

REID MAYNE

THE WHITE CHIEF: A
LEGEND OF NORTHERN
MEXICO

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**The White Chief: A Legend
of Northern Mexico**

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Mayne Reid

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Chapter One

Deep in the interior of the American Continent – more than a thousand miles from the shores of any sea – lies our scene.

Climb with me yonder mountain, and let us look from its summit of snow.

We have reached its highest ridge. What do we behold?

On the north a chaos of mountains, that continues on through thirty parallels to the shores of the Arctic Sea! On the south, the same mountains, – here running in separate sierras, and there knotting with each other. On the west, mountains again, profiled along the sky, and alternating with broad tables that stretch between their bases.

Now turn we around, and look eastward. Not a mountain to be seen! Far as the eye can reach, and a thousand miles farther, not a mountain. Yonder dark line rising above the plain is but the rocky brow of another plain – a *steppe* of higher elevation.

Where are we? On what summit are we standing? On the Sierra Blanca, known to the hunter as the “Spanish Peaks.” We are upon the western rim of the *Grand Prairie*.

Looking eastward, the eye discovers no signs of civilisation. There *are* none within a month’s journeying. North and south, – mountains, mountains.

Westward, it is different. Through the telescope we can see cultivated fields afar off, – a mere strip along the banks of a shining river. Those are the settlements of Nuevo Mexico, an oasis irrigated by the Rio del Norte. The scene of our story lies not there.

Face once more to the eastward, and you have it before you. The mountain upon which we stand has its base upon a level plain that expands far to the east. There are no foot-hills. The plain and the mountain touch, and at a single step you pass from the naked turf of the one to the rocky and pine-clad declivities of the other.

The aspect of the plain is varied. In some places it is green, where the gramma-grass has formed a sward; but in most parts it is sterile as the Sahara. Here it appears brown, where the sun-parched earth is bare; there it is of a sandy, yellowish hue; and yonder the salt effervescence renders it as white as the snow upon which we stand.

The scant vegetation clothes it not in a livery of verdure. The leaves of the agave are mottled with scarlet, and the dull green of the cactus is still further obscured by its thickly-set spines. The blades of the yuccas are dimmed by dust, and resemble clusters of half-rusty bayonets; and the low scrubby copses of acacia scarce offer a shade to the dusky *agama* and the ground rattlesnake. Here and there a solitary palmetto, with branchless stem and tufted crown, gives an African aspect to the scene. The eye soon tires of a landscape where every object appears angular and thorny; and upon this plain, not only are the trees of that character, but the plants, – even the *very* grass carries its thorns!

With what sensations of pleasure we turn to gaze into a lovely valley, trending eastward from the base of the mountain! What a contrast to the arid plain! Its surface is covered with a carpet of bright green, enamelled by flowers that gleam like many-coloured gems; while the cotton-wood, the wild-china-tree, the live-oak, and the willow, mingle their foliage in soft shady groves that seem to invite us. Let us descend!

We have reached the plain, yet the valley is still far beneath us – a thousand feet at the least – but, from a promontory of the bluff projecting over it, we command a view of its entire surface to the distance of many miles. It is a level like the plain above; and gazing down upon it, one might

fancy it a portion of the latter that had sunk into the earth's crust, so as to come within the influence of a fertilising power denied to the higher region.

On both sides of it, far as the eye can reach, run the bordering cliffs, stepping from one level to the other, by a thousand feet sheer, and only passable at certain points. There is a width of ten miles from cliff to cliff; and these, of equal height, seem the counterparts of each other. Their grim savage fronts, overhanging the soft bright landscape of the valley, suggest the idea of a beautiful picture framed in rough oak-work.

A stream, like a silver serpent, bisects the valley – not running in a straight course, but in luxuriant windings, as though it loved to tarry in the midst of that bright scene. Its frequent curves and gentle current show that it passes over a surface almost plane. Its banks are timbered, but not continuously. Here the timber forms a wide belt, there only a fringe scarce shadowing the stream, and yonder the grassy turf can be distinguished running in to the very water's edge.

Copse-like groves are scattered over the ground. These are of varied forms; some perfectly circular, others oblong or oval, and others curving like the cornucopias of our gardens. Detached trees meet the eye, whose full round tops show that Nature has had her will in their development. The whole scene suggests the idea of some noble park, planted by design, with just timber enough to adorn the picture without concealing its beauties.

Is there no palace, no lordly mansion, to correspond? No. Nor palace nor cottage sends up its smoke. No human form appears within this wild paradise. Herds of deer roam over its surface, the stately elk reposes within the shade of its leafy groves, but no human being is there. Perhaps the foot of man never —

Stay! there is one by our side who tells a different tale. Hear him.

“That is the valley of San Ildefonso.” Wild though it appears, it was once the abode of civilised man. Near its centre you may note some irregular masses scattered over the ground. But for the trees and rank weeds that cover them, you might there behold the ruins of a city.

“Yes! on that spot once stood a town, large and prosperous. There was a *Presidio* with the flag of Spain flying from its battlements; there was a grand Mission-house of the Jesuit *padrés*; and dwellings of rich miners and ‘*hacendados*’ studded the valley far above and below. A busy populace moved upon the scene; and all the passions of love and hate, ambition, avarice, and revenge, have had existence there. The hearts stirred by them are long since cold, and the actions to which they gave birth are not chronicled by human pen. They live only in legends that sound more like romance than real history.

“And yet these legends are less than a century old! One century ago, from the summit of yonder mountain could have been seen, not only the settlement of San Ildefonso, but a score of others – cities, and towns, and villages – where to-day the eye cannot trace a vestige of civilisation. Even the names of these cities are forgotten, and their histories buried among their ruins!

“The Indian has wreaked his revenge upon the murderers of Moctezuma! Had the Saxon permitted him to continue his war of retaliation, in one century more – nay, in half that time – the descendants of Cortez and his conquerors would have disappeared from the land of Anahuac!

“Listen to the ‘Legend of San Ildefonso’!”

Chapter Two

Perhaps in no country has religion so many devoted days as in Mexico. The “fiestas” are supposed to have a good effect in Christianising the natives, and the saints’ calendar has been considerably enlarged in that pseudo-holy land. Nearly every week supplies a festival, with all its mummary of banners, and processions, and priests dressed as if for the altar-scene in “Pizarro,” and squibs, and fireworks, and silly citizens kneeling in the dust, and hats off all round. Very much like a London Guy-Fawkes procession is the whole affair, and of about like influence upon the morals of the community.

Of course the *padrés* do not get up these ceremonial exhibitions for mere amusement – not they. There are various little “blessings,” and “indultos,” and sprinklings of sacred water, to be distributed on these occasions – not *gratuitously* – and the wretched believer is precious “plucked” while he is in the penitent mood – at the same time he is promised a short and easy route to heaven.

As to any solemnity in the character of the ceremonials, there is nothing of the sort. They are in reality days of amusement; and it is not uncommon to see the kneeling devotee struggling to keep down the cackle of his fighting-cock, which, full-galved, he carries under the folds of his *serapé*! All this under the roof of the sacred temple of God!

On days of fiesta, the church genuflexions are soon over; and then the gambling-booth, the race-course, bull-baiting, the cock-pit, and various minor amusements, come into full operation. In all these you may meet the robed priest of the morning, and stake your dollar or doubloon against his, if you feel so inclined.

“San Juan” is one of the “*fiestas principales*” – one of the most noted of Mexican ceremonials. On this day – particularly in a *New Mexican* village – the houses are completely deserted. All people turn out, and proceed to some well-known locality, usually a neighbouring plain, to witness the sports – which consist of horse-racing, “tailing the bull,” “running the cock,” and the like. The intervals are filled up by gambling, smoking, and flirtation.

There is much of republican equality exhibited on these occasions. Rich and poor, high and low, mingle in the throng, and take part in the amusements of the day.

It is the day of San Juan. A broad grassy plain lies just outside the town of San Ildefonso, and upon this the citizens are assembled. It is the scene of the festival, and the sports will soon begin. Before they do, let us stroll through the crowd, and note its component parts. All classes of the community – in fact, all the community – appear to be present. There go the two stout *padrés* of the mission, bustling about in their long gowns of coarse serge, with bead-string and crucifix dangling to their knees, and scalp-lock close shaven. The Apache will find no trophy on their crowns.

There is the *cura* of the town church, conspicuous in his long black cloak, shovel hat, black silk stockings, pumps, and buckles. Now smiling benignly upon the crowd, now darting quick Jesuitical glance from his dark ill-meaning eyes, and now playing off his white jewelled fingers, as he assists some newly-arrived “señora” to climb to her seat. Great “ladies’ men” are these same black-gowned bachelor-churchmen of Mexico.

We have arrived in front of several rows of seats raised above one another. Let us observe who occupy them. At a glance it is apparent they are in possession of the “*familias principales*,” the aristocracy of the settlement. Yes – there is the rich “*comerciante*,” Don José Rincon, his fat wife, and four fat sleepy-looking daughters. There, too, is the wife and family of the “Alcalde,” and this magistrate himself with tasselled official staff; and the Echevarrias – pretty creatures that they think themselves – under care of their brother, the beau, who has discarded the national costume for the *mode de Paris*! There is the rich “*hacendado*,” Señor Gomez del Monte, the owner of countless flocks and broad acres in the valley; and there are others of his class with their señoras and señoritas. And there, too, observed of all, is the lovely Catalina de Cruces, the daughter of Don Ambrosio, the

wealthy miner. He will be a lucky fellow who wins the smiles of Catalina, or rather perhaps the good graces of her father – for Don Ambrosio will have much to say in the matter of her marriage. Indeed, it is rumoured that that matter is already arranged; and that Captain Roblado, second in command at the Presidio, is the successful suitor. There stands he, in full moustache, covered with gold-lace, back and front, and frowning fiercely on every one who dares to rest eye for a moment upon the fair Catalina. With all his gold-lace and gallant strut, Catalina displays no great taste in her choice; – but is he her choice? Maybe not – maybe he is the choice of Don Ambrosio; who, himself of plebeian origin, is ambitious that his blood should be mingled with that of the military *hidalgo*. The soldier has no money – beyond his pay; and that is mortgaged for months in advance; but he is a true *Gachupino*, of “blue blood,” a genuine “hijo de algo.” Not a singular ambition of the old miser, nor uncommon among parvenus.

Vizcarra, the Comandante, is on the ground – a tall colonel of forty – laced and plumed like a peacock. A lively bachelor is he; and while chatting with *padré*, *cura*, or *alcalde*, his eye wanders to the faces of the pretty *poblanas* that are passing the spot. These regard his splendid uniform with astonishment, which he, fancying himself “Don Juan Tenorio,” mistakes for admiration, and repays with a bland smile.

There, too, is the third officer – there are but the three – the *teniente*, Garcia by name. He is better looking, and consequently more of a favourite with both *poblanas* and rich *señoritas*, than either of his superiors. I wonder the fair Catalina does not give her preference to him. Who can tell that she does not? A Mexican dame does not carry her soul upon her sleeve, nor upon her tongue neither.

It would be a task to tell of whom Catalina is thinking just now. It is not likely at her age – she is twenty – that her heart is still her own; but whose? Roblado’s? I would wager, no. Garcia’s? That would be a fairer bet. After all, there are many others – young “*hacendados*,” employés of the mines, and a few merchant dandies of the town. Her choice may be some one of these. *Quien sabe?*

Let us on through the crowd!

We see the soldiers of the garrison, with tinkling spurs and long trailing sabres, mingling fraternally with the *serapé*-clad tradesmen, the *gambucinos*, and *rancheros* of the valley. They imitate their officers in strut and swagger – the very character of which enables one to tell that the military power is here in the ascendant. They are all dragoons – infantry would not avail against an Indian enemy – and they fancy that the loud clinking of their spurs, and the rattle of their steel scabbards, add greatly to their importance. They have their eyes after the *poblanas*, and the sweethearts of the *poblanas* keep their eyes after them in a constant vigil of jealousy.

The “*poblanas*” are the pretty girls of the place; but, pretty or plain, all the girls are out to-day in their best and gayest apparel. Some wear *enaguas* of blue – others of scarlet – others of purple; and many of them tastefully flounced at the bottoms with a trimming of narrow lace. They wear the embroidered chemisette, with its snow-white frills, and the blueish *reboso*, gracefully arranged, so as to conceal neck, bosom, arms, and, in some cases of coquetry, even the face! Ere night this jealous garment will have lost half its prudery. Already the prettier faces peep forth; and you may see, from the softness of the complexion, that they have been just washed free of the “*alegria*” that for the last two weeks has rendered them hideous.

The “*rancheros*” are in their full and beautiful costume – velveteen trousers, wide at the bottoms and open up the sides; *botas* of unstained leather; jackets of tanned sheepskin; or velveteen richly embroidered; fancy-worked shirts underneath; and scarfs of rich red silk around the waist. Over all the broad-brimmed *sombrero*, of black glaze, with silver or gold band, and tags of the same, screwed into the crown. Some have no jacket, but the *serapé*, hanging negligently from their shoulders, serves in place of one. All of these men have horses with them; and on their feet may be seen spurs full five pounds in weight, with rowels three, four, and even five inches in diameter!

The “*gambucinos*,” and young men of the town, the smaller tradespeople, are very similarly attired; but those of higher class – the officials and “*comerciantes*” – are clad in broad-cloth jackets

and pantaloons, not exactly of European cut, but approaching it – a sort of compromise between Paris fashions and the native costume of the country.

Another costume may be noticed, worn by many of the crowd. This is the dress of the native “Pueblos”, or *Indios mansos*– the poor labourers of the mines, and the neophytes of the mission. It is a simple dress, and consists of an upper garment, the *tilma*, a sort of coat without sleeves. A coffee-sack with a hole ripped in the bottom for the head to pass through, and a slit cut in each side for the arms, would make the “tilma.” It has no waist, and hangs nearly to the hips without other fastening than the support at the shoulders. The tilma is usually a piece of coarse rug – a cheap woollen cloth of the country, called “gerga,” of a whitish colour, with a few dyed threads to give the semblance of a pattern. This with a pair of dressed sheepskin breeches and rude sandals —*guaraches*– constitutes the wear of most of the “Indios mansos” of Mexico. The head is bare; and the legs, from the knee to the ankle, shine forth in all their copper-coloured nakedness.

Of these dark aborigines – the “peons” of the mission and the mines – there are hundreds stalking about, while their wives and daughters sit squatted upon the ground in rear of their *petatés*; upon which are piled the fruits of the soil – the *tuñas*, *petahayas*, plums, apricots, grapes, *sandias*, and other species of melons, with roasted nuts of the piñon-tree, the produce of the neighbouring mountains. Others keep stands of *dulces* and *agua-miel* or *limonada*; while others sell small loaves —*piloncillos*– of corn-stalk sugar, or baked roots of the agave. Some squat before fires, and prepare *tortillas* and *chilé Colorado*; or melt the sugared chocolate cake in their urn-like earthen *ollas*. From these humble “hucksters,” a hot peppery stew, a dish of *atole*, or a bowl of *piñole*, is to be had for a few *clacos*. There are other stands where you can buy cigarillos of *punche*, or a drink of the fiery *aguardiente* from Taos or El Paso; and these stands are favourite resorts of the thirsty miners and soldiers. There are no “booths,” but most of the hucksters protect themselves from the sun by a huge screen of palmetto mat (*petaté*) placed umbrella-like over their heads.

There is one class of persons yet to be spoken of – an important class at the festival of San Juan – they who are to be competitors in the sports – the real wrestlers in the games.

