude; water the divinity he worships. Without water, even in the midst of plenty, plenty of food, he must die. In the wild western desert it is the thirst that kills. No wonder I was filled with despair. I believed myself to be about the middle of the Jornada. I knew that I could never reach the other side without water. The yearning had already begun. My throat and tongue felt shrivelled and parched.

I had lost all knowledge of the course I should take. The mountains, hitherto my guide, seemed to trend in every direction. Their numerous spurs puzzled me.

I remembered hearing of a spring, the Ojo del Muerto, that was said to lie westward of the trail. Sometimes there was water in the spring. On other occasions travellers had reached it only to find the fountain dried up, and leave their bones upon its banks. So ran the tales in Socorro.

I headed my horse westward. I would seek the spring, and, should I fail to find it, push on to the river. This was turning out of my course; but I must reach the water and save my life.

I sat in my saddle, faint and choking, leaving my animal to go at will. I had lost the energy to guide him.

He went many miles westward, for the sun told me the course. I was suddenly roused from my stupor. A glad sight was before me. A lake! – a lake shining like crystal. Was I certain I saw it? Could it be the mirage? No. Its outlines were too sharply defined. It had not that filmy, whitish appearance which distinguishes the latter phenomenon. No. It was not the mirage. It was water!

I involuntarily pressed the spur against the side of my horse; but he needed not that. He had already eyed the water, and sprang forward, inspirited with new energy. The next moment he was in it up to his flanks.

I flung myself from the saddle with a plunge. I was about to lift the water in my concave palms, when the actions of my horse attracted me. Instead of drinking greedily, he stood tossing his head with snorts of disappointment. My dog, too, refused to lap, and ran along the shore whining and howling.

I knew what this meant; but, with that common obstinacy which refuses all testimony but the evidence of the senses, I lifted some drops in my hand, and applied them to my lips. They were briny and burning. I might have known this before reaching the lake, for I had ridden through a salt incrustation that surrounded it like a belt of snow. But my brain was fevered; my reason had left me.

It was of no use remaining where I was. I climbed back into my saddle, and rode along the shore, over fields of snow-white salt. Here and there my horse's hoof rang against bleaching bones of animals, the remains of many a victim. Well was this lake named the Laguna del Muerto – the “Lake of Death!”

Reaching its southern point, I again headed westward, in hopes of striking the river.

From this time until a later period, when I found myself in a far different scene, I have no distinct memories.

I remember dismounting on a high bank. I must have travelled unconsciously for hours before, for the sun was low down on the horizon as I alighted. It was a very high bank – a precipice – and below me I saw a beautiful river sweeping onward through groves of emerald greenness. I thought there were many birds fluttering in the groves, and their voices rang in delicious melody. There was fragrance on the air, and the scene below me seemed an Elysium. I thought that around where I stood all was bleak, and barren, and parched with intolerable heat. I was tortured with a slakeless thirst that grew fiercer as I gazed on the flowing water. These were real incidents. All this was true.

I must drink. I must to the river. It is cool, sweet water. Oh! I must drink. What! A horrid cliff! No; I will not go down there. I can descend more easily here. Who are these forms? Who are you, sir? Ah! it is you, my brave Moro; and you, Alp. Come! come! Follow me! Down; down to the river! Ah! again that accursed cliff! Look at the beautiful water! It smiles. It ripples on, on, on! Let us drink. No, not yet; we cannot yet. We must go farther. Ugh! Such a height to leap from! But we must drink, one and all. Come, Gode! Come, Moro, old friend! Alp, come on! We shall reach it; we shall drink. Who is Tantalus? Ha! ha! Not I; not I! Stand back, fiends! Do not push me over! Back! Back, I say! Oh!

Part of all this was a reality; part was a dream, a dream that bore some resemblance to the horrors of a first intoxication.

Chapter Twelve.

Zoe

I lay tracing the figures upon the curtains. They were scenes of the olden time – mailed knights, helmed and mounted, dashing at each other with couched lances, or tumbling from their horses, pierced by the spear. Other scenes there were: noble dames, sitting on Flemish palfreys, and watching the flight of the merlin hawk. There were pages in waiting, and dogs of curious and extinct breeds held in the leash. Perhaps these never existed except in the dreams of some old-fashioned artist; but my eye followed their strange shapes with a sort of half-idiotic wonder.

Metallic rods upheld the curtains; rods that shone brightly, and curved upwards, forming a canopy. My eyes ran along these rods, scanning their configuration, and admiring, as a child admires, the regularity of their curves. I was not in my own land. These things were strange to me. “Yet,” thought I, “I have seen something like them before, but where? Oh! this I know, with its broad stripes and silken texture; it is a Navajo blanket! Where was I last? In New Mexico? Yes. Now I remember: the Jornada! but how came I?”