These are young men of all grades in society, and all of them mounted – of course, each in the best way he can. There they go, prancing over the ground, causing their gaily caparisoned steeds to caper and curvet, especially in front of the tiers of seated señoritas. There are miners among them, and young *hacendados*, and *rancheros*, and *vaqueros*, and *ciboleros*, and young merchants who ride well. Every one rides well in Mexico – even the dwellers in cities are good horsemen.

Nearly a hundred are there of these youths who intend to take part in the various trials of skill in equitation.

Let the sports begin!

Chapter Three

The first exhibition on the programme was to be the *coleo de toros*, which may be rendered in English as “tailing the bull.” It is only in the very large cities of Mexico where a regular *plaza de toros*, or arena for the bull-fight, is to be found; but in every tillage, however insignificant, the spoil of bull-tailing may be witnessed, as this only requires an open plain, and as wild a bull as can be procured. The sport is not quite so exciting as the bull-fight, as it is less perilous to those engaged in it. Not unfrequently, however, a gored horse or a mutilated rider is produced by the “coleo;” and fatal accidents have occurred at times. The horses, too, sometimes stumble, and both horse and rider are trampled by the others crowding from behind, so that in the pellmell drive awkward accidents are anything but uncommon. The coleo is, therefore, a game of strength, courage, and skill; and to excel in it is an object of high ambition among the youth of a New Mexican settlement.

The arrangements having been completed, it was announced by a herald that the coleo was about to begin. These arrangements were simple enough, and consisted in collecting the crowd to one side, so that the bull, when let loose, would have a clear track before him in the direction of the open country. Should he not be allowed this favour he might head *towards* the crowd, – a thing to be apprehended. In fear of this, most of the women were to be seen mounting into the rude *carretas*, scores of which were upon the ground, having carried their owners to the spectacle. Of course the señoras and señoritas on the raised benches felt secure.

The competitors were now drawn up in a line. There were a dozen detailed for this first race, – young men of all classes, who were, or fancied themselves, “crack” riders. There were rancheros in their picturesque attire, smart arrieros, miners from the hills, townsmen, hacendados of the valley, vaqueros from the grazing-farms, and ciboleros, whose home is for the most part on the wide prairies. Several dragoons, too, were arrayed with the rest, eager to prove their superiority in the *manège* of the horse.

At a given signal the bull was brought forth from a neighbouring *corral*. He was not led by men afoot, – that would have been a dangerous undertaking. His conductors were well-mounted vaqueros, who, with their lazoes around his horns, were ready, in case of his showing symptoms of mutiny, to fling him to the earth by a jerk.

A vicious-looking brute he appeared, with shaggy frontlet and scowling lurid eye. It was *plain* that it only needed a little goading to make him a still more terrible object; for he already swept his tail angrily against his flanks, tossed his long straight horns in the air, snorted sharply, and beat the turf at intervals with his hoofs. He was evidently one of the fiercest of a fierce race – the race of Spanish bulls.

Every eye was fixed upon him with interest, and the spectators freely commented upon his qualities. Some thought him too fat, others alleged he was just in the condition to make a good run – as, in the coleo, speed, not courage, is the desirable quality. This difference of opinions led to the laying of numerous wagers on the result, – that is, the time that should elapse from the start until the bull should be “tailed” and “thrown.” The throwing of the bull, of course ends the chase.

When it is considered that the brute selected is one of the strongest, swiftest, and fiercest of his kind, and that no weapon – not even the lazo – is allowed, it will be admitted this is a matter of no easy accomplishment. The animal goes at full run, almost as fast as the horse can gallop; and to bring him to the ground under these circumstances requires the performance of a feat, and one that demands skill, strength, and the best of horsemanship. That feat is to seize the bull by the tail, and jerk the animal off his legs!

The bull was led out some two hundred yards beyond the line of horsemen, where he was halted, with his head turned to the open plain. The lazoes, that held him by a leash-knot, were then

cautiously slipped, two or three fire-squibs, pointed and barbed, were shot into his hips, and away he went amidst the yells of the spectators!

Next moment the riders spurred after, each shouting in his own fashion.

Soon the line was broken, and a confused spread of horsemen, like a “field” of fox-hunters, was seen scouring over the plain. Each moment the troop became elongated, until what had started in line was now strung out in double and single file to a length of several hundred yards. Still on they went, whipping, and spurring, and urging their steeds to the utmost.

The bull, maddened by the arrowy squibs, and terrified by their hissing, ran at the top of his speed in a nearly direct line. The start he had been allowed was not so easily taken up, even by fast riders, and he had got a full mile or more before any one neared him. Then a dragoon, mounted on a large bay horse, was seen pressing him closely, and at length laying hold of the tail. He was observed to give it a jerk or two, as though endeavouring to fling the brute by sheer strength. It was a failure, however; for the next moment the bull shot out in a side direction, and left his pursuer behind.

A young hacendado, splendidly horsed, was next upon his flanks; but each time he reached forth to grasp the tail it was whisked beyond his reach. He succeeded at length in seizing it; but the bull, making a sudden lurch, whipped his tail from the rider’s hands, and left him also in the rear.

One condition of the “coleo” was, that each competitor, after having once failed, should retire from the ground; so that the hacendado and the dragoon were now actually *hors de chasse*.

These were seen riding back, though not directly in front of the spectators. They preferred making a roundabout thing of it, so that their fallen faces might not be too closely scanned on their return.

On went the bull, and after him the eager and excited horsemen. Another dragoon soon tried his “pluck,” and also failed; and then a vaquero, and another horseman, and another, with like success – each failure being hailed by a groan from the crowd. There were several tumbles, too, at which the spectators laughed heartily; and one horse was badly gored, having headed the bull and got entangled upon his horns.

In less than ten minutes eleven out of the twelve competitors were seen returning from the chase.

Only one now remained to make his trial. The bull had proved a splendid fellow, and was already in high favour, and loudly applauded by the spectators.

“*Bravo, toro! bravissimo!*” was heard on all sides. All eyes were now turned upon the enraged animal, and his one remaining pursuer. Both were still near enough to be well observed, for the chase had led hitherto, not in one line, but in different directions over the plain; so that the bull was actually no farther from the crowd than when first overtaken by the dragoon. He was at this moment running in a cross course, so that every movement of both pursuer and pursued could be well observed from the stand.

At the first glance it was plain that the bull had now behind him the handsomest horse and horseman upon the field – would they prove the best? That was to be tried.

The horse was a large coal-black *mustang*, with a long full tail, pointed at the tip, and carried like the brush of a running fox. Even while in gallop, his neck slightly curved, and his proud figure, displayed against the smooth sward, called forth expressions of admiration.

The rider was a young man of twenty or over; and his light curling hair and white-red complexion distinguished him from all his competitors – who were, without exception, dark-skinned men. He was dressed in full *ranchero* costume, with its rich broidery and trappings; and instead of the usual “serapé,” he wore a purple *manga* – a more graceful, as well as costlier garment. The long skirts of this he had flung behind him, in order to have his arms free; and its folds, opening to the breeze, added to the gracefulness of his carriage in the saddle.

The sudden appearance of this splendid horseman – for, hanging in the rear with folded *manga*, he seemed not to have been noticed before, – caused unusual attention, and many were heard inquiring his name.

“*Carlos the cibolero!*” cried a voice, loud enough to satisfy all at once.

Some evidently knew who “Carlos the cibolero” was, though by far the greater number on the ground did not. Of the former, one was heard inquiring —

“Why hasn’t he come up before? – He could have done so if he had wished.”

“*Carrambo!* yes,” added another. “He might have done so. He only hung back to give the others a trial. He knew none of them could throw *that* bull. *Mira!*”

The speaker’s conjecture was, no doubt, correct.

It was plain, at first sight, that this rider could easily overtake the bull. His horse was still in a gentle gallop, and, though his ears were set and his red nostrils staring open, it was only through the excitement of the chase, and chafing at being hitherto checked. The bridle-rein was, in fact, still tightly drawn.

As the speaker uttered the cautionary phrase “*Mira!*” a change was suddenly observed in the manner of the horseman. He was about twenty paces from the chase and directly in the rear. All at once his horse sprang forward at double his former speed, and in a few stretches laid himself alongside the bull. The rider was observed to grasp the long outstretched tail, and then lean forward and downward. The next moment he raised himself with a sudden jerk, and the huge horned creature turned sprawling upon his back. The whole thing seemed to cost him no more effort than if the bull had been a tom-cat. Loud “*vivas!*” broke from the spectators, and the victorious horseman rode back in front of the stand, modestly bowed his thanks, and then retired into the depth of the crowd.

There were not wanting those who fancied that in bowing the eyes of the cibolero were directed on the fair Catalina de Cruces; and some went so far as to assert that she smiled and looked content; but that could not be. The heiress of the rich Don Ambrosio smile to a compliment from a cibolero!

There was one, however, who *did* smile. That was a fair-haired, fair-skinned girl, who stood upon one of the carretas, by the side of which the victor had placed himself. Side by side those two faces seemed one. They were of one blood, – one colour, – one race: were they not brother and sister? Yes, – the fair girl was the sister of the cibolero. She was smiling from happiness at the thought of her brother’s triumph.

A strange-looking woman was seated in the bottom of the carreta – an old woman, with long flowing hair, white as flax. She was silent, but her sharp eyes were bent upon the cibolero with a triumphant expression. Some regarded her with curiosity, but most with fear, akin to awe. These knew something of her, and whispered strange tales to one another.

“*Esta una bruxa! —una hechicera!*” (She is a witch! a charmer!) said they.

This they muttered in low tones lest they might be heard by Carlos or the girl. *She was their mother!*

Chapter Four

The sports continue. The bull thrown by the cibolero, now cowed, walks moodily across the plain. He would not serve for a second run, so he is lazoed and led off, – to be delivered to the victor as his prize.

A second is brought forth and started, with a fresh dozen of horsemen at his heels.

These seem to be better matched, or rather the bull has not run off so well, as all overtake him at once, riding past him in their headlong speed. Most unexpectedly the animal turns in his tracks, and runs back, heading directly for the stand!

Loud screams are heard from the poblanas in the carretas – from the señoras and señoritas. No wonder. In ten seconds the enraged brute will be in their midst!

The pursuing horsemen are still far behind him. The sudden turning in their headlong race threw them out of distance. Even the foremost of them cannot come up in time.

The other horsemen are all dismounted. No man on foot will dare to check the onward rush of a goaded bull!

Confusion and loud shouting among the men, terror and screaming among the women, are the characteristics of the scene. Lives will be lost – perhaps many. None know but that they themselves may be the victims!

The strings of carretas filled with their terrified occupants flank the stand on each side; but, running farther out into the plain, form with it a sort of semicircle. The bull enters this semicircle, and guided by the carretas rushes down, heading directly for the benches, as though determined to break through in that direction. The ladies have risen to their feet, and, half-frantic, seem as though they would leap down upon the very horns of the monster they dread! It is a fearful crisis for them.

Just at this moment a man is seen advancing, lazo in hand, in front of the carretas. He is afoot. As soon as he has detached himself from the crowd, he spins the lazo round his head, and the noose shooting out is seen to settle over the horns of the bull.

Without losing a moment the man runs to a small tree that stands near the centre of the semicircle, and hastily coils the other end of the lazo around its trunk. Another moment, and he would have been too late.

The knot is scarcely tied, when a heavy pluck announces that the bull has reached the end of his rope, and the foiled brute is now seen thrown back upon his hips, with the *lazo* tightly noosed over his horns. He has fallen at the very feet of the spectators!

“*Bravo! viva!*” cried a hundred voices, as soon as their owners had sufficiently recovered from their terror to call out.

“*Viva. Viva!* Carlos the cibolero!”

It was he who had performed this second feat of skill and daring.

The bull was not yet conquered, however. He was only confined within a certain range – the circle of the lazo – and, rising to his feet, with a furious roar he rushed forward at the crowd. Fortunately the lazo was not long enough to enable him to reach the spectators on either side; and again he tumbled back upon his haunches. There was a scattering on all sides, as it was feared he might still slip the noose; but the horsemen had now come up. Fresh lazoes were wound about his neck, others tripped up his legs, and he was at length flung violently upon the ground and his quarters well stretched.

He was now completely conquered, and would run no more; and as but two bulls had been provided for the occasion, the “*coleo de toros*” was for that day at an end.

Several lesser feats of horsemanship were next exhibited, while preparations were being made for another of the grand games of the day. Those were by way of interlude, and were of various kinds. One was throwing the lazo upon the foot of a person running at full speed, noosing him around the

ankle, and of course tripping him up. This was done by men both mounted and afoot; and so many accomplished it, that it could hardly be deemed a “feat:” nor was it regarded as such among the more skilful, who disdained to take part in it.

Picking up the hat was next exhibited. This consisted in the rider throwing his hat upon the ground, and then recovering it from the saddle, while his horse swept past at full gallop. Nearly every rider on the spot was equal to this feat, and only the younger ones looked upon it as a proof of skill. Of these some twenty could now be seen wheeling about at a gallop and ducking down for their sombreros, which they had previously dropped.

But it is not so easy to pick up smaller objects, and a piece of coin lying flat upon the ground tries the skill of the best “cavallero.”

The Comandante Vizcarra now stepped forth and commanded silence. Placing a Spanish dollar upon the smooth turf, he called out —

“This to the man who can take it up at the first trial. Five gold onzas that Sergeant Gomez will perform the feat!”

There was silence for a while. Five gold “onzas” (doubloons) was a large sum of money. Only a “rico” could afford to lose such a sum.

After a pause, however, there came a reply. A young ranchero stepped forth: —

“Colonel Vizcarra,” said he, “I will not bet that Sergeant Gomez cannot perform the feat; but I’ll wager there’s another on the ground can do it as well as he. Double the amount if you please.”

“Name your man!” said Vizcarra.

“Carlos the cibolero.”

“Enough – I accept your wager. Any one else may have their trial,” continued Vizcarra, addressing the crowd. “I shall replace the dollar whenever it is taken up – only one attempt, remember!”

Several made the attempt and failed. Some touched the coin, and even drew it from its position, but no one succeeded in lifting it.

At length a dragoon mounted on a large bay appeared in the list, who was recognised as the Sergeant Gomez. He was the same that had first come up with the bull, but failed to fling him; and no doubt that failure dwelling still in his thoughts added to the natural gloom of his very sallow face. He was a man of large size, unquestionably a good rider, but he lacked that symmetrical shape that gives promise of sinewy activity.

The feat required little preparation. The sergeant looked to his saddle-girths, disencumbered himself of his sabre and belts, and then set his steed in motion.

In a few minutes he directed his horse so as to shave past the shining coin, and then, bending down, he tried to seize it. He succeeded in lifting it up from the ground; but, owing to the slight hold he had taken, it dropped from his fingers before he had got it to the height of the stirrup.

A shout, half of applause and half of disapprobation, came from the crowd. Most were disposed to favour him on Vizcarra’s account. Not that they loved Colonel Vizcarra, but they *feared* him, and that made them loyal.

The cibolero now rode forth upon his shining black. All eyes were turned upon him. His handsome face would have won admiration, but for its very *fairness*. Therein lay a secret prejudice. They knew *he was not of their race!*

Woman’s heart has no prejudice, however; and along that line of dark-eyed “doncellas” more than one pair of eyes were sparkling with admiration for the blond “Americano,” for of such race was Carlos the cibolero.

Other eyes than woman’s looked favourably on the cibolero, and other lips murmured applause. Among the half-brutalised Tagnos, with bent limbs and downcast look, there were men who dreamt of days gone by; who knew that their fathers were once free; who in their secret assemblies in mountain

cave, or in the deep darkness of the “estufa,” still burned the “sacred fire” of the god Quetzalcoatl – still talked of Moctezuma and Freedom.

These, though darker than all others, had no prejudice against the fair skin of Carlos. Even over their benighted minds the future had cast some rays of its light. A sort of mysterious presentiment, apparently instinctive, existed among them, that their deliverers from the yoke of Spanish tyranny would yet come from the East – from beyond the great plains!

The cibolero scarce deigned to make any preparation. He did not even divest himself of his *manga*, but only threw it carelessly back, and left its long skirt trailing over the hips of his horse.

Obedient to the voice of his rider, the animal sprang into a gallop; and then, guided by the touch of the knees, he commenced circling round the plain, increasing his speed as he went.

Having gained a wide reach, the rider directed his horse towards the glittering coin. When nearly over it he bent down from the saddle, caught the piece in his fingers, flung it up into the air, and then, suddenly checking his horse underneath, permitted it to drop into his outstretched palm!

All this was done with the ease and liability of a Hindoo juggler. Even the prejudiced could not restrain their applause; and loud *vivas* for “Carlos the cibolero” again pealed upon the air.

The sergeant was humiliated. He had for a long time been victor in these sports – for Carlos had not been present until this day, or had never before taken part in them. Vizcarra was little better pleased. His favourite humbled – himself the loser of ten golden onzas – no small sum, even to the Comandante of a frontier Presidio. Moreover, to be jibed by the fair señoritas for losing a wager he had himself challenged, and which, no doubt, he felt certain of winning. From that moment Vizcarra liked not “Carlos the cibolero.”

The next exhibition consisted in riding at full gallop to the edge of a deep “zequia” which passed near the spot. The object of this was to show the courage and activity of the rider as well as the high training of the steed.

The zequia – a canal used for irrigation – was of such width that a horse could not well leap over it, and deep enough to render it no very pleasant matter for a horseman to get into. It therefore required both skill and daring to accomplish the feat. The animal was to arrive upon the bank of the canal in full run, and to be drawn up suddenly, so that his four feet should rest upon the ground inside a certain line. This line was marked at less than two lengths of himself from the edge of the drain. Of course the bank was quite firm, else the accomplishment of such a feat would have been impossible.

Many succeeded in doing it to perfection; and an admirable piece of horsemanship it was. The horse, suddenly checked in his impetuous gallop, upon the very brink of the zequia, and drawn back on his haunches, with head erect, starting eyeballs, and open smoking nostrils, formed a noble picture to look upon. Several, however, by way of contrast, gave the crowd a ludicrous picture to laugh at. These were either faint-hearted riders, who stopped short before arriving near the bank, or bold but unskilful ones, who overshot the mark, and went plunge into the deep muddy water. Either class of failure was hailed by groans and laughter, which the appearance of the half-drowned and dripping cavaliers, as they weltered out on the bank, rendered almost continuous. On the other hand, a well-executed manoeuvre elicited *vivas* of applause.

No wonder that, under such a system of training and emulation, these people are the finest riders in the world, and such they certainly are.

It was observed that Carlos the cibolero took no part in this game. What could be the reason? His friends alleged that he looked upon it as unworthy of him. He had already exhibited a skill in horsemanship of a superior kind, and to take part in this would be seeking a superfluous triumph. Such was in fact the feeling of Carlos.

But the chagrined Comandante had other views. Captain Roblado as well – for the latter had seen, or fancied he had seen, a strange expression in the eyes of Catalina at each fresh triumph of the cibolero. The two “militarios” had designs of their own. Base ones they were, and intended for the humiliation of Carlos. Approaching him, they inquired why he had not attempted the last feat.

“I did not think it worth while,” answered the cibolero, in a modest tone.

“Ho!” cried Roblado, tauntingly; “my good fellow. You must have other reasons than that. It is not so contemptible a feat to rein up on the edge of that ‘zanca.’ You fear a ducking, I fancy?”

This was uttered in a tone of banter, loud enough for all to hear; and Captain Roblado wound up his speech with a jeering laugh.

Now, it was just this ducking that the militares wished to see. They had conceived hopes, that, if Carlos attempted the feat, some accident, such as the slipping or stumbling of his horse, might lead to that result; which to them would have been as grateful as it would have been mortifying to the cibolero. A man floundering out of a muddy ditch, and drenched to the skin, however daring the attempt that led to it, would cut but a sorry figure in the eyes of a holiday crowd; and in such a situation did they wish to see Carlos placed.

Whether the cibolero suspected their object did not appear. His reply does not show. When it was heard, the “zequia” and its muddy water were at once forgotten. A feat of greater interest occupied the attention of the spectators.

Chapter Five

Carlos, seated in his saddle, was silent for a while. He seemed puzzled for a reply. The manner of the two officers, as well as Roblado's speech, stung him. To have proceeded to the performance of this very common feat after all others had given over, merely on the banter of Roblado and the Comandante, would have been vexatious enough; and yet to refuse it would lay him open to jeers and insinuations; and, perhaps, this was their design.

He had reason to suspect some sinister motive. He knew something of both the men – of their public character – he could not otherwise, as they were lords paramount of the place. But of their private character, too, he had some knowledge, and that was far from being to their credit. With regard to Roblado, the cibolero had particular reasons for disliking *him* – very particular reasons; and but that the former was still ignorant of a certain fact, he had quite as good a reason for reciprocating the dislike. Up to this moment Roblado knew nothing of the cibolero, who for the most part of his time was absent from the valley. Perhaps the officer had never encountered him before, or at all events had never changed words with him. Carlos knew *him* better; and long ere this encounter, for reasons already hinted at, had regarded him with dislike.

This feeling was not lessened by the conduct of the officer on the present occasion. On the contrary, the haughty jeering tones fell bitterly upon the ear of the cibolero. He replied, at length, "Captain Roblado, I have said it is not worth my while to perform what a *muchachito* of ten years old would hardly deem a feat. I would not wrench my horse's mouth for such a pitiful exhibition as running him up on the edge of that harmless gutter; but if – "

"Well, if what?" eagerly inquired Roblado, taking advantage of the pause, and half suspecting Carlos' design.

"If *you* feel disposed to risk a doubloon – I am but a poor hunter, and cannot place more – I shall attempt what a muchachito of ten years *would* consider a feat perhaps."

"And what may that be, Señor Cibolero?" asked the officer, sneeringly.

"I will check my horse at full gallop *on the brow of yonder cliff!*"

"Within two lengths from the brow?"

"Within two lengths – less – the same distance that is traced here on the banks of the zequia!"

The surprise created by this announcement held the bystanders for some moments in silence. It was a proposal of such wild and reckless daring that it was difficult to believe that the maker of it was in earnest. Even the two officers were for a moment staggered by it, and inclined to fancy the cibolero was not serious but mocking them.

The cliff to which Carlos had pointed was part of the bluff that hemmed in the valley. It was a sort of promontory, however, that jutted out from the general line, so as to be a conspicuous object from the plain below. Its brow was of equal height with the rest of the precipice, of which it was a part – a sort of buttress – and the grassy turf that appeared along its edge was but the continuation of the upper plateau. Its front to the valley was vertical, without terrace or ledge, although horizontal seams traversing its face showed a stratification of lime and sandstone alternating with each other. From the sward upon the valley to the brow above the height was one thousand feet sheer. To gaze up to it was a trial to delicate nerves – to look down put the stoutest to the proof.

Such was the cliff upon whose edge the cibolero proposed to rein up his steed. No wonder the proposal was received with a surprise that caused a momentary silence in the crowd. When that passed, voices were heard exclaiming, – "Impossible!"

"He is mad!"

"Pah! he's joking!"

"*Esta burlando los militares!*" (He's mocking the military gents); and such-like expressions.

Carlos sat playing with his bridle-rein, and waiting for a reply.

He had not long to wait. Vizcarra and Roblado muttered some hasty words between themselves; and then, with an eagerness of manner, Roblado cried out —

“I accept the wager!”

“And I another onza!” added the Comandante.

“Señores,” said Carlos, with an air of apparent regret, “I am sorry I cannot take both. This doubloon is all I have in the world; and it’s not likely I could borrow another just now.”

As he said this Carlos regarded the crowd with a smile, but many of these were in no humour for smiling. They were really awed by the terrible fate which they believed awaited the reckless cibolero. A voice, however, answered him: —

“Twenty onzas, Carlos, for any other purpose. But I cannot encourage this mad project.”

It was the young ranchero, his former backer, who spoke.

“Thank you, Don Juan,” replied the cibolero. “I know you would lend them. Thank you all the same. Do not fear! I’ll win the onza. Ha! ha! ha! I haven’t been twenty years in the saddle to be bantered by a *Gachupino*.”

“Sir!” thundered Vizcarra and Roblado in a breath, at the same time grasping the hilts of their swords, and frowning in a fierce threatening manner.

“Oh! gentlemen, don’t be offended,” said Carlos, half sneeringly. “It only slipped from my tongue. I meant no insult, I assure you.”

“Then keep your tongue behind your teeth, my good fellow,” threatened Vizcarra. “Another slip of the kind may cost you a fall.”

“Thank you, Señor Comandante,” replied Carlos, still laughing. “Perhaps I’ll take your advice.”

The only rejoinder uttered by the Comandante was a fierce “Carrajo!” which Carlos did not notice; for at this moment his sister, having heard of his intention, sprang down from the carreta and came running forward, evidently in great distress.

“Oh, brother Carlos!” she cried, reaching out her arms, and grasping him by the knees, “Is it true? Surely it is not true?”

“What, *hermanita*?” (little sister), he asked with a smile.

“That you — ”

She could utter no more, but turned her eyes, and pointed to the cliff.

“Certainly, Rosita, and why not? For shame, girl! Don’t be alarmed — there’s nought to fear, I assure you — I’ve done the like before.”

“Dear, dear Carlos, I know you are a brave horseman — none braver — but oh! think of the danger — *Dios de mi alma*! think of — ”

“Pshaw, sister! don’t shame me before the people — come to mother! — hear what she will say. I warrant she won’t regard it.” And, so saying, the cibolero rode up to the carreta, followed by his sister.

Poor Rosita! Eyes gleamed upon you at that moment that saw you for the first time — eyes in whose dark orbs lay an expression that boded you no good. Your fair form, the angelic beauty of your face — perhaps your very grief — awakened interest in a heart whose love never meant else than ruin to its object. It was the heart of Colonel Vizcarra.

“*Mira!* Roblado!” muttered he to his subordinate and fellow-villain. “See yonder! *Santisima Virgen!* Saint Guadalupe! Look, man! Venus, as I’m a Christian and a soldier! In the name of all the saints, what sky has she fallen from?”

“For *Dios!* I never saw her before,” replied the captain; “she must be the sister of this fellow: yes — hear them! they address each other as brother and sister! She *is* pretty!”

“*Ay de mi!*” sighed the Comandante. “What a godsend! I was growing dull — very dull of this monotonous frontier life. With this new excitement, perhaps, I may kill another month. Will she last me that long, think you?”

“Scarcely — if she come and go as easily as the rest. What! already tired of Inez?”

“Poh! poh! loved me too much; and that I can’t bear. I would rather too little if anything.”

“Perhaps this blonde may please you better in that respect. But, see! they are off!”

As Roblado spoke, Carlos and his sister had moved forward to the *carreta* which held their aged mother, and were soon in conversation with her.

The Comandante and his captain, as well as a large number of the spectators, followed, and crowded around to listen.

“She wants to persuade me against it, mother,” Carlos was heard to say. He had already communicated his design. “Without *your* consent, I will not. But hear me, dear mother; I have half pledged myself, and I wish to make good my pledge. It is a *point of honour*, mother.”

The last phrase was spoken loudly and emphatically in the ear of the old woman, who appeared to be a little deaf.

“Who wants to dissuade you?” she asked, raising her head, and glancing upon the circle of faces. “Who?”

“Rosita, mother.”

“Let Rosita to her loom, and weave *rebosos* – that’s what she’s fit for. You, my son, can do great things – deeds, ay, deeds; else have you not in your veins the blood of your father. *He* did deeds —*he*— ha! ha! ha!”

The strange laugh caused the spectators to start, accompanied, as it was, with the wild look of her who uttered it.

“Go!” cried she, tossing back her long flax-coloured locks, and waving her arms in the air – “go, Carlos the *cibolero*, and show the tawny cowards – slaves that they are – what a free American can do. To the cliff! to the cliff!”

As she uttered the awful command, she sank back into the *carreta*, and relapsed into her former silence.

Carlos interrogated her no further. The expressions she had let slip had rendered him somewhat eager to close the conversation; for he noticed that they were not lost on several of the bystanders. The officers, as well as the priests and *alcalde*, exchanged significant glances while she was uttering them.

Placing his sister once more in the *carreta*, and giving her a parting embrace, Carlos leaped to the back of his steed, and rode forth upon the plain. When at some distance he reined in, and bent his eyes for a moment upon the tiers of benches where sat the *señoras* and *señoritas* of the town. A commotion could be observed among them. They had heard of the intended feat, and many would have dissuaded the *cibolero* from the perilous attempt.

There was one whose heart was full to bursting – full as that of Carlos’ own sister; and yet she dared not show it to those around. She was constrained to sit in silent agony, and suffer.

Carlos knew this. He drew a white handkerchief from his bosom, and waved it in the air, as though bidding some one an adieu. Whether he was answered could not be told; but the next moment he wheeled his horse, and galloped off towards the cliffs.

There were conjectures among the *señoras* and *señoritas*, among the *poblanas* too, as to who was the recipient of that parting salute. Many guesses were made, many names mentioned, and scandal ran the rounds. One only of all knew in her heart for whom the compliment was meant – in her heart overflowing with love and fear.

Chapter Six

All who had horses followed the cibolero, who now directed himself towards a path that led from the valley to the table above. This path wound up the cliffs by zigzag turnings, and was the only one by which the upper plain could be reached at that point. A corresponding road traversed the opposite bluff, so that the valley might be here crossed; and this was the only practicable crossing for several miles up and down.

Though but a thousand feet separated the valley and table-land, the path leading from one to the other was nearly a mile in length; and as it was several miles from the scene of the festival to the bottom of the cliff, only those accompanied Carlos who were mounted, with a few others determined to witness every manoeuvre of this fearful attempt. Of course, the officers were of the party who went up. The rest of the people remained in the valley, but moved forward in the direction of the cliffs, so that they would be able to observe the more interesting and thrilling part of the spectacle.

For more than an hour those on the plain were kept waiting; but they did not allow the time to pass unimproved. A *monte* table had been spread out over which both gold and silver changed hands rapidly, the two *padrés* of the mission being among the highest bettors; and the señoras, among themselves, had a quiet little game of their favourite *chuza*. A “main” between a pair of sturdy chanticleers, one belonging to the *alcalde* and the other to the *cura* (!), furnished the interlude for another half-hour. In this contest the representative of the Church was triumphant. His grey cock (“pardo”) killed the *alcalde*’s red one at a single blow, by striking one of his long steel galves through the latter’s head. This was regarded as a very interesting and pleasant spectacle by all on the ground – ladies included, and *alcalde* excepted.

By the time the cock-fight was finished, the attention of the crowd became directed to the movements of the party who had gone up to the upper plain. These were now seen along the edge of the cliff, and by their manoeuvres it was evident they were engaged in arranging the preliminaries of the perilous adventure. Let us join them.