“Can I untwist this? It is close woven; it is wool, fine wool. No, I cannot separate a thread from —

“My fingers! how white and thin they are! and my nails, blue, and long as the talons of a bird! I have a beard! I feel it on my chin. What gave me a beard? I never wear it; I will shave it off – ha! my moustache!”

I was wearied, and slept again.

Once more my eyes were tracing the figures upon the curtains: the knights and dames, the hounds, hawks, and horses. But my brain had become clearer, and music was flowing into it. I lay silent, and listened.

The voice was a female's. It was soft and finely modulated. Someone played upon a stringed instrument. I recognised the tones of the Spanish harp, but the song was French, a song of Normandy; and the words were in the language of that romantic land. I wondered at this, for my consciousness of late events was returning; and I knew that I was far from France.

The light was streaming over my couch; and, turning my face to the front, I saw that the curtains were drawn aside.

I was in a large room, oddly but elegantly furnished. Human figures were before me, seated and standing.

After looking steadily for a while, my vision became more distinct and reliable; and I saw that there were but three persons in the room, a man and two females.

I remained silent, not certain but that the scene before me was only some new phase of my dream. My eyes wandered from one of the living figures to another, without attracting the attention of any of them.

They were all in different attitudes, and occupied differently.

Nearest me was a woman of middle age, seated upon a low ottoman. The harp I had heard was before her, and she continued to play. She must have been, I thought, when young, a woman of extreme beauty. She was still beautiful in a certain sense. The noble features were there, though I could perceive that they had been scathed by more than ordinary suffering of the mind.

She was a Frenchwoman: an ethnologist could have told that at a glance. Those lines, the characteristics of her highly gifted race, were easily traceable. I thought there was a time when that face had witched many a heart with its smiles. There were no smiles on it now, but a deep yet intellectual expression of melancholy. This I perceived, too, in her voice, in her song, in every note that vibrated from the strings of the instrument.

My eye wandered farther. A man of more than middle age stood by the table, near the centre of the room. His face was turned towards me, and his nationality was as easily determined as that of the lady. The high, florid cheeks, the broad front, the prominent chin, the small green cap with its long peak and conical crown, the blue spectacles, were all characteristics. He was a German.

His occupation was also characteristic of his nationality. Before him were strewed over the table, and upon the floor, the objects of his study – plants and shrubs of various species. He was busy with these, classifying and carefully laying them out between the leaves of his portfolio. It was evident that the old man was a botanist.

A glance to the right, and the naturalist and his labours were no longer regarded. I was looking upon the loveliest object that ever came before my eyes, and my heart bounded within me, as I strained forward in the intensity of its admiration.

Yet it was not a woman that held my gaze captive, but a child – a girl – a maid – standing upon the threshold of womanhood, ready to cross it at the first summons of Love!

My eyes, delighted, revelled along the graceful curves that outlined the beautiful being before me. I thought I had seen the face somewhere. I had, but a moment before, while looking upon that of the elder lady. They were the same face – using a figure of speech – the type transmitted from mother to daughter: the same high front and facial angle, the same outline of the nose, straight as a ray of light, with the delicate spiral-like curve of the nostril which meets you in the Greek medallion. Their hair, too, was alike in colour, golden; though, in that of the mother, the gold showed an enamel of silver.

I will desist and spare details, which to you may be of little interest. In return, do me the favour to believe, that the being who impressed me then and for ever was beautiful, was lovely.

“Ah! it wud be ver moch kindness if madame and ma’m’selle wud play la Marseillaise, la grande Marseillaise. What say mein liebe fraulein!”

“Zoe, Zoe! take thy bandolin. Yes, doctor, we will play it for you with pleasure. You like the music. So do we. Come, Zoe!”

The young girl, who, up to this time, had been watching intently the labours of the naturalist, glided to a remote corner of the room, and taking up an instrument resembling the guitar, returned and seated herself by her mother. The bandolin was soon placed in concert with the harp, and the strings of both vibrated to the thrilling notes of the Marseillaise.

There was something exceedingly graceful in the performance. The instrumentation, as I thought, was perfect; and the voices of the players accompanied it in a sweet and spirited harmony. As I gazed upon the girl Zoe, her features animated by the thrilling thoughts of the anthem, her whole countenance radiant with light, she seemed some immortal being – a young goddess of liberty calling her children “to arms!”

The botanist had desisted from his labours, and stood listening with delighted attention. At each return of the thrilling invocation, “Aux armes, citoyens!” the old man snapped his fingers, and beat the floor with his feet, marking the time of the music. He was filled with the same spirit which at that time, over all Europe, was gathering to its crisis.