The cibolero, on gaining the ground, pointed out the spot where he had proposed to execute his daring design. From the plain above the cliffs were not visible, and even the great abyss of the valley itself could not be seen a hundred paces back from the edge of the bluff. There was no escarpment or slope of any kind. The turf ran in to the very edge of the precipice, and on the same level with the rest of the plain. It was smooth and firm – covered with a short sward of *gramma* grass. There was neither break nor pebble to endanger the hoof. No accident could arise from that cause.

The spot chosen, as already stated, was a sort of buttress-like promontory that stood out from the line of bluffs. This formation was more conspicuous from below. Viewing it from above, it resembled a tongue-like continuation of the plain.

Carlos first rode out to its extremity, and carefully examined the turf. It was just of the proper firmness to preclude the possibility of a horse’s hoof either sliding or sinking into it. He was accompanied by Vizcarra, Roblado, and others. Many approached the spot, but kept at a safe distance from the edge of the horrid steep. Though denizens of this land of grand geological features, there were many present who dreaded to stand upon the brow of that fearful ledge and look below.

The cibolero sat upon his horse, on its very edge, as calm as if he had been on the banks of the zequia, and directed the marking of the line. His horse showed no symptoms of nervousness. It was evident he was well-trained to such situations. Now and then he stretched out his neck, gazed down into the valley, and, recognising some of his kind below, uttered a shrill neigh. Carlos purposely kept him on the cliff, in order to accustom him to it before making the terrible trial.

The line was soon traced, less than two lengths of the horse from the last grass on the turf. Vizcarra and Roblado would have insisted upon short measure; but their proposal to curtail it was received with murmurs of disapprobation and mutterings of “Shame!”

What did these men want? Though not evident to the crowd, they certainly desired the death of the cibolero. Both had their reasons. Both hated the man. The cause or causes of their hatred were of late growth, – with Roblado still later than his Comandante. He had observed something within the hour that had rendered him furious. He had observed the waving of that white kerchief; and as he stood by the stand he had seen to whom the “adios” was addressed. It had filled him with astonishment and indignation; and his language to Carlos had assumed a bullying and brutal tone.

Horrible as such a supposition may seem, both he and Vizcarra would have rejoiced to see the cibolero tumble over the bluff. Horrible indeed it seems; but such were the men, and the place, and the times, that there is nothing improbable in it. On the contrary, cases of equal barbarity – wishes and *acts* still more inhuman – are by no means rare under the skies of “Nuevo Mexico.”

The young ranchero, who had accompanied the party to the upper plain, insisted upon fair play. Though but a ranchero, he was classed among the “ricos,” and, being a fellow of spirit, urged Carlos’ rights, even in the face of the moustached and scowling militares.

“Here, Carlos!” cried he, while the arrangements were progressing; “I see you are bent on this madness; and since I cannot turn you from it, I shall not embarrass you. But you sha’n’t risk yourself for such a trifle. My purse! bet what sum you will.”

As he said this, he held out a purse to the cibolero, which, from its bulk, evidently contained a large amount.

Carlos regarded the purse for a moment without making answer. He was evidently gratified by the noble offer. His countenance showed that he was deeply touched by the kindness of the youth. “No,” said he, at length; “no, Don Juan. I thank you with all my heart, but I cannot take your purse – one onza, nothing more. I should like to stake one against the Comandante.”

“As many as you please,” urged the ranchero.

“Thank you, Don Juan! only one – that with my own will be two. – Two onzas! – that, in faith, is the largest bet I have ever made. *Vaya!* a poor cibolero staking a double onza!”

“Well, then,” replied Don Juan, “if you don’t, I shall. Colonel Vizcarra!” said he aloud, addressing himself to the Comandante, “I suppose you would like to win back your wager. Carlos will now take your bet for the onza, and I challenge you to place ten.”

“Agreed!” said the Comandante, stiffly.

“Dare you double it?” inquired the ranchero.

“Dare I, sir?” echoed the Colonel, indignant at being thus challenged in the presence of the spectators. “Quadruple it, if you wish, sir.”

“Quadruple then!” retorted the other. “Forty onzas that Carlos performs the feat!”

“Enough! deposit your stakes!”

The golden coins were counted out, and held by one of the bystanders, and judges were appointed.

The arrangements having been completed, the spectators drew back upon the plain, and left the cibolero in full possession of the promontory – alone with his horse.

Chapter Seven

All stood watching him with interested eyes. Every movement was noted.

He first alighted from the saddle, stripped off his manga, had it carried back and placed out of the way. He next looked to his spurs, to see that the straps were properly buckled. After this he re-tied his sash, and placed the sombrero firmly on his head. He buttoned his velveteen calzoneros down nearly to his ankles, so that their leathern bottoms might not flap open and discommode him. His hunting-knife along with his “whip” were sent back to the charge of Don Juan.

His attention was next turned to his horse, that stood all this while curving his neck proudly as though he divined that he was to be called upon for some signal service. The bridle was first scrutinised. The great bit – a Mameluke – was carefully examined, lest there might be some flaw or crack in the steel. The head-strap was buckled to its proper tightness, and then the reins were minutely scanned. These were of the hair of wild horses’ tails closely and neatly plaited. Leather might snap, there was no fear of breaking such cords as these.

The saddle now had its turn. Passing from side to side, Carlos tried both stirrup-leathers, and examined the great wooden blocks which formed the stirrups. The girth was the last as well as most important object of his solicitude. He loosed the buckles on both sides, and then tightened them, using his knees to effect his purpose. When drawn to his liking, the tip of the finger could not have been passed under the strong leathern band.

No wonder he observed all this caution. The snapping of a strap, or the slipping of a buckle, might have hurled him into eternity.

Having satisfied himself that all was right, he gathered up the reins, and leaped lightly into the saddle.

He first directed his horse at a walk along the cliff, and within a few feet of its edge. This was to strengthen the nerves both of himself and the animal. Presently the walk became a trot, and then a gentle canter. Even this was an exhibition fearful to behold. To those regarding it from below it was a beautiful but terrible spectacle.

After a while he headed back towards the plain, and then stretching into a fair gallop – the gait in which he intended to approach the cliff – he suddenly reined up again, so as to throw his horse nearly on his flanks. Again he resumed the same gallop and again reined up; and this manoeuvre he repeated at least a dozen times, now with his horse’s head turned towards the cliffs, and now in the direction of the plain. Of course this gallop was far from being the full speed of the animal. That was not bargained for. To draw a horse up at race-course speed within two lengths of himself would be an utter impossibility, even by sacrificing the life of the animal. A shot passing through his heart would not check a racer in so short a space. A fair gallop was all that could be expected under the circumstances, and the judges expressed themselves satisfied with that which was exhibited before them. Carlos had put the question.

At length he was seen to turn his horse towards the cliff, and take his firmest seat in the saddle. The determined glance of his eyes showed that the moment had come for the final trial.

A slight touch of the spur set the noble brute in motion, and in another second he was in full gallop, and heading directly for the cliff!

The gaze of all was fixed with intense earnestness upon that reckless horseman. Every heart heaved with emotion; and, beyond their quick breathing, not an utterance escaped from the spectators. The only sounds heard were the hoof-strokes of the horse as they rang back from the hard turf of the plain.

The suspense was of short duration. Twenty strides brought horse and horseman close to the verge, within half-a-dozen lengths. The rein still hung loose – Carlos dared not tighten it – a touch he knew would bring his horse to a halt, and that before he had crossed the line would only be a failure.

Another leap, – another, – yet another! Ho! he is inside – Great God! He will be over!

Such exclamations rose from the spectators as they saw the horseman cross the line, still in a gallop; out the next moment a loud cheer broke from both crowds, and the “vivas” of those in the valley were answered by similar shouts from those who witnessed the feat from above.

Just as the horse appeared about to spring over the horrid brink, the reins were observed suddenly to tighten, the fore-hoofs became fixed and spread, and the hips of the noble animal rested upon the plain. He was poised at scarce three feet distance from the edge of the cliff! While in this attitude the horseman raised his right hand, lifted his sombrero, and after waving it round returned it to his head!

A splendid picture from below. The dark forms of both horse and rider were perceived as they drew up on the cliff, and the imposing and graceful attitude was fully developed against the blue background of the sky. The arms, the limbs, the oval outlines of the steed, even the very trappings, could be seen distinctly; and for the short period in which they were poised and motionless, the spectator might have fancied an equestrian statue of bronze, its pedestal the pinnacle of the cliff!

This period was but of a moment's duration, but, during its continuance, the loud “vivas” pealed upon the air. Those looking from below saw the horseman suddenly wheel, and disappear beyond the brow-line of the bluff.

The daring feat was ended and over; and hearts, but a moment ago throbbing wildly within tender bosoms, now returned to their soft and regular beating.

Chapter Eight

When the cibolero returned to the plain, he was received with a fresh burst of vivas, and kerchiefs were waved to greet him. One only caught his eye, – but that was enough. He saw not the rest, nor cared to see them. That little perfumed piece of cambric, with its lace border, was to him an ensign of hope – a banner that would have beckoned him on to achieve deeds of still higher daring. He saw it held aloft by a small jewelled hand, and waved in triumph for *him*. He was happy.

He passed the stand, rode up to the carreta, and, dismounting, kissed his mother and sister. He was followed by Don Juan, his backer; – and there were those who noticed that the eyes of the blonde were not always upon her brother: there was another on the ground who shared their kind glances, and that other was the young ranchero. No one, not even the dullest, could fail to notice that these kind glances were more than repaid. It was an affair of mutual and understood love, beyond a doubt.

Though Don Juan was a rich young farmer, and by courtesy a “Don,” yet in rank he was but a degree above the cibolero – the degree which wealth confers. He was not one of the high aristocracy of the place, – about that he cared little; but he had the character of being a brave, spirited young fellow; and in time, if he desired it, might mingle with the “sangre azul.” It was not likely he ever should – at least through the influence of marriage. Any one who was witness to the ardent glances exchanged between his eyes and those of the cibolero’s sister, would prophesy with ease that Don Juan was not going to marry among the aristocracy.

It was a happy little group around the carreta, and there was feasting, too, – dulces, and orgeat, and wine from El Taso of the best vintage. Don Juan was not afraid to spend money, and he had no reason on that occasion, with fifty onzas of clear gain in his pocket – a fact that by no means sat easily on the mind of the Comandante.

The latter was observed, with a clouded countenance, strolling around, occasionally approaching the carreta, and glancing somewhat rudely towards the group. His glances were, in fact, directed on Rosita, and the consciousness of his almost despotic power rendered him careless of concealing his designs. His admiration was expressed in such a manner that many could perceive it. The poor girl’s eyes fell timidly when they encountered his, and Don Juan, having noticed it, was not without feelings of anger as well as uneasiness. He knew the character of the Comandante, as well as the dangerous power with which he was armed. O Liberty! what a glorious thing art thou! How many hopes are blighted, how many loves crossed, and hearts crushed, in a land where thou art not! where the myrmidons of tyranny have power to thwart the purpose of a life, or arrest the natural flow of its affections!

Several games were yet carried on upon the plain, but they were without general interest. The splendid feat of the cibolero had eclipsed all lesser exhibitions for the time; besides, a number of the head men were out of humour. Vizcarra was sad, and Roblado savage – jealous of Catalina. The alcalde and his assistant were in a vexed state, as both had bet heavy sums on the red cock. Both the padrés had lost at *monté*, and they were no longer in a Christian spirit. The cura alone was in good spirits, and ready to back the “pardo” for another main.

The concluding game was at length heralded. It was to be the “*Correr el gallo*” (running the cock). As this is rather an exciting sport, the “*monté*” tables and other minor amusements were once more put aside; and all prepared to watch “el gallo.”

“Running the cock” is a New Mexican game in all its characteristics. It is easily described. Thus: A cock is suspended by the limbs to a horizontal branch, at just such a height that a mounted man may lay hold of his head and neck hanging downward. The bird is fastened in such a manner that a smart pluck will detach him from the tree; while, to render this the more difficult, both head and neck are well covered with soap. The horseman must be in full gallop while passing under the branch; and he who succeeds in plucking down the cock is pursued by all the others, who endeavour

to rob him of the prize. He has a fixed point to run round, and his goal is the tree from which he started. Sometimes he is over, taken before reaching this, the cock snatched from him, – or, as not infrequently happens, torn to pieces in the contest. Should he succeed in getting back – still retaining the bird entire – he is then declared victor. The scene ends by his laying his prize at the feet of his mistress; and she – usually some pretty poblana – appears that same evening at the fandango with the feathered trophy under her arm – thus signifying her appreciation of the compliment paid her, as well as giving to the *fandangueros* ocular proof of the fact that some skilful horseman is her admirer. It is a cruel sport, for it must be remembered that the poor cock who undergoes all this plucking and mangling is a *living bird*! It is doubtful whether a thought of the *cruelty* ever entered the mind of a New Mexican. If so, it must have been a New Mexican *woman*; for the humanity of these is in an inverse ratio to that of their lords. For the women it may be urged that the sport is a custom of the country; and what country is without its cruel sports? Is it rational or consistent to weep over the sufferings of Chanticleer, while we ride gaily upon the heels of poor broken Reynard?

There are two modes of the “Correr el gallo.” The first has been described. The second only differs from it in the fact that the cock, instead of being tied to a tree, is buried up to his shoulders in the earth. The horsemen, as before, pass in routine – each bending from his saddle, and striving to pluck the bird out of the ground. For the rest the conditions are the same as before.

The first cock was hung to a branch; and the competitors having taken their places in a line, the game commenced.

Several made the attempt, and actually seized the bird’s head, but the soap foiled them.

The dragoon sergeant was once more a competitor; but whether his colonel made any further bet upon him is not known. The Comandante had gambled enough for that day; and but for a little speculation which he enjoyed upon the mining “derechos,” and other little customs dues, he would have felt his losses still more severely. Out of the derechos, however, he knew he could square himself at the expense of the vice-regal government.

The sergeant, who, as already stated, had the advantage of a tall figure and a tall horse, was able to get a full grasp at the neck of the bird; and being already provided, as was afterwards ascertained, with a fistful of sand, he took the prize with him, and galloped off.

But there were swifter horses than his on the ground; and before he could double the turning-post he was overtaken by an active vaquero, and lost a wing of his bird. Another wing was plucked from him by a second pursuer; and he returned to the tree with nothing but a fragment left! Of course he received neither *vivas* nor cheers.

Carlos the cibolero took no part in this contest. He knew that he had won glory enough for that day – that he had made both friends and enemies, and he did not desire to swell the list of either. Some of the bystanders, however, began to banter him, wishing, no doubt, to see him again exhibit his fine horsemanship. He withstood this for some time, until two more cocks were plucked from the tree – the vaquero already alluded to carrying one of them clear, and laying it at the feet of his smiling sweetheart.

A new thought seemed now to have entered the mind of Carlos, and he was seen riding into the lists, evidently about to take part in the next race.

“It will be some time before I can be present at another fiesta,” remarked he to Don Juan. “Day after to-morrow I start for the plains. So I’ll take all the sport I can out of this one.”

An innovation was now introduced in the game. The bird was buried in the ground; and its long neck and sharp-pointed bill showed that it was no cock, but a snow-white “gruya,” one of the beautiful species of herons common in these regions. Its fine tapering neck was not soiled with soap, but left in its natural state. In this case the chances of failure lay in the fact that, loosely buried as it was, the gruya would not allow its head to be approached by a hand, but jerked it from side to side, thus rendering it no easy matter to get hold of it.

The signal being given, away went the string of horsemen! Carlos was among the last, but on coming up he saw the white bending neck still there. His hand was too quick for the bird, and the next moment it was dragged from the yielding sand, and flapping its snowy wings over the withers of his horse.

It required not only speed on the part of Carlos, but great adroitness, to pass the crowd of horsemen, who now rushed from all points to intercept him. Here he dashed forward – there reined up – anon wheeled round a rider, and passed behind him; and, after a dozen such manoeuvres, the black horse was seen shooting off towards the turning-post alone. This passed, he galloped back to the goal, and holding up his prize, unstained and intact, received the applause of the spectators.

There was a good deal of guessing and wondering as to who would be the recipient of the trophy. Some girl of his own rank, conjectured the crowd; some poblana or ranchero's daughter. The cibolero did not seem in haste to gratify their curiosity; but, after a few minutes, he astonished them all, by flinging the gruya into the air, and suffering it to fly off. The bird rose majestically upward, and then, drawing in its long neck, was seen winging its way toward the lower end of the valley.

It was observed that before parting with the bird Carlos had plucked from its shoulders the long gossamer-like feathers that distinguish the heron species. These he was tying into a plume.

Having accomplished this, he put spurs to his horse, and, galloping up to the front of the stand, he bent gracefully forward, and deposited the trophy at the feet of *Catalina de Cruces*!

A murmur of surprise ran through the crowd, and sharp censure followed fast. What! a cibolero, – a poor devil, of whom nothing was known, aspire to the smiles of a rico's daughter? It was not a compliment. It was an insult! Presumption intolerable!

And these critiques were not confined to the señoras and señoritas. The poblanas and rancheros were as bitter as they. These felt themselves slighted – passed by – regularly jilted – by one of their own class. *Catalina de Cruces*, indeed!

Catalina – her situation was pleasant, yet painful – painful, because embarrassing. She smiled, then blushed, uttered a soft “*Gracias, caballero!*” yet hesitated a moment whether to take up the trophy. A scowling father had started to his feet on one side, on the other a scowling lover. The last was Roblado.

“Insolent!” cried he, seizing the plume, and flinging it to the earth; “insolent!”

Carlos bent down from his saddle, once more laid hold of the plume, and stuck it under the gold band of his hat. Then, turning a defiant glance upon the officer, he said, “Don't lose your temper, Captain Roblado. A jealous lover makes but an indifferent husband.” And transferring his look to Catalina, he added with a smile, and in a changed tone, “*Gracias, señorita!*”

As he said this he doffed his sombrero, and, waving it gracefully, turned his horse and rode off.

Roblado half drew his sword, and his loud “*Carrajo!*” along with the muttered imprecations of Don Ambrosio, reached the ears of the cibolero. But the captain was far from brave, with all his swagger; and seeing the long *machete* of the horseman strapped over his hips, he vented his spite in threats only, and suffered Carlos to depart.

The incident had created no small excitement, and a good deal of angry feeling. The cibolero had roused the indignation of the aristocracy, and the jealousy and envy of the democracy; so that, after all his brilliant performances, he was likely to leave the field anything but a favourite. The wild words of his strange old mother had been widely reported, and national hatred was aroused, so that his skill called forth envy instead of admiration. An angel indeed, should he have been to have won friendship there – he an Americano – a “heretico” – for in this far corner of the earth fanaticism was as fierce as in the Seven-hilled City itself during the gloomiest days of the Inquisition!

Mayhap it was as well for Carlos that the sports were now ended, and the fiesta about to close.

In a few minutes the company began to move off. The mules, oxen, and asses, were yoked to the carretas – the rancheros and rancheras climbed inside the deep boxes; and then, what with the

cracking of quirts, the shouts of drivers, and the hideous screaming of the ungreased axles, a concert of sounds arose that would have astonished any human being, except a born native of the soil.

In half-an-hour the ground was clear, and the lean coyote might be seen skulking over the spot in search of a morsel for his hungry maw.

Chapter Nine

Though the field-sports were over, the fiesta of San Juan was not yet ended. There were still many sights to be seen before the crowd scattered to their homes. There was to be another turn at the church – another sale of “indultos,” beads, and relics, – another sprinkling of sacred water, in order that the coffers of the *padrés* might be replenished toward a fresh bout at the *monté* table. Then there was an evening procession of the Saint of the day (John), whose image, set upon a platform, was carried about the town, until the five or six fellows who bore the load were seen to perspire freely under its weight.

The Saint himself was a curiosity. A large wax and plaster doll, dressed in faded silk that had once been yellow, and stuck all over with feathers and tinsel. A Catholic image Indianised, for the Mexican divinities were as much Indian as Roman. He appeared bored of the business, as, the joinings between head and neck having partially given way, the former drooped over and nodded to the crowd as the image was moved along. This nodding, however, which would have been laughed at as supremely ridiculous in any other than a priest-ridden country, was here regarded in a different light. The *padrés* did not fail to put their interpretation upon it, pointing it out to their devout followers as a mark of condescension on the part of the Saint, who, in thus bowing to the crowd, was expressing his approbation of their proceedings. It was, in fact, a regular miracle. So alleged both *padrés* and *cura*, and who was there to contradict them? It would have been a dangerous matter to have said nay. In San Ildefonso no man dared to disbelieve the word of the Church. The miracle worked well. The religious enthusiasm boiled up; and when Saint John was returned to his niche, and the little “cofre” placed in front of him, many a “peseta,” “real,” and “cuartillo,” were dropped in, which would otherwise have been deposited that night in the *monté* bank. Nodding Saints and “winking Madonnas” are by no means a novel contrivance of the Holy Church. The *padrés* of its Mexican branch have had their wonderful saints too; and even in the almost *terra ignota* of New Mexico can be found a few of them that have performed as *smart* miracles as any recorded in the whole jugglery of the race.

A pyrotechnic display followed – and no mean exhibition of the sort neither – for in this “art” the New Mexicans are adepts. A fondness for “fireworks” is a singular but sure characteristic of a declining nation.

Give me the statistics of pyrotechnic powder burnt by a people, and I shall tell you the standard measure of their souls and bodies. If the figure be a maximum, then the physical and moral measure will be the minimum, for the ratio is inverse.

I stood in the Place de Concorde, and saw a whole nation – its rich and its poor – gazing on one of these pitiful spectacles, got up for the purpose of duping them into contentment. It was the price paid them for parting with their liberty, as a child parts with a valuable gem for a few sugar-plums. They were gazing with a delight that seemed enthusiasm! I looked upon scrubby, stunted forms, a foot shorter than were their ancestors. I looked upon eyes that gleamed with demoralised thought.

These were the representatives of a once great people, and who still deem themselves the first of mankind. I felt sure that this was an illusion. The pyro-spectacle and its reception convinced me that I saw before me a people who had passed the culminating point of their greatness, and were now gliding rapidly down the declining slope that leads to annihilation and nothingness.

After the fireworks came the “fandango.” There we meet the same faces, without much alteration in the costumes. The señoras and señoritas alone have doffed their morning dresses, and here and there a pretty poblana has changed her coarse woollen “nagua” for a gay flounced muslin.

The ball was held in the large saloon of the “Casa de Cabildo,” which occupied one side of the “Plaza.” On this festival day there was no exclusiveness. In the frontier towns of Mexico not much at any time, for, notwithstanding the distinctions of class, and the domineering tyranny of the government authorities, in matters of mere amusement there is a sort of democratic equality, a

mingling of high and low, that in other countries is rare. English, and even American travellers, have observed this with astonishment.

All were admitted to the “Salon de baile” who chose to pay for it; and alongside the rico in fine broad-cloth you might see the ranchero in his leathern jacket and velveteen calzoneros; while the daughter of the rich comerciante danced in the same set with the “aldeana,” whose time was taken up in kneading tortillas or weaving rebosos!

The Comandante with Roblado and the lieutenant figured at the fandango in full uniform. The alcalde was there with his gold-headed cane and tassel; the *cura* in his shovel hat; the padrés in their swinging robes; and all the “familias principales” of the place.

There was the rich comerciante, Don José Rincon, with his fat wife and four fat sleepy-looking daughters – there, too, the wife and family of the alcalde – there the Echevarrias, with their brother the “beau” in full Paris costume, with dress coat and crush hat – the only one to be seen in the saloon. There, too, the rich hacendado, Señor Gomez del Monté, with his lean wife and several rather lean daughters – differing in that respect from the hundreds of kine that roam over the pastures of his “ganada.” And there, too, observed of all, was the lovely Catalina de Graces, the daughter of the wealthy miner Don Ambrosio, who himself is by her side, keeping a watchful eye upon her.

Besides these grand people there were employés of the mines of less note, clerks of the comerciantes, young farmers of the valley, gambucinos, vaqueros, ciboleros, and even “leperos” of the town, shrouded in their cheap serapés. A motley throng was the fandango.

The music consisted of a bandolon, a harp, and fiddle, and the dances were the waltz, the *bolero*, and the *coona*. It is but just to say that finer dancing could not have been witnessed in the saloons of Paris. Even the peon, in his leathern spencer and calzoneros, moved as gracefully as a professor of the art; and the poblanas, in their short skirts and gay coloured slippers, swept over the floor like so many coryphées of the ballet.

Roblado, as usual, was pressing his attentions on Catalina, and danced almost every set with her; but her eye wandered from his gold epaulettes and seemed to search the room for some other object. She was evidently indifferent to the remarks of her partner, and tired of his company.

Vizcarra’s eyes were also in search of some one that did not appear to be present, for the Comandante strolled to and fro, peering into every group and corner with a dissatisfied look.

If it was the fair blonde he was looking for, he would be unsuccessful. She was not there. Rosita and her mother had returned home after the exhibition of the fireworks. Their house was far down the valley, and they had gone to it, accompanied by Carlos and the young ranchero. These, however, had returned to be present at the fandango. It was late before they made their appearance, the road having detained them. This was why the eye of Catalina wandered. Unlike Vizcarra, however, she was not to meet with disappointment.

While the dance was going on two young men entered the saloon, and soon mingled with the company. One of them was the young ranchero, the other was Carlos. The latter might easily have been distinguished by the heron-plume that waved over his black sombrero.

The eye of Catalina was no longer restless. It was now directed upon an object, though its glances were not fixed, but quick and stolen – stolen, because of the observation of an angry father and a jealous lover.

Carlos assumed indifference, though his heart was burning. What would he not have given to have danced with her? But he knew the situation too well. He knew that the offer of such a thing would lead to a scene. He dared not propose it.

At times he fancied that she had ceased to regard him – that she even listened with interest to Roblado – to the beau Echevarria – to others. This was but Catalina’s fine acting. It was meant for other eyes than those of Carlos, but he knew not that, and became piqued.

He grew restless, and danced. He chose for his partner a very pretty “aldeana,” Inez Gonzales by name, who was delighted to dance with him. Catalina saw this, and became jealous in turn.

This play continued for a length of time, but Carlos at length grew tired of his partner, and sat down upon the *banqueta* alone. His eyes followed the movements of Catalina. He saw that hers were bent upon him with glances of love, – love that had been avowed in words, – yes, had already been plighted upon oath. Why should they suspect each other?

The confidence of both hearts was restored; and now the excitement of the dance, and the less zealous guardianship of Don Ambrosio, half drunk with wine, gave confidence to their eyes, and they gazed more boldly and frequently at one another.

The ring of dancers whirling round the room passed close to where Carlos sat. It was a waltz. Catalina was waltzing with the beau Echevarria. At each circle her face was towards Carlos, and then their eyes met. In these transient but oft-recurring glances the eyes of a Spanish maid will speak volumes, and Carlos was reading in those of Catalina a pleasant tale. As she came round the room for the third time, he noticed something held between her fingers, which rested over the shoulder of her partner. It was a sprig with leaves of a dark greenish hue. When passing close to him, the sprig, dexterously detached, fell upon his knees, while he could just bear, uttered in a soft whisper, the word – “*Tuya!*”

Carlos caught the sprig, which was a branch of “tuya,” or cedar. He well understood its significance; and after pressing it to his lips, he passed it through the button-hole of his embroidered “jaqueta.” As Catalina came round again, the glances exchanged between them were those of mutual and confiding love.

The night wore on – Don Ambrosio at length became sleepy, and carried off his daughter, escorted by Roblado.

Soon after most of the ricos and fashionables left the saloon, but some tireless votaries of Terpsichore still lingered until the rosy Aurora peeped through the “rejas” of the Casa de Cabildo.

Chapter Ten

The “Llano Estacado,” or “Staked Plain” of the hunters, is one of the most singular formations of the Great American Prairie. It is a table-land, or “steppe,” rising above the regions around it to a height of nearly one thousand feet, and of an oblong or leg-of-mutton form, trending from north to south.

It is four hundred miles in length, and at its widest part between two and three hundred. Its superficial area is about equal to the island of Ireland. Its surface aspect differs considerably from the rest of prairie-land, nor is it of uniform appearance in every part. Its northern division consists of an arid steppe, sometimes treeless, for an extent of fifty miles, and sometimes having a stunted covering of mezquite (*acacia*), of which there are two distinct species. This steppe is in several places rent by chasms a thousand feet in depth, and walled in on both sides by rugged impassable precipices. Vast masses of shapeless rocks lie along the beds of these great clefts, and pools of water appear at long intervals, while stunted cedars grow among the rocks, or cling from the seams of the cliffs.

Such chasms, called “cañons,” can only be crossed, or even entered, at certain points; and these passes are frequently a score of miles distant from each other.

On the upper plain the surface is often a dead level for a hundred miles, and as firm as a macadamised road. There are spots covered with a turf of grass of the varieties known as gramma, buffalo, and mezquite; and sometimes the traveller encounters a region where shallow ponds of different sizes stud the plain – a few being permanent, and surrounded by sedge. Most of these ponds are more or less brackish, some sulphurous, and others perfectly salt. After heavy rains such aqueous deposits are more numerous, and their waters sweeter; but rain seems to fall by accident over this desolate region, and after long spells of drought the greater number of these ponds disappear altogether.

Towards the southern end of the Llano Estacado the surface exhibits a very singular phenomenon – a belt of sand-hills, nearly twenty miles in breadth and full fifty in length, stretching north and south upon the plain. These hills are of pure white sand, thrown up in ridges, and sometimes in cones, to the height of a hundred feet, and without tree, bush, or shrub, to break their soft outlines, or the uniformity of their colour. But the greatest anomaly of this geological puzzle is, that water-ponds are found in their very midst – even among their highest ridges – and this water not occasional, as from rains, but lying in “lagunas,” with reeds, rushes, and *nymphae* growing in them, to attest that the water is permanent! The very last place where water might be expected to make a lodgment.

Such formations of drift-sand are common upon the shores of the Mexican Gulf, as well as on European coasts, and there their existence is easily explained; but here, in the very heart of a continent, it cannot be regarded as less than a singular phenomenon.

This sand-belt is passable at one or two points, but horses sink to the knees at every step, and but for the water it would be a perilous experiment to cross it.

Where is the Llano Estacado? Unroll your map of North America. You will perceive a large river called the Canadian rising in the Rocky Mountains, and running, first southerly, and then east, until it becomes part of the Arkansas. As this river bends eastwardly, it brushes the northern end of the Llano Estacado, whose bluffs sometimes approach close to its banks, and at other times are seen far off, resembling a range of mountains – for which they have been frequently mistaken by travellers.