“Where am I? French faces, French music, French voices, and the conversation in French!” for the botanist addressed the females in that language, though with a strong Rhenish patois, that confirmed my first impressions of his nationality. “Where am I?”

My eye ran around the room in search of an answer. I could recognise the furniture: the cross-legged Campeachy chairs, a rebozo, the palm-leaf petate. “Ha, Alp!”

The dog lay stretched along the mattress near my couch, and sleeping.

“Alp! Alp!”

“Oh, mamma! mamma! écoutez! the stranger calls.”

The dog sprang to his feet, and throwing his fore paws upon the bed, stretched his nose towards me with a joyous whimpering. I reached out my hand and patted him, at the same time giving utterance to some expressions of endearment.

“Oh, mamma! mamma! he knows him. Voilà.”

The lady rose hastily, and approached the bed. The German seized me by the wrist, pushing back the Saint Bernard, which was bounding to spring upward.

“Mon Dieu! he is well. His eyes, doctor. How changed!”

“Ya, ya; moch better; ver moch better. Hush! away, tog! Keep away, mine goot tog!”

“Who? where? Tell me, where am I? Who are you?”

“Do not fear! we are friends: you have been ill!”

“Yes, yes! we are friends: you have been ill, sir. Do not fear us; we will watch you. This is the good doctor. This is mamma, and I am – ”

“An angel from heaven, beautiful Zoe!”

The child looked at me with an expression of wonder, and blushed as she said —

“Hear, mamma! He knows my name!”

It was the first compliment she had ever received from the lips of love.

“It is goot, madame! he is ver moch relief; he ver soon get over now. Keep away, mine goot Alp! Your master he get well: goot tog, down!”

“Perhaps, doctor, we should leave him. The noise – ”

“No, no! if you please, stay with me. The music; will you play again?”

“Yes, the music is ver goot; ver goot for te pain.”

“Oh, mamma! let us play, then.”

Both mother and daughter took up their instruments, and again commenced playing.

I listened to the sweet strains, watching the fair musicians a long while. My eyes at length became heavy, and the realities before me changed into the soft outlines of a dream.

My dream was broken by the abrupt cessation of the music. I thought I heard, through my sleep, the opening of a door. When I looked to the spot lately occupied by the musicians, I saw that they were gone. The bandolin had been thrown down upon the ottoman, where it lay, but “she” was not there.

I could not, from my position, see the whole of the apartment; but I knew that someone had entered at the outer door, I heard expressions of welcome and endearment, a rustling of dresses, the words “Papa!”

“My little Zoe”; the latter uttered in the voice of a man. Then followed some explanations in a lower tone, which I could not hear.

A few minutes elapsed, and I lay silent and listening. Presently there were footsteps in the hall. A boot, with its jingling rowels, struck upon the tiled floor. The footsteps entered the room, and approached the bed. I started, as I looked up. The Scalp-hunter was before me!

Chapter Thirteen.

Seguin

“You are better; you will soon be well again. I am glad to see that you recover.”

He said this without offering his hand.

“I am indebted to you for my life. Is it not so?”

It is strange that I felt convinced of this the moment that I set my eyes upon the man. I think such an idea crossed my mind before, after awaking from my long dream. Had I encountered him in my struggles for water, or had I dreamed it?

“Oh yes!” answered he, with a smile, “but you will remember that I had something to do with your being exposed to the risk of losing it.”

“Will you take this hand? Will you forgive me?”

After all, there is something selfish even in gratitude. How strangely had it changed my feelings towards this man! I was begging the hand which, but a few days before, in the pride of my morality, I had spurned from me as a loathsome thing.

But there were other thoughts that influenced me. The man before me was the husband of the lady; was the father of Zoe. His character, his horrid calling, were forgotten; and the next moment our hands were joined in the embrace of friendship.

“I have nothing to forgive. I honour the sentiment that induced you to act as you did. This declaration may seem strange to you. From what you knew of me, you acted rightly; but there may be a time, sir, when you will know me better: when the deeds which you abhor may seem not only pardonable, but justifiable. Enough of this at present. The object of my being now at your bedside is to request that what you do know of me be not uttered here.”

His voice sank to a whisper as he said this, pointing at the same time towards the door of the room.

“But how,” I asked, wishing to draw his attention from this unpleasant theme, “how came I into this house? It is yours, I perceive. How came I here? Where did you find me?”

“In no very safe position,” answered he, with a smile. “I can scarcely claim the merit of saving you. Your noble horse you may thank for that.”

“Ah, my horse! my brave Moro! I have lost him.”

“Your horse is standing at the maize-trough, not ten paces from where you lie. I think you will find him in somewhat better condition than when you last saw him. Your mules are without. Your packs are safe. You will find them here,” and he pointed to the foot of the bed.