The boundary of the west side of the “Staked Plain” is more definite. Near the head-waters of the Canadian another large river has its source. This the Pecos. Its course, you will observe, is nearly south, but your map is not correct, as for several hundred miles the Pecos runs within a few degrees of east. It afterwards takes a southerly direction, before it reaches its embouchure in the Rio Grande. Now the Pecos washes the whole western base of the Llano Estacado; and it is this very plain, elevated

as it is, that turns the Pecos into its southerly course, instead of leaving it to flow eastward, like all the other prairie-streams that head in the Rocky Mountains.

The eastern boundary of the Llano Estacado is not so definitely marked, but a line of some three hundred miles from the Pecos, and cutting the head-waters of the Wichita, the Louisiana Bed, the Brazos, and Colorado, will give some idea of its outline. These rivers, and their numerous tributaries, all head in the eastern “ceja” (brow) of the Staked Plain, which is cut and channelled by their streams into tracts of the most rugged and fantastic forms.

At the south the Llano Estacado tapers to a point, declining into the mezquite plains and valleys of numerous small streams that debouch into the Lower Rio Grande.

This singular tract is without one fixed dweller; even the Indian never makes abode upon it beyond the few hours necessary to rest from his journey, and there are parts where he – inured as he is to hunger and thirst – dare not venture to cross it. So perilous is the “Jornada,” or crossing of the Llano Estacado, that throughout all its length of four hundred miles there are only two places where travellers can effect it in safety! The danger springs from the want of water, for there are spots of grass in abundance; but even on the well-known routes there are, at certain seasons, stretches of sixty and eighty miles where not a drop of water is to be procured!

In earlier times one of these routes was known as the “Spanish Trail,” from Santa Fé to San Antonio de Bexar, of Texas; and lest travellers should lose their way, several points were marked with “palos,” or stakes. Hence the name it has received.

The Llano Estacado is now rarely travelled, except by the ciboleros, or Mexican buffalo-hunters, and “Comancheros,” or Indian traders. Parties of these cross it from the settlements of New Mexico, for the purpose of hunting the buffalo, and trafficking with the Indian tribes that roam over the plains to the east. Neither the hunt nor the traffic is of any great importance, but it satisfies a singular race of men, whom chance or inclination has led to the adopting it as a means of subsistence.

These men are to the Mexican frontier pretty much what the hunter and backwoodsman are upon the borders of the Anglo-American settlements. They are, however, in many respects different from the latter – in arms and equipments, modes of hunting, and otherwise. The outfit of a cibolero, who is usually also a *coureur de bois*, is very simple. For hunting, he is mounted on a tolerable – sometimes a fine – horse and armed with a bow and arrows, a hunting-knife, and a long lance. Of fire-arms he knows and cares nothing – though there are exceptional cases. A lazo is an important part of his equipment. For trading, his stock of goods is very limited – often not costing him twenty dollars! A few bags of coarse bread (an article of food which the prairie Indians are fond of), a sack of “piñole,” some baubles for Indian ornament, some coarse serapés, and pieces of high-coloured woollen stuffs, woven at home: these constitute his “invoice.” Hardware goods he does not furnish to any great extent. These stand him too high in his own market, as they reach it only after long carriage and scandalous imposts. Fire-arms he has nothing to do with: such prairie Indians as use these are furnished from the eastern side; but many Spanish pieces – fusils and escopettes – have got into the hands of the Comanches through their forays upon the Mexican towns of the south.

In return for his outlay and perilous journey, the cibolero carries back dried buffalo-flesh and hides – some the produce of his own hunting, some procured by barter from the Indians.

Horses, mules, and asses, are also articles of exchange. Of these the prairie Indians possess vast herds – some individuals owning hundreds; and most of them with Mexican brands! In other words, they have been stolen from the towns of the *Lower* Rio Grande, to be sold to the towns of the *Upper* Rio Grande, and the trade is deemed perfectly legitimate, – at least, there is no help for it as the case stands.

The cibolero goes forth on the plains with a rare escort. Sometimes a large number of these men, taking their wives and families with them, travel together just like a tribe of wild Indians. Generally, however, one or two leaders, with their servants and equipage, form the expedition. They experience less molestation from the savages than ordinary travellers. The Comanches and other tribes know

their object, and rather encourage them to come amongst them. Notwithstanding, they are often cheated and ill-used by these double-faced dealers. Their mode of transport is the pack-mule, and the “carreta” drawn by mules or oxen. The carreta is of itself a picture of primitive locomotion. A pair of block-wheels, cut out of a cotton-wood tree, are joined by a stout wooden axle. The wheels usually approach nearer to the oval, or square, than the circular form. A long tongue leads out from the axle-tree, and upon top of this a square, deep, box-like body is placed. To this two or more pairs of oxen are attached in the most simple manner – by lashing a cross-piece of wood to their horns which has already been made fast to the tongue. The animals have neither yoke nor harness, and the forward push of the head is the motive power by which the carreta is propelled. Once in motion, the noise of the wooden axle is such as to defy description. The cries of a whole family, with children of all sizes, in bitter agony, can alone represent the concert of terrible sounds; and we must go to South Mexico to find its horrid equal in a troop of howling monkeys.

Chapter Eleven

About a week after the fiesta of Saint John, a small party of ciboleros was seen crossing the Pecos, at the ford of the “Bosque Redondo.” The party was only five in number, and consisted of a white man, a half-blood, and three pure-bred Indians, having with them a small *atajo* of pack-mules, and three ox-team carretas. The crouching trot of the Indians, as well as their tilma dresses and sandalled feet, showed that they were “Indios mansos.” They were, in fact, the hired *peons* of Carlos the cibolero – the white man, and chief of the party.

The half-blood – Antonio by name – was “arriero” of the mule-train, while the three Indians drove the ox-teams, guiding them across the ford with their long goads. Carlos himself was mounted upon his fine black horse, and, muffled in a strong serapé, rode in front to pilot the way. His beautiful manga had been left behind, partly to save it from the rough wear of such an expedition, and also that it might not excite the cupidity of the prairie Indians, who, for such a brilliant mantle as it was, would not hesitate to take his scalp. Besides the manga, the embroidered jacket, the scarlet scarf, and velveteen calzoneros, had all been put off, and others of a coarser kind were now worn in their place.

This was an important expedition for Carlos. He carried with him the largest freight he had ever taken upon the prairies. Besides the three carretas with four oxen each, the atajo consisted of five pack-mules, all loaded with merchandise – the carretas with bread, piñole, Spanish beans, Chilé peppers; and the packs were made up of serapé blankets, coarse woollen cloth, and a few showy trinkets, as also some Spanish knives, with their pointed triangular blades. It was his bold luck on the day of the fiesta that had enabled him to provide such a stock. In addition to his own original onza and the two he had won, the young ranchero, Don Juan, had insisted upon his accepting the loan of five others towards an outfit for this expedition.

The little troop, having safely forded the Pecos, headed towards the “ceja” of the Llano Estacado, that was not far distant from the crossing of Bosque Redondo. A sloping ravine brought them to the top of the “mesa,” where a firm level road lay before them – a smooth plain without break or bush to guide them on their course.

But the cibolero needed no guide. No man knew the Staked Plain better than he; and, setting his horse’s head in a direction a little south of east, the train moved on. He was striking for one of the head branches of the Red River of Louisiana, where he had heard that for several seasons past the buffalo had appeared in great numbers. It was a new route for him – as most of his former expeditions had been made to the upper forks of the Texan rivers Brazos and Colorado. But the plains around these rivers were at this time in undisputed possession of the powerful tribe of Comanches, and their allies, the Kiawas, Lipans, and Tonkewas. Hence, these Indians, uninterrupted in their pursuit of the buffalo, had rendered the latter wild and difficult of approach, and had also thinned their numbers. On the waters of the Red River the case was different. This was hostile ground. The Wacoes, Panés, Osages, and bands from the Cherokee, Kickapoo, and other nations to the east, occasionally hunted there, and sanguinary conflicts occurred among them; so that one party or another often lost their season’s hunt by the necessity of keeping out of each other’s range; and the game was thus left undisturbed. It is a well-known fact that in a neutral or “hostile ground” the buffalo, as well as other game, are found in greatest abundance, and are there more easily approached than elsewhere.

With a knowledge of these facts, Carlos the cibolero had determined to risk an expedition to the Red River, whose head-waters have their source in the eastern “ceja” of the Llano Estacado, and *not* in the Rocky Mountains as laid down upon maps.

Carlos was well armed for hunting the buffalo – so was the half-blood Antonio – and two of the three peons were also experienced hunters. Their arms consisted of the bow and lance, both weapons being preferable to fire-arms for buffalo-hunting. In one of the carretas, however, might be seen a weapon of another kind – a long brown American rifle. This Carlos kept for other and higher game,

and he well knew how to use it. But how came such a weapon into the hands of a Mexican cibolero? Remember Carlos was not of Mexican origin. The weapon was a family relic. It had been his father's.

We shall not follow Carlos and his "caravan" through all the details of their weary "journeyings" across the desert plain. At one place they made a "Jornada" of seventy miles without water. But the experienced Carlos knew how to accomplish this without the loss of a single animal.

He travelled thus. Having given his cattle as much as they would drink at the last watering-place, he started in the afternoon, and travelled until near daybreak. Then a halt of two hours was made, so that the animals should graze while the dew was still on the grass. Another long march followed, continuing until noon, then a rest of three or four hours brought the cool evening, when a fresh spell of marching brought the "Jornada" to its end, far on in the following night. Such is the mode of travelling still practised on the desert steppes of Chihuahua, Sonora, and North Mexico.

After several days' travelling the cibolero and his party descended from the high "mesa," and, passing down its eastern slope, arrived on a tributary of the Red River. Here the scenery assumed a new aspect – the aspect of the "rolling" prairie. Gentle declivities, with soft rounded tops declining into smooth verdant vales, along which meandered streams of clear and sparkling water. Here and there along the banks stood groves of trees, such as the evergreen live-oak, the beautiful "pecan" with its oblong edible nuts, the "overcup" with its odd-looking acorns, the hackberry with its nettle-shaped leaves and sweet fruits, and the silvery cotton-wood. Along the swells could be seen large trees standing apart, and at almost equal distances, as though planted for an orchard. Their full leafy tops gave them a fine appearance, and their light pinnate leaves, with the long brown legumes hanging from their branches, told they were the famous "mezquite" trees – the American acacia. The red mulberry could be seen in the creek bottoms, and here and there the beautiful wild-china-tree with its pretty lilac flowers. The whole surface both of hill and valley was clad in a rich mantle of short *buffalo* grass, which gave it the aspect of a meadow lately mown, and springing into fresh verdure. It was a lovely landscape, and no wonder the wild bulls of the prairies chose it for their favourite range.

The cibolero had not travelled far through this favoured region until he came upon the buffalo sign – "roads", "wallows", and "bois de vache;" and next morning he found himself in the midst of vast herds, roaming about like tame cattle, and browsing at their leisure. So little shy were they, they scarce deigned to make off at his approach!

Of course he had reached the end of his journey. This was his great stock-farm. These were his own cattle – as much his as any one else's; and he had nothing more to do but set to killing and curing.

As to his trade with the Indians, that would take place whenever he should chance to fall in with a party – which he would be certain to do in the course of the season.

Like all men of the prairie, rude trappers as well as Indians, Carlos had an eye for the picturesque, and therefore chose a beautiful spot for his camp. It was a grassy bottom, through which ran a clear "arroyo" of sweet water, shaded by pecan, mulberry, and wild-china-trees, and under the shadow of a mulberry grove his carretas were halted and his tent was pitched.

Chapter Twelve

Carlos had commenced his hunt, and was making rapid progress. In the first two days he had slaughtered no less than twenty buffaloes, and had them all carried to camp. He and Antonio followed the buffalo and shot them down, while two of the peons skinned the animals, cut up the meat, and packed it to camp. There, under the hands of the third, it underwent the further process of being “jerked,” that is, cut into thin slices and dried in the sun.

The hunt promised to be profitable. Carlos would no doubt obtain as much “tasajo” as he could carry home, besides a large supply of hides, both of which found ready sale in the towns of New Mexico.

On the third day, however, the hunters noticed a change in the behaviour of the buffalo. They had suddenly grown wild and wary. Now and then vast gangs passed them, running at full speed, as if terrified and pursued! It was not Carlos and his companion that had so frightened them. What then had set them a-running?

Carlos conjectured that some Indian tribe was in the neighbourhood engaged in hunting them.

His conjecture proved correct. On ascending a ridge which gave him a view of a beautiful valley beyond, his eye rested upon an Indian encampment.

It consisted of about fifty lodges, standing like tents along the edge of the valley, and fronting towards the stream. They were of a conical form, constructed of a framework of poles set in a circle, drawn together at their tops, and then covered with skins of the buffalo.

“Waco lodges!” said the cibolero, the moment his practised eye fell upon them.

“Master,” inquired Antonio, “how do you tell that?” Antonio’s experience fell far short of that of his master, who from childhood had spent his life on the prairies.

“How!” replied Carlos, “by the lodges themselves.”

“I should have taken it for a Comanche camp,” said the half-blood. “I have seen just such lodges among the ‘Buffalo-eaters.’”

“Not so, Anton,” rejoined his master. “In the Comanche lodge the poles meet at the top, and are covered over with the skins, leaving no outlet for smoke. You observe it is not so with these. They are lodges of the Wacoes, who, it is true, are allies of the Comanches.”

Such was in reality the fact. The poles, though bent so as to approach each other at the top, did not quite meet, and an open hole remained for the passage of smoke. The lodge, therefore, was not a perfect cone, but the frustum of one; and in this it differed from the lodge of the Comanches.

“The Wacoes are not hostile,” remarked the cibolero. I think we have nothing to fear from them. No doubt they will trade with us. But where are they? This question was drawn forth by the cibolero observing that not a creature was to be seen about the lodges, – neither man, woman, child, nor animal! And yet it could not be a deserted camp. Indians would not abandon such lodges as these – at least they would not leave behind the fine robes that covered them! No, the owners must be near: no doubt, among the neighbouring hills, in pursuit of the buffalo.

The cibolero guessed aright. As he and his companion stood looking down upon the encampment, a loud shouting reached their ears, and the next moment a body of several hundred horsemen was seen approaching over a swell of the prairie. They were riding slowly, but their panting foaming horses showed that they had just left off harder work. Presently another band, still more numerous, appeared in the rear. These were horses and mules laden with huge brown masses, the buffalo-meat packed up in the shaggy hides. This train was conducted by the women and boys, and followed by troops of dogs and screaming children.

As they came toward the encampment from an opposite direction, Carlos and his companion were not for a while seen.

The Indians, however, had not been long among the lodges before the quick eye of one caught sight of their two heads above the ridge. A warning cry was uttered, and in a moment every one of the dismounted hunters was back in his saddle and ready for action. One or two galloped off towards the meat-train, which had not yet come into camp, while others rode to and fro, exhibiting symptoms of alarm.

No doubt they were under apprehensions that the Panés, their mortal foes, had stolen a march upon them.

Carlos soon relieved them from this apprehension. Spurring his horse to the crest of the ridge, he drew up in full view of the Indians. A few signs, which he well knew how to make, and the word “amigo!” shouted at the top of his voice, restored their confidence; then a young fellow now rode out in front, and advanced up the hill. When sufficiently near to be heard, he halted; and a conversation, partly by signs, and partly by means of a little Spanish, enabled him and Carlos to understand each other. The Indian then galloped back, and, after a short interval, returned again, and invited the cibolero and his companion to the encampment.