“And – ”

“Gode you would ask for,” said he, interrupting me. “Do not be uneasy on his account. He, too, is in safety. He is absent just now, but will soon return.”

“How can I thank you? This is good news indeed. My brave Moro! and Alp here! But how? you say my horse saved me. He has done so before: how can this be?”

“Simply thus: we found you many miles from this place, on a cliff that overlooks the Del Norte. You were hanging over on your lasso, that by a lucky accident had become entangled around your body. One end of it was knotted to the bit-ring, and the noble animal, thrown back upon his haunches, sustained your weight upon his neck!”

“Noble Moro! what a terrible situation!”

“Ay, you may say that! Had you fallen from it, you would have passed through a thousand feet of air before striking the rocks below. It was indeed a fearful situation.”

“I must have staggered over in my search for water.”

“In your delirium you walked over. You would have done so a second time had we not prevented you. When we drew you up on the cliff, you struggled hard to get back. You saw the water below, but not the precipice. Thirst is a terrible thing – an insanity of itself.”

“I remember something of all this. I thought it had been a dream.”

“Do not trouble your brain with these things. The doctor here admonishes me to leave you. I have an object, as I have said,” (here a sad expression passed over the countenance of the speaker), “else I should not have paid you this visit. I have not many moments to spare. To-night I must be far hence. In a few days I shall return. Meanwhile, compose yourself, and get well. The doctor here will see that you want for nothing. My wife and daughter will nurse you.”

“Thanks! thanks!”

“You will do well to remain where you are until your friends return from Chihuahua. They must pass not far from this place, and I will warn you when they are near. You are a student. There are books here in different languages. Amuse yourself. They will give you music. Monsieur, adieu!”

“Stay, sir, one moment! You seem to have taken a strange fancy to my horse?”

“Ah! monsieur, it was no fancy; but I will explain that at some other time. Perhaps the necessity no longer exists.”

“Take him, if you will. Another will serve my purpose.”

“No, monsieur. Do you think I could rob you of what you esteem so highly, and with such just reason, too? No, no! Keep the good Moro. I do not wonder at your attachment to the noble brute.”

“You say that you have a long journey to-night. Then take him for the time.”

“That offer I will freely accept, for indeed my own horse is somewhat jaded. I have been two days in the saddle. Well, adieu!”

Seguin pressed my hand and walked away. I heard the “chinck, chinck” of his spurs as he crossed the apartment, and the next moment the door closed behind him.

I was alone, and lay listening to every sound that reached me from without. In about half an hour after he had left me, I heard the hoof-strokes of a horse, and saw the shadow of a horseman passing outside the window. He had departed on his journey, doubtless on the performance of some red duty connected with his fearful avocation!

I lay for a while harassed in mind, thinking of this strange man. Then sweet voices interrupted my meditations; before me appeared lovely faces, and the Scalp-hunter was forgotten.

Chapter Fourteen.

Love

I would compress the history of the ten days following into as many words. I would not weary you with the details of my love – a love that in the space of a few hours became a passion deep and ardent.

I was young at the time; at just such an age as to be impressed by the romantic incidents that surrounded me, and had thrown this beautiful being in my way; at that age when the heart, unguarded by cold calculations of the future, yields unresistingly to the electrical impressions of love. I say electrical. I believe that at this age the sympathies that spring up between heart and heart are purely of this nature.

At a later period of life that power is dissipated and divided. Reason rules it. We become conscious of the capability of transferring our affections, for they have already broken faith; and we lose that sweet confidence that comforted the loves of our youth. We are either imperious or jealous, as the advantages appear in our favour or against us. A gross alloy enters into the love of our middle life, sadly detracting from the divinity of its character.

I might call that which I then felt my first real passion. I thought I had loved before, but no, it was only a dream; the dream of the village schoolboy, who saw heaven in the bright eyes of his coy class-mate; or perhaps at the family picnic, in some romantic dell, had tasted the rosy cheek of his pretty cousin.

I grew strong, and with a rapidity that surprised the skilful man of herbs. Love fed and nourished the fire of life. The will often effects the deed, and say as you may, volition has its power upon the body. The wish to be well, to live, an object to live for, are often the speediest restoratives. They were mine.

I grew stronger, and rose from my couch. A glance at the mirror told me that my colour was returning.

Instinct teaches the bird while wooing his mate to plume his pinions to their highest gloss; and a similar feeling now rendered me solicitous about my toilet. My portmanteau was ransacked, my razors were drawn forth, the beard disappeared from my chin, and my moustache was trimmed to its wonted dimensions.

I confess all this. The world had told me I was not ill-looking, and I believed what it said. I am mortal in my vanities. Are not you?