Carlos of course accepted the courtesy, and a few minutes after, he and Antonio were eating fresh buffalo-beef, and chatting in perfect amity with their new hosts.

The chief, a fine-looking man, and evidently possessing full authority, became particularly friendly with Carlos, and was much pleased at hearing that the latter had a stock of goods. He promised to visit his camp next morning and allow his tribe to trade. As the cibolero had conjectured, they were Waco Indians, – a noble race, one of the noblest of the prairie tribes.

Carlos returned to his camp in high spirits. He would now have his goods exchanged for mules, – so the chief promised, – and these were the main objects of his expedition.

In the morning, according to appointment, the Indians arrived, chief and all; and the little valley where the cibolero had encamped was filled with men, women, and children. The packs were opened, the goods were set forth, and the whole day was spent in continuous trading. The cibolero found his customers perfectly honest; and when night came, and they took their departure, not a single item of Carlos’ stock remained on his hands. In its place, however, a handsome *mulada* of no less than thirty mules was seen picketed in the bottom of the little valley. These were now the property of Carlos the cibolero. Not a bad outlay of his eight onzas!

Not only would they yield well on his return, but it was his intention that each of them should carry back its full load of buffalo-hides, or “tasajo.”

It would be a successful expedition, indeed; and dreams of future wealth, with the hope of being some day in a condition to advance a legitimate claim to the hand of the fair Catalina, were already passing through the mind of Carlos.

Once a “rico,” reflected he, even Don Ambrosio might sanction his suit. On that night soft was the slumber and pleasant the dreams of Carlos the cibolero.

Chapter Thirteen

Next day he followed his hunting with increased ardour. He was now provided with the means of transport to any amount. There was no fear he should have to leave either his robes or *tasajo* behind. With his own mules, he had now thirty-five; and that number, with the three *carretas*, would carry a splendid freight – of the value of hundreds of dollars.

He had already obtained some dressed robes from the Indians. For these he had parted with everything for which an Indian would trade. Even the buttons from off his jacket and those of his men, the bullion bands and shining tags of their *sombreros* – everything about them that glittered!

Their arms of course not. These the Wacoes did not want. They had similar ones themselves, and could manufacture them at will. They would have purchased the long brown rifle; but that was a souvenir Carlos would not have parted with for a score of mules.

For the next day or two the *cibolero* continued his hunting. He found the buffalo grow every hour more excited and wild. He noticed, too, that the “running” gangs came from the north, while the Wacoes were hunting to the southward of his camp! It could not be the latter that were disturbing them. Who then?

On the third night after his trade with the Indians, Carlos had retired to rest with his people. Antonio kept watch until midnight, at which hour he was to be relieved by one of the peons.

Antonio had grown very sleepy. His hard riding after the buffalo had wearied him; and he was doing his best to keep awake for the last half-hour of his vigil, when a snort reached his ears from the direction of the *mulada*.

This brought him to himself. He placed his ear to the ground and listened. Another snort louder than the first came from the *mulada* – another – and another – quick in succession!

“What can it mean? Coyotes? or, perhaps, a bear? I shall wake my master,” said Antonio to himself.

Stealing gently to the side of Carlos, the half-blood shook the sleeper by the arm. A slight shake was enough, for in an instant the *cibolero* was upon his feet and handling his rifle. He always resorted to this weapon in cases of danger, such as a hostile attack by Indians, using his bow only in the chase.

After a word or two had passed between Carlos and Antonio the three peons were awaked, and all five stood to their arms. The little party remained in the midst of the *carretas*, which had been drawn up so as to form a small triangular corral. The high boxes of these would be an excellent protection against arrows; and, as there was no fire in the camp to make a light, they could not be seen from without. The camp, moreover, was shadowed by the thick foliage of the mulberries, which rendered it still more obscure; while its occupants commanded a view of the prairie in front. But for the wood copses which stood at intervals, they could have seen the whole ground both up and down the valley and along its sides. These copses, however, might have concealed any number of foes.

The hunters remained silent, listening intently. At one time they fancied they could see a dark form crouching along the ground in the direction of the *mulada*, that was picketed not a hundred yards off. The light, however, was so uncertain, not one of the five could be sure of this. Whatever it was, it moved very slowly, for it appeared to remain near the same spot.

Carlos at length set himself to observe it more closely. He stole out from the corral, and, followed by Antonio, crawled along the ground. When the two had got nearer the dark object, it was distinctly seen to move.

“There *is* something!” whispered the *cibolero*.

At that moment the mules again snorted, and one or two of them struck the ground with their hoofs, as if startled.

“It must be a bear, I fancy,” continued Carlos. “It has the appearance of one. It will stampede the animals – a shot will be less likely to do so.”

As he said this he raised his rifle, and, taking aim as well as the darkness would allow him, pulled trigger and fired.

It seemed as if the shot had invoked all the demons of the infernal regions. A hundred voices burst forth in one simultaneous yell, the hoofs of a hundred horses rang upon the turf, the *mulada* got into motion, the mules squealing and plunging violently, and the next moment every one of them had broken their lariats, and were running at a furious gallop out of the valley! A dark band of yelling horsemen was seen closing in after and driving them off; and, before Carlos could recover from his surprise, both mules and Indians had disappeared out of sight and hearing!

Not a single one remained of the whole *mulada*. The ground upon which they had been picketed was swept perfectly clear!

“An estampeda!” said the cibolero, in a husky voice; “my poor mules – all gone —*every* one of them! A curse upon Indian duplicity!”

Carlos had not the slightest doubt but that the marauders were the Wacoos – the very same from whom he had purchased the mules. He knew that such an occurrence was by no means rare – that oftentimes the traders are robbed in this way; and not unusual is it for them to purchase a second time the very animals thus carried off, and from the same Indians who have stolen them!

“A curse upon Indian duplicity!” he repeated with indignant emphasis. “No wonder they were so free and generous in their barter! It was but a plot on the part of the cowardly thieves to take from me my whole cargo, without daring to do so openly. *Carajo!* I am lost!”

This last phrase was uttered in a tone that partook equally of anger and grief.

The cibolero was certainly placed in an unpleasant situation. All his hopes – lately running so high – were crushed in a single moment. His whole property taken from him – the object of his enterprise lost – his long, perilous, and painful journeyings made for nothing. He should return empty-handed, poorer than when he set out – for his own five pack-mules were gone among the rest. The oxen, and his faithful steed, tied to the carretas, alone remained. These would scarce serve to carry provision for himself and party on their journey home; no cargo – not a bale of hides – not a “bulta” of meat more than would be required for their own food!

These reflections all passed through the mind of the cibolero in the space of a few moments, as he stood gazing in the direction in which the marauders had gone. He made no attempt to follow – that would have been worse than useless. On his splendid horse he might have overtaken them – only to die on the points of their lances!

“A curse upon Indian duplicity!” he once more repeated; and then, rising to his feet, walked back to the corral, and gave orders for the oxen to be drawn close up and firmly fastened to the carretas. Another surprise might be attempted by some lingering party of the savages; and, as it would be unsafe to go to sleep, the cibolero and his four companions remained awake and on the alert for the remainder of the night.

Chapter Fourteen

That was a *noche triste* to Carlos – a night of painful reflections. Bereft of his property – in the midst of hostile Indians, who might change their minds, return, and massacre him and his party – many hundred miles from home, or from any settlement of whites – a wide desert to be traversed – the further discouragement that there was no object for his going home, now that he was stripped of all his trading-stock – perhaps to be laughed at on his return – no prospect of satisfaction or indemnity, for he well knew that his government would send out no expedition to revenge so humble an individual as he was – he knew, in fact, that no expedition of Spanish soldiery could penetrate to the place, even if they had the will; but to fancy Vizcarra and Roblado sending one on his account! No, no; there was no hope of his obtaining satisfaction. He was cruelly robbed, and he knew that he must endure it; but what a blighted prospect was before him!

As soon as day broke he would go to the Waco camp – he would boldly upbraid them for their treachery. But what purpose would that serve? Besides, would he find them still there? No; most likely they were moving off to some other part at the time they had planned the robbery!

Several times during the night a wild idea occurred to him. If he could not have indemnity he might obtain revenge. The Wacoes were not without enemies. Several bordering tribes were at war with them; and Carlos knew they had a powerful foe in the Panés.

“My fortune is bitter,” thought Carlos; “but revenge is sweet! What if I seek the Pané, – tell him my intention, – offer him my lance, my bow, and my true rifle? I have never met the Pané. I know him not; but I am no weak hand, and now that I have a cause for vengeance he will not despise my aid. My men will follow me – I know they will – anywhere; and, tame ‘Tagnos’ though they be, they can fight when roused to revenge. I shall seek the Pané!”

The last thought was uttered half aloud, and with emphasis that spoke determination. The cibolero was a man of quick resolves, and this resolve he had actually come to. It is not to be wondered at, His indignation at being treated in such a cruel and cowardly manner – the poor prospect before him on returning to the settlement – his natural desire to punish those who had placed him in such a predicament – as well as some hope which he still entertained of recovering at least a part of his lost property, – all influenced him to this resolve. He had determined upon it, and was just on the point of communicating his determination to his companions, when he was interrupted by the half-blood Antonio.

“Master,” said the latter, who appeared to have been for some time busied with his own thoughts, “did you notice nothing strange?”

“When, Antonio?”

“During the estampeda.”

“What was there strange?”

“Why, there appeared to be a good number, full half, of the rascals afoot.”

“True; I observed that.”

“Now, master, I have seen a *cavallada* stampeded by the Comanches more than once – they were always mounted.”

“What signifies that? These are Wacoes, not Comanches.”

“True, master; but I have heard that the Wacoes, like the Comanches, are true Horse-Indians, and never go afoot on any business.”

“That is indeed so,” replied the cibolero in a reflective mood. “Something strange, I confess.”

“But, master,” continued the half-blood, “did you notice nothing else strange during the stampede?”

“No,” answered Carlos; “I was so annoyed – so put out by the loss – I scarce noticed anything. What else, Antonio?”

“Why, in the midst of these yellings, did you not hear a shrill whoop now and then – a *whistle*?”

“Ha! did you hear that?”

“More than once – distinctly.”

“Where were my ears?” asked the cibolero of himself. “You are sure, Antonio?”

“Quite sure, master.”

Carlos remained for a moment silent, evidently engaged in busy reflection. After a pause, he broke out in a half-soliloquy: —

“It may have been – it must have been – by Heavens! it must – ”

“What, master?”

“The Pané whistle!”

“Just what I was thinking, master. The Comanches never whoop so – the Kiawa never. I have not heard that the Wacoos give such a signal. Why not Pané? Besides, their being afoot – that’s like Pané!”

A sudden revulsion had taken place in the mind of the cibolero. There was every probability that Antonio’s conjecture was correct. The “whistle” is a peculiar signal of the Pané tribes. Moreover, the fact of so many of the marauders being on foot – that was another peculiarity. Carlos knew that among the Southern Indians such a tactic is never resorted to. The Panés are *Horse-Indians* too, but on their marauding expeditions to the South they often go afoot, trusting to return mounted – which they almost invariably do.

“After all,” thought Carlos, “I have been wronging the Wacoos – the robbers are Panés!”

But now a new suspicion entered his mind. It was still the Wacoos that had done it. They had adopted the Pané whistle to deceive him! A party of them might easily be afoot – it was not such a distance to their camp, – besides, after the estampeda they had gone in that very direction!

No doubt, should he go there on the morrow, they would tell him that Panés were in the neighbourhood, that it was they who had stolen his mules – the mules of course he would not see, as these would be safely concealed among the hills.

“No, Antonio,” he said, after making these reflections, “our enemies are the Wacoos themselves.”

“Master,” replied Antonio, “I hope not.”

“I hope not, too, camarado. I had taken a fancy to our friends of but yesterday: I should be sorry to find them our foes – but I fear it is even so.”

With all, Carlos was not confident; and now that he reflected, another circumstance came to his mind in favour of the Wacoos. His companions had also noted it.

That circumstance was the running of the buffaloes observed during the past few days. The gangs had passed from the north, going southward; and their excited manner was almost a proof that they were pressed by a party of hunters. The Wacoos were all this time hunting to the south of the cibolero’s camp! This would seem to indicate that some other Indians were upon the north. What more likely than a band of Panés?

Again Carlos reproached himself for his too hasty suspicions of his new friends. His mind was filled with doubts. Perhaps these would be resolved by the light of the morning.

As soon as day should arrive, he had resolved to go to the Waco camp, and satisfy himself, or at all events openly make his inquiries.

The first streaks of daylight were just falling upon the prairie, when the quick keen eye of the half-blood, ranging the ground in every direction, was arrested by the appearance of something odd upon the grass. It lay near the spot where the *mulada* had been picketed. It was a darkish object in a recumbent position. Was it bushes or gorse? No. It could not be that. Its outlines were different. It was more like some animal lying down – perhaps a large wolf? It was near the place where they had fancied that they saw something in the darkness, and at which Carlos had fired.

Antonio, on first perceiving the object, called his master’s attention to it, and both now gazed over the box of the carreta, scanning it as well as the grey light would permit them.

As this became brighter, the object was seen more distinctly, while at each moment the curiosity of the ciboleros increased. They would have long since gone out to examine it more closely; but they were not yet free from apprehensions of a second attack from the Indians; and they prudently remained within the corral.

At length, however, they could forego an examination no longer. They had formed their suspicion of what the object was; and Carlos and Antonio climbed over the carretas, and proceeded towards it.

On arriving at the spot they were not so much surprised – for they had partially anticipated such a thing – at finding the body of a dead Indian. It was lying flat upon the grass, face downwards; and, on closer examination, a wound, from which much blood had run, was perceived in the side. There was the mark of a rifle bullet – Carlos had not fired in vain! They bent down, and turned over the body to examine it. The savage was in full war-costume – that is, naked to the waist, and painted over the breast and face so as to render him as frightful as possible: but what struck the ciboleros as most significant was the *costume of his head*! This was close shaven over the temples and behind the ears. A patch upon the top was clipped short, but in the centre of the crown one long lock of hair remained uncut, and this lock was intermingled with plumes, and plaited so as to hang, queue-like, down the back. The naked temples were stained with vermilion, and the cheeks and bosom daubed in a similar manner. These brilliant spots contrasted with the colourless and deathly hue of the skin, and, with the blanched lips and glazed eyeballs, gave to the corpse a hideous appearance.

Carlos, after gazing upon it for some moments, turned to his companion with a look of intelligence; and, pointing to the shaved head, and then to the moccasins upon the Indian's feet, in a tone that expressed the satisfaction he felt at the discovery, pronounced the word, – “Pané!”

Chapter Fifteen

The dead Indian was a Pané beyond doubt. The tonsure of his hair, the cut of his moccasins, his war-paint, enabled Carlos to tell this.

The cibolero was glad that he was a Pané. He had several reasons for being so. First, it gratified him to know that his Waco friends were still true; secondly, that he had punished one of the robbers; and, lastly, the knowledge that they were Panés gave him some hope that he might yet recover, *by the help of the Wacoes*, some of the stolen mules.

This was not improbable. As already stated, the Wacoes and Panés were sworn foes; and as soon as the former should hear that the latter were in the neighbourhood, Carlos felt sure they would go in pursuit of them. He would share in this pursuit with his little band, and, in the event of the Panés being defeated, might get back his *mulada*.

His first impulse, therefore, was, to gallop to the Waco camp – apprise them of the fact that the Pané was on the war-trail, and then join them in search of the latter.