There was a guitar in the house. I had learnt in my college days to touch the strings, and its music delighted both Zoe and her mother. I sang to them the songs of my own land – songs of love; and with a throbbing heart watched whether the burning words produced any impression upon her. More than once I have laid aside the instrument with feelings of disappointment. From day to day, strange reflections passed through my mind. Could it be that she was too young to understand the import of the word love? too young to be inspired with a passion? She was but twelve years of age, but then she was the child of a sunny clime; and I had often seen at that age, under the warm sky of Mexico, the wedded bride, the fond mother.

Day after day we were together alone. The botanist was busy with his studies, and the silent mother occupied with the duties of her household.

Love is not blind. It may be to all the world beside; but to its own object it is as watchful as Argus.

I was skilled in the use of the crayon, and I amused my companion by sketches upon scraps of paper and the blank leaves of her music. Many of these were the figures of females, in different attitudes and costumes. In one respect they resembled each other: their faces were alike.

The child, without divining the cause, had noticed this peculiarity in the drawings.

“Why is it?” she asked one day, as we sat together. “These ladies are all in different costumes, of different nations; are they not? and yet there is a resemblance in their faces! They have all the same features; indeed, exactly the same, I think.”

“It is your face, Zoe; I can sketch no other.”

She raised her large eyes, and bent them upon me with an expression of innocent wonder. Was she blushing? No!

“Is that like me?”

“It is, as nearly as I can make it.”

“And why do you not sketch other faces?”

“Why! because I – Zoe, I fear you would not understand me.”

“Oh, Enrique; do you think me so bad a scholar? Do I not understand all that you tell me of the far countries where you have been? Surely I may comprehend this as well.”

“I will tell you, then, Zoe.”

I bent forward, with a burning heart and trembling voice.

“It is because your face is ever before me; I can paint no other. It is, that – I love you, Zoe!”

“Oh! is that the reason? And when you love one, her face is always before you, whether she herself be present or no? Is it not so?”

“It is so,” I replied, with a painful feeling of disappointment.

“And is that love, Enrique?”

“It is.”

“Then must I love you; for, wherever I may be, I can see your face: how plainly before me! If I could use this pencil as you do, I am sure I could paint it, though you were not near me! What then? Do you think I love you, Enrique?”

No pen could trace my feelings at that moment. We were seated; and the sheet on which were the sketches was held jointly between us. My hand wandered over its surface, until the unresisting fingers of my companion were clasped in mine. A wilder emotion followed the electric touch: the paper fell upon the floor; and with a proud but trembling heart I drew the yielding form to mine!

Chapter Fifteen. Light and Shade

The house we inhabited stood in a quadrangular inclosure that sloped down to the banks of the river, the Del Norte. This inclosure was a garden or shrubbery, guarded on all sides by high, thick walls of adobe. Along the summit of these walls had been planted rows of the cactus, that threw out huge, thorny limbs, forming an impassable chevaux-de-frise. There was but one entrance to the house and garden, through a strong wicket gate, which I had noticed was always shut and barred. I had no desire to go abroad. The garden, a large one, hitherto had formed the limit of my walk; and through this I often rambled with Zoe and her mother, but oftener with Zoe alone.

There were many objects of interest about the place. It was a ruin; and the house itself bore evidences of better times. It was a large building in the Moro-Spanish style, with flat roof (azotea), and notched parapet running along the front. Here and there the little stone turrets of this parapet had fallen off, showing evidence of neglect and decay.

The walls of the garden impinged upon the river, and there ended; for the bank was steep and vertical, and the deep, still water that ran under it formed a sufficient protection on that side.

A thick grove of cotton-woods fringed the bank of the river, and under their shade had been erected a number of seats of japanned mason-work, in a style peculiar to Spanish countries. There were steps cut in the face of the bank, overhung with drooping shrubs, and leading to the water's edge. I had noticed a small skiff moored under the willows, where these steps went down to the water.

From this point only could you see beyond the limits of the inclosure. The view was magnificent, and commanded the windings of the Del Norte for a distance of miles.

Evening after evening we sought the grove of cotton-woods, and, seated upon one of the benches, together watched the glowing sunset. At this time of the day we were ever alone, I and my little companion.

One evening, as usual, we sat under the solemn shadow of the grove. We had brought with us the guitar and bandolin; but, after a few notes had been struck, the music was forgotten, and the instruments lay upon the grass at our feet. We loved to listen to the music of our own voices. We preferred the utterance of our own thoughts to the sentiments of any song, however sweet. There was music enough around us; the hum of the wild bee as it bade farewell to the closing corolla; the whoop of the gruya in the distant sedge; and the soft cooing of the doves as they sat in pairs upon the adjacent branches, like us whispering their mutual loves.

Autumn had now painted the woods, and the frondage was of every hue. The shadows of the tall trees dappled the surface of the water, as the stream rolled silently on. The sun was far down, and the spire of El Paso gleamed like a golden star under the parting kiss of his beams. Our eyes wandered, and rested upon the glittering vane.

"The church!" half soliloquised my companion; "I hardly know what it is like, it is so long since I saw it."

"How long?"

"Oh, many, many years; I was very young then."

"And you have not been beyond these walls since then?"

"Oh yes! Papa has taken us down the river in the boat, mamma and myself, often, but not lately."

"And have you no wish to go abroad through these gay woods?"

"I do not desire it; I am contented here."

"And will you always be contented here?"

"And why not, Enrique? When you are near me, why should I not be happy?"

"But when –"

A dark shadow seemed to cross her thoughts. Benighted with love, she had never reflected upon the probability of my leaving her, nor indeed had I. Her cheeks became suddenly pale; and I could see the agony gathering in her eyes, as she fixed them upon me. But the words were out —

“When I must leave you?”

She threw herself on my breast, with a short, sharp scream, as though she had been stung to the heart, and in an impassioned voice cried aloud —

“Oh! my God, my God! leave me! leave me! Oh! you will not leave me? You who have taught me to love! Oh! Enrique, why did you tell me that you loved me? Why did you teach me to love?”

“Zoe!”

“Enrique, Enrique! say you will not leave me!”

“Never! Zoe! I swear it; never, never!” I fancied at this moment I heard the stroke of an oar; but the wild tumult of my feelings prevented me from rising to look over the bank. I was raising my head when an object, appearing above the bank, caught my eye. It was a black sombrero with its golden band. I knew the wearer at a glance: Seguin! In a moment, he was beside us.

“Papa!” exclaimed Zoe, rising up and reaching forward to embrace him. The father put her to one side, at the same time tightly grasping her hand in his. For a moment he remained silent, bending his eyes upon me with an expression I cannot depict. There was in it a mixture of reproach, sorrow, and indignation. I had risen to confront him, but I quailed under that singular glance, and stood abashed and silent.

“And this is the way you have thanked me for saving your life? A brave return, good sir; what think you?”

I made no reply.

“Sir!” continued he, in a voice trembling with emotion, “you have deeply wronged me.”

“I know it not; I have not wronged you.”

“What call you this? Trifling with my child!”

“Trifling!” I exclaimed, roused to boldness by the accusation.

“Ay, trifling! Have you not won her affections?”

“I won them fairly.”

“Pshaw, sir! This is a child, not a woman. Won them fairly! What can she know of love?”

“Papa! I do know love. I have felt it for many days. Do not be angry with Enrique, for I love him; oh, papa! in my heart I love him!”

He turned to her with a look of astonishment.

“Hear this!” he exclaimed. “Oh, heavens! my child, my child!”

His voice stung me, for it was full of sorrow.

“Listen, sir!” I cried, placing myself directly before him. “I have won the affections of your daughter. I have given mine in return. I am her equal in rank, as she is mine. What crime, then, have I committed? Wherein have I wronged you?”

He looked at me for some moments without making any reply.

“You would marry her, then?” he said, at length, with an evident change in his manner.

“Had I permitted our love thus far, without that intention, I should have merited your reproaches. I should have been ‘trifling,’ as you have said.”

“Marry me!” exclaimed Zoe, with a look of bewilderment.

“Listen! Poor child! she knows not the meaning of the word!”

“Ay, lovely Zoe! I will; else my heart, like yours, shall be wrecked for ever! Oh, sir!”

“Come, sir, enough of this. You have won her from herself; you have yet to win her from me. I will sound the depth of your affection. I will put you to the proof.”

“Put me to any proof!”

“We shall see; come! let us in. Here, Zoe!”

And, taking her by the hand, he led her towards the house. I followed close behind.

As we passed through a clump of wild orange trees, the path narrowed; and the father, letting go her hand, walked on ahead. Zoe was between us; and as we reached the middle of the grove, she turned suddenly, and laying her hand upon mine, whispered in a trembling voice, “Enrique, tell me, what is ‘to marry’?”

“Dearest Zoe! not now: it is too difficult to explain; another time, I – ”

“Come, Zoe! your hand, child!”

“Papa, I am coming!”

Chapter Sixteen. An Autobiography

I was alone with my host in the apartment I had hitherto occupied. The females had retired to another part of the house; and I noticed that Seguin, on entering, had looked to the door, turning the bolt.

What terrible proof was he going to exact of my faith, of my love? Was he about to take my life, or bind me by some fearful oath, this man of cruel deeds? Dark suspicions shot across my mind, and I sat silent, but not without emotions of fear.