Just then both he and Antonio remembered that the Panés had themselves gone in the direction of the Waco camp! It was not two miles distant – they could hardly fail to find it, even in the night. What if they had taken the Wacoes by surprise, and had already made their attack!

It was quite probable – more than probable. The time and the hour were just in keeping. The estampeda had occurred before midnight. No doubt they were then on their way to the Waco village. They would just be in time to make their attack, at the usual hour for such forays, between midnight and morning.

Carlos feared he might be too late to give warning. His Waco friends may have already perished! Whether or no, he determined to proceed at once to their encampment.

Leaving Antonio and the peons with directions to guard and defend his own camp to the last, he rode off, armed both with rifle and bow. It was yet but grey day, but he knew the trail leading to the Waco village, and followed it without difficulty. He rode with caution, scanning the timber copses before approaching them; and running his eye along the crests of the ridges as he advanced.

This caution was not unnecessary. The Panés could not be far off – they might still be in ambush between him and the Waco camp, or halted among the hills.

The cibolero had but little fear of meeting one or two of them. He rode a horse in which he had full confidence; and he knew that no Pané could overtake him; but he might be surrounded by numbers, and intercepted before he could reach the Waco lodges. That was the reason why he advanced with so much caution.

His ears were set to listen attentively. Every sound was noted and weighed – the “gobble” of the wild turkey from the branches of the oak; the drumming of the ruffed grouse on some dry knoll; the whistling of the fallow-deer; or the tiny bark of the prairie marmot. All these were well-known sounds; and as each was uttered, the cibolero stopped and listened attentively. Under other circumstances he would not have heeded them, but he knew that these sounds could be imitated, and his ear was bent to detect any counterfeit. He could distinguish the Pané trail of the previous night. A strong band there must have been, by the numerous tracks on the grass. At the crossing of a stream Carlos could detect the prints of moccasins in the sand. There were still some of the party afoot then, though, no doubt, the stolen *mulada* had mounted a good many.

Carlos rode on with more caution than ever. He was half-way to the Waco village, and still the Pané trail led in that direction. Surely these could not have passed without finding it? Such skilled warriors as the Panés would not. They would see the trail of the Wacoes leading to the cibolero’s own camp – they would soon discover the lodges – perhaps they had already made their attack – perhaps —

The reflections of the cibolero were suddenly interrupted; distant sounds fell upon his ear – shouts and cries of fearful import – with that continued murmur that results from the mingling of

many voices in loud and confused clamour. Now and then was heard a whoop, or a cheer, or a shrill whistle, rising above the ordinary noises, and carrying far over the plain its tones of triumph or revenge.

Carlos knew the import of those shouts and cries – they were the sounds of battle! – of terrible and deadly strife!

They came from behind the hill – the cibolero was just climbing it.

He spurred his horse, and, galloping forward to its crest, looked down into the valley. The conflict was raging before him!

He had a full view of the dreadful scene. Six hundred dusky horsemen were riding about on the plain; some dashing at each other with couched lances – some twanging their bows from a distance; and others close together in the hand-to-hand combat of the deadly tomahawk! Some were charging in groups with their long spears – some wheeling into flight, and others, dismounted, were battling on foot! Some took shelter among the timber islands, and sprang out again as they saw an opportunity of sending an arrow, or lancing a foeman in the back; and so the red contest continued.

Not a shot was heard – neither bugle nor drum sent forth their inspiring notes – no cannon rolled its thunder – no rocket blazed – no smoke spread its sulphury cloud upon the air; but without these sights and sounds there was no fear of mistaking that contest for a mimic game – a tournament of the prairies. The wild war-whoop, and the wilder whistle – the earnest onslaught – the fierce charging cheer – the cries of triumph and vengeance – the neighing steeds without riders – here and there the prostrate savage, with skinless scalp, glaring red in the sun – the spears and hatchets crimsoned with blood, – all were evidence of real and deadly strife, and Carlos did not doubt for a moment the character of the scene. Before him was an Indian fight – Waco and Pané engaged in the earnest struggle of life and death!

All this he comprehended at a glance, and, after regarding the fight for a moment, he could distinguish the warriors of both tribes from one another. The Panés, in full war-costume, were easily recognised by their tufted scalp-locks; while the Waco, who had, no doubt, been taken by surprise, were many of them in hunting-shirts and leggings. Some, however, were nearly as naked as their adversaries; but easily distinguished from them by their full flowing hair.

The first impulse of the cibolero was to gallop forward and mingle in the fight, – of course, taking side with the Waco. The sound of the conflict roused his blood, and the sight of the robbers who had so lately ruined him rendered him eager for revenge. Many of them were mounted upon the very mules they had taken from him, and Carlos was determined to have some of them back again.

He was about to put spurs to his horse, and dash forward, when a sudden change seemed to occur in the conflict that decided him to remain where he was. The Panés were giving way!

Many of them were seen wheeling out of the plain, and taking to flight.

As Carlos looked down the hill, he saw three of the Pané warriors in full run, making up to the spot where he stood. Most of the band were still fighting, or had fled in a different direction; but these, cut off from the rest, came directly up the hill at a gallop.

The cibolero had drawn his horse under the cover of some trees, and was not perceived by them until they were close to the spot.

At this moment the war-cry of the Waco was heard directly in their rear, and Carlos saw that two mounted warriors of that tribe were in pursuit. The fugitives looked back, and, seeing only two adversaries after them, once more wheeled round and gave fight.

At their first charge one of the pursuers was killed, and the other – whom Carlos now recognised as the Waco chief – was left alone against three assailants.

The whip-like crack of the cibolero's rifle sounded on the air, and one of the Panés dropped out of his saddle. The other two, ignorant of whence the shot had come, continued their onset on the Waco chief, who, dashing close up, split the skull of one of them with his tomahawk. His horse, however, bore him rapidly past, and before he could wheel round, the remaining Pané – an active

warrior – rushed after and thrust his long spear into the back of the chief. Its head passed clear through his body, completely impaling him; and with a death-whoop, the noble Indian fell from his horse to the ground.

But his enemy fell at the same time. The arrow of the cibolero was too late to save, though not to avenge, the Waco's fall. It pierced the Pané just at the moment the latter had made his thrust, and he fell to the ground simultaneously with his victim, still clutching the handle of the spear!

A fearful group lay dead upon the sward; but Carlos did not stay to contemplate it. The fight still raged in another part of the field, and, putting spurs to his horse he galloped off to take part in it.

But the Panés had now lost many of their best warriors, and a general panic had seized upon them, ending in their full flight. Carlos followed along with the victorious pursuers, now and then using his rifle upon the fleeing robbers. But fearing that a stray party of them might attack his own little camp he turned from the line of pursuit, and galloped in that direction. On arriving, he found Antonio and the peons fortified within their corral, and all safe. Stray Indians had passed them, but all apparently too much frightened to have any desire for an attack upon the little party.

As soon as the cibolero had ascertained these facts, he turned his horse and rode back toward the scene of the late conflict.

Chapter Sixteen

As Carlos approached the spot where the chief had been slain he heard the death-wail chanted by a chorus of voices.

On getting still nearer, he perceived a ring of warriors dismounted and standing around a corpse. It was that of the fallen chief. Others, fresh from the pursuit, were gathering to the place; each taking up the melancholy dirge as he drew nigh.

The cibolero alighted, and walked forward to the ring. Some regarded him with looks of surprise, while others, who knew he had aided them in the fight, stepped up and grasped him by the hand. One old warrior taking Carlos' arm in his, led him forward to the ring, and silently pointed to the now ghastly features, as though he was imparting to the cibolero the news that their chief was dead!

Neither he nor any of the warriors knew what part Carlos had borne in the affair. No one, now alive, had been witness to the conflict in which the chief had fallen. Around the spot were high copses that hid it from the rest of the field, and, at the time this conflict occurred, the fight was raging in a different direction. The warrior, therefore, thought he was imparting to Carlos a piece of news, and the latter remained silent.

But there was a *mystery* among the braves, and Carlos saw this by their manner. Five Indians lay dead upon the ground *unscalped*! That was the mystery. They were the three Panés, and the chief with the other Waco. They could not have slain each other, and all have fallen on the spot. That was not probable. The Waco and one of the Panés lay apart. The other three were close together, just as they had fallen, the chief impaled by the Pané spear, while his slayer lay behind him still grasping the weapon! The red tomahawk was clutched firmly in the hands of the chief, and the cleft skull of the second Pané showed where it had last fallen.

So far the Indians translated the tableau, but the mystery lay not there. Who had slain the slayer of their chief? That was the puzzle. Some one must have survived this deadly strife, where five warriors had died together!

If a Pané, surely he would not have gone off without that great trophy which would have rendered him famous for life, – the scalp of the Waco chief? If a Waco, where and who was he?

These questions passed from lip to lip. No one was found to answer them, but there were yet some warriors to return from the pursuit, and the inquiry was suspended, while the death-song was again chanted over the fallen chief.

At length all the braves had arrived on the spot, and stood in a circle around the body. One of the warriors stepped forward to the midst, and by a signal intimated that he wished to be heard. A breathless silence followed, and the warrior began: —

“Wacoes! our hearts are sad when they should otherwise rejoice. In the midst of victory a great calamity has fallen upon us. We have lost our father, – our brother! Our great chief – he whom we all loved – has fallen. Alas! In the very hour of triumph, when his strong right hand had hewn down his enemy on the field – in that moment has he fallen!

“The hearts of his warriors are sad, the hearts of his people will long be sad!

“Wacoes! our chief has not fallen unrevenged. His slayer lies at his feet pierced with the deadly dart, and weltering in his blood. Who of you hath done this?”

Here the speaker paused for a moment as if waiting for a reply. None was given.

“Wacoes!” he continued, “our beloved chief has fallen, and our hearts are sad. But it glads them to know that his death has been avenged. There lies his slayer, still wearing his hated scalp. What brave warrior claims the trophy? Let him stop forth and take it!”

Here there was another pause, but neither voice nor movement answered the challenge.

The cibolero was silent with the rest. He did not comprehend what was said, as the speech was in the Waco tongue, and he understood it not. He guessed that it related to the fallen chief and his enemies, but its exact purport was unknown to him.

“Brothers!” again resumed the orator, “brave men are modest and silent about their deeds. None but a brave warrior could have done this. We know that a brave warrior will avow it. Let him fear not to speak. The Wacoës will be grateful to the warrior who has avenged the death of their beloved chief.”

Still the silence was unbroken, except by the voice of the orator.

“Brother warriors!” he continued, raising his voice and speaking in an earnest tone, “I have said that the Wacoës will be grateful for this deed. I have a proposal to make. Hear me!”

All signified assent by gestures.

“It is our custom,” continued the speaker, “to elect our chief from the braves of our tribe. I propose that we elect him *now* and *here*— here! on the red field where his predecessor has fallen. *I propose for our chief the warrior who has done this deed!*” And the orator pointed to the fallen Pané.

“My voice for the brave who has avenged our chief!” cried one.

“And mine!” shouted another.

“And mine! and mine! and mine!” exclaimed all the warriors.

“Then solemnly be it proclaimed,” said the orator, “that he to whom belongs this trophy,” he pointed to the scalp of the Pané, “shall be chief of the Waco nation!”

“Solemnly we avow it!” cried all the warriors in the ring, each placing his hand over his heart as he spoke.

“Enough!” said the orator. “Who is chief of the Waco warriors? Let him declare himself on the spot!”

A dead silence ensued. Every eye was busy scanning the faces around the circle, every heart was beating to hail their new chief.

Carlos, unconscious of the honour that was in store for him, was standing a little to one side, observing the movements of his dusky companions with interest. He had not the slightest idea of the question that had been put. Some one near him, however, who spoke Spanish, explained to him the subject of the inquiry, and he was about to make a modest avowal, when one of the braves in the circle exclaimed —

“Why be in doubt longer? If modesty ties the tongue of the warrior, let his weapon speak. Behold! his arrow still pierces the body of our foe. Perhaps it will declare its owner, — it is a marked one!”

“True!” ejaculated the orator. “Let us question the arrow!”

And, stepping forward, he drew the shaft from the body of the Pané, and held it aloft.

The moment the eyes of the warriors fell upon its barbed head, an exclamation of astonishment passed from their lips. The head was of *iron*! No Waco ever used such a weapon as that!

All eyes were instantly turned on Carlos the cibolero, with looks of inquiry and admiration. All felt that it must be from his bow had sped that deadly shaft; and they were the more convinced of this because some who had noticed the third Pané pierced with a rifle bullet, had just declared the fact to the crowd.

Yes, it must be so. The pale-face was the avenger of their chief!

Chapter Seventeen

Carlos, who by this time had become aware of the nature of their inquiries, now stepped forward, and, in modest phrase, detailed through the interpreter how the chief had fallen, and what part he himself had borne in the conflict.

A loud murmur of applause broke from the circle of warriors, and the more excited of the young men rushed forward and grasped the cibolero's hand, uttering as they did so expressions of gratitude. Most of the warriors already knew that to him they were indebted for their safety. It was the report of his rifle, fired in the night, that had put them on their guard, and prevented the Panés from surprising their encampment, else the day's history might have been *very* different. In fact, the Panés, through this very signal having been heard, had been themselves surprised, and that was the true secret of their disaster and sanguinary retreat.

When, in addition to this service, it was seen how the cibolero had fought on their side, killing several of their foes, the hearts of the Wacoes were filled with gratitude; but now that it became known that the pale-faced warrior was the avenger of their beloved chief, their gratitude swelled into enthusiasm, and for some minutes their loud expressions of it alone could be heard.

When the excitement had to some extent subsided, the warrior who seemed to be recognised as the orator of the tribe, and who was regarded with great deference, again stood forth to speak. This time his speech was directed to Carlos alone.

"White warrior!" he said. "I have spoken with the braves of our nation. They all feel that they owe you deep gratitude, which words cannot repay. The purport of our recent deliberations has been explained to you. Upon this ground we vowed that the avenger of him who lies cold should be our future chief. We thought not at the time that that brave warrior was our white brother. But now we know; and should we for that be false to our vow – to our promised word? No! – not even in thought; and here, with equal solemnity, we again repeat that oath."

"We repeat it!" echoed around the ring of warriors, while each with solemnity of manner placed his hand over his heart.

"White warrior!" continued the speaker, "our promise remains sacred. The honour we offer you is the greatest that we can bestow. It has never been borne but by a *true* warrior of the Waco tribe, for no impotent descendant of even a favourite chief has ever ruled over the braves of our nation. We do not fear to offer this honour to you. We would rejoice if you would accept it. Stranger! we will be proud of a *white* chief when that chief is a warrior such as you! We know you better than you think. We have heard of you from our allies the Comanche – we have heard of *Carlos the Cibolero*!

"We know you are a great warrior; and we know, too, that in your own country, among your own people, you are nothing. Excuse our freedom, but speak we not the truth? We despise your people, who are only tyrants and slaves. All these things have our Comanche brothers told us, and much more of *you*. We know who you are, then; we knew you when you came amongst us, and were glad to see you. We traded with you as a friend.

"We now hail you as a brother, and thus say, – If you have no ties that bind you to your ungrateful nation, we can offer you one that will not be ungrateful. Live with us, – be our chief!"

As the speaker ended, his last words were borne like an echo from lip to lip until they had gone round the full circle of warriors, and then a breathless silence ensued.

Carlos was so taken by surprise that for some moments he was unable to make reply, he was not alone surprised by the singular proposal thus singularly made to him; but the knowledge which the speaker betrayed of his circumstances quite