A bottle of wine was placed between us, and Seguin, pouring out two glasses, asked me to drink. This courtesy assured me. "But how if the wine be poi – ?" He swallowed his own glass before the thought had fairly shaped itself.

"I am wronging him," thought I. "This man, with all, is incapable of an act of treachery like that."

I drank up the wine. It made me feel more composed and tranquil.

After a moment's silence he opened the conversation with the abrupt interrogatory, "What do you know of me?"

"Your name and calling; nothing more."

"More than is guessed at here;" and he pointed significantly to the door. "Who told you thus much of me?"

"A friend, whom you saw at Santa Fé."

"Ah! Saint Vrain; a brave, bold man. I met him once in Chihuahua. Did he tell you no more of me than this?"

"No. He promised to enter into particulars concerning you, but the subject was forgotten, the caravan moved on, and we were separated."

"You heard, then, that I was Seguin the Scalp-hunter? That I was employed by the citizens of El Paso to hunt the Apache and Navajo, and that I was paid a stated sum for every Indian scalp I could hang upon their gates? You heard all this?"

"I did."

"It is true."

I remained silent.

"Now, sir," he continued, after a pause, "would you marry my daughter, the child of a wholesale murderer?"

"Your crimes are not hers. She is innocent even of the knowledge of them, as you have said. You may be a demon; she is an angel."

There was a sad expression on his countenance as I said this.

"Crimes! demon!" he muttered, half in soliloquy. "Ay, you may well think this; so judges the world. You have heard the stories of the mountain men in all their red exaggeration. You have heard that, during a treaty, I invited a village of the Apaches to a banquet, and poisoned the viands – poisoned the guests, man, woman, and child, and then scalped them! You have heard that I induced to pull upon the drag rope of a cannon two hundred savages, who know not its use; and then fired the piece, loaded with grape, mowing down the row of unsuspecting wretches! These, and other inhuman acts, you have no doubt heard of?"

"It is true. I have heard these stories among the mountain hunters; but I knew not whether to believe them."

"Monsieur, they are false; all false and unfounded."

"I am glad to hear you say this. I could not now believe you capable of such barbarities."

“And yet, if they were true in all their horrid details, they would fall far short of the cruelties that have been dealt out by the savage foe to the inhabitants of this defenceless frontier. If you knew the history of this land for the last ten years; its massacres and its murders; its tears and its burnings; its spoliations; whole provinces depopulated; villages given to the flames; men butchered on their own hearths; women, beautiful women, carried into captivity by the desert robber! Oh, God! and I too have shared wrongs that will acquit me in your eyes, perhaps in the eyes of Heaven!”

The speaker buried his face in his hands, and leant forward upon the table. He was evidently suffering from some painful recollection. After a moment he resumed – “I would have you listen to a short history of my life.” I signified my assent; and after filling and drinking another glass of wine, he proceeded.

“I am not a Frenchman, as men suppose. I am a Creole, a native of New Orleans. My parents were refugees from Saint Domingo, where, after the black revolution, the bulk of their fortune was confiscated by the bloody Christophe.

“I was educated for a civil engineer; and, in this capacity, I was brought out to the mines of Mexico, by the owner of one of them, who knew my father. I was young at the time, and I spent several years employed in the mines of Zacatecas and San Luis Potosi.

“I had saved some money out of my pay, and I began to think of opening upon my own account.

“Rumours had long been current that rich veins of gold existed upon the Gila and its tributaries. The washings had been seen and gathered in these rivers; and the mother of gold, the milky quartz rock, cropped out everywhere in the desert mountains of this wild region.

“I started for this country with a select party; and, after traversing it for weeks, in the Mimbres mountains, near the head waters of the Gila, I found the precious ore in its bed. I established a mine, and in five years was a rich man.

“I remembered the companion of my youth, the gentle, the beautiful cousin who had shared my confidence, and inspired me with my first passion. With me it was first and last; it was not, as is often the case under similar circumstances, a transient thing. Through all my wanderings I had remembered and loved her. Had she been as true to me?

“I determined to assure myself; and leaving my affairs in the hands of my mayoral, I set out for my native city.

“Adèle had been true; and I returned, bringing her with me.

“I built a house in Valverde, the nearest inhabited district to my mine.

“Valverde was then a thriving place; it is now a ruin, which you may have seen in your journey down.

“In this place we lived for years, in the enjoyment of wealth and happiness. I look back upon those days as so many ages of bliss. Our love was mutual and ardent; and we were blessed with two children, both girls. The youngest resembled her mother; the other, I have been told, was more like myself. We doted, I fear, too much on these pledges. We were too happy in their possession.

“At this time a new Governor was sent to Santa Fé, a man who, by his wantonness and tyranny, has since then ruined the province. There has been no act too vile, no crime too dark, for this human monster.

“He offered fair enough at first, and was feasted in the houses of the ricos through the valley. As I was classed among these, I was honoured with his visits, and frequently. He resided principally at Albuquerque; and grand fêtes were given at his palace, to which my wife and I were invited as special guests. He in return often came to our house in Valverde, under pretence of visiting the different parts of the province.

“I discovered, at length, that his visits were solely intended for my wife, to whom he had paid some flattering attentions.

“I will not dwell on the beauty of Adèle, at this time. You may imagine that for yourself; and, monsieur, you may assist your imagination by allowing it to dwell on those graces you appear to have discovered in her daughter, for the little Zoe is a type of what her mother was.

“At the time I speak of she was still in the bloom of her beauty. The fame of that beauty was on every tongue, and had piqued the vanity of the wanton tyrant. For this reason I became the object of his friendly assiduities.

“I had divined this; but confiding in the virtue of my wife, I took no notice of his conduct. No overt act of insult as yet claimed my attention.

“Returning on one occasion from a long absence at the mines, Adèle informed me what, through delicacy, she had hitherto concealed – of insults received from his excellency at various times, but particularly in a visit he had paid her during my absence.

“This was enough for Creole blood. I repaired to Albuquerque; and on the public plaza, in presence of the multitude, I chastised the insulter.

“I was seized and thrown into a prison, where I lay for several weeks. When I was freed, and sought my home again, it was plundered and desolate. The wild Navajo had been there; my household gods were scattered and broken, and my child, oh, God! my little Adèle, was carried captive to the mountains!”

“And your wife? your other child?” I inquired, eager to know the rest.

“They had escaped. In the terrible conflict – for my poor peons battled bravely – my wife, with Zoe in her arms, had rushed out and hidden in a cave that was in the garden. I found them in the ranche of a vaquero in the woods, whither they had wandered.”

“And your daughter Adèle – have you heard aught of her since?”

“Yes, yes, I will come to that in a moment.

“My mine, at the same time, was plundered and destroyed; many of the workmen were slaughtered before they could escape; and the work itself, with my fortune, became a ruin.

“With some of the miners, who had fled, and others of Valverde, who, like me, had suffered, I organised a band, and followed the savage foe; but our pursuit was vain, and we turned back, many of us broken in health and heart.

“Oh, monsieur, you cannot know what it is to have thus lost a favourite child! you cannot understand the agony of the bereaved father!”

The speaker pressed his head between his hands, and remained for a moment silent. His countenance bore the indications of heartrending sorrow.

“My story will soon be told – up to the present time. Who knows the end?”

“For years I hung upon the frontiers of the Indian country, hunting for my child. I was aided by a small band, most of them unfortunates like myself, who had lost wife or daughter in a similar manner. But our means became exhausted, and despair wore us out. The sympathies of my companions grew old and cold. One after another gave up. The Governor of New Mexico offered us no aid. On the contrary, it was suspected then – it is now known – that the Governor himself was in secret league with the Navajo chiefs. He had engaged to leave them unmolested; while they, on their side, promised to plunder only his enemies!

“On learning this terrible secret, I saw the hand that had dealt me the blow. Stung by the disgrace I had put upon him, as well as by my wife’s scorn, the villain was not slow to avenge himself.

“Since then his life has been twice in my power, but the taking of it would, most probably, have forfeited my own, and I had objects for which to live. I may yet find a reckoning day for him.

“I have said that my band melted away. Sick at heart, and conscious of danger in New Mexico, I left the province, and crossed the Jornada to El Paso. Here for a while I lived, grieving for my lost child.

“I was not long inactive. The frequent forays made by the Apaches into Sonora and Chihuahua had rendered the government more energetic in the defence of the frontier. The presidios were

repaired and garrisoned with more efficient troops, and a band of rangers organised, whose pay was proportioned to the number of scalps they might send back to the settlements.

“I was offered the command of this strange guerilla; and in the hope that I might yet recover my child, I accepted it – I became a scalp-hunter.

“It was a terrible commission; and had revenge alone been my object, it would long since have been gratified. Many a deed of blood have we enacted; many a scene of retaliatory vengeance have we passed through.

“I knew that my captive daughter was in the hands of the Navajoes. I had heard so at various times from prisoners whom I had taken; but I was always crippled for want of strength in men and means. Revolution after revolution kept the states in poverty and civil warfare, and our interests were neglected or forgotten. With all my exertions, I could never raise a force sufficient to penetrate that desert country north of the Gila, in which lie the towns of the savage Navajoes.”

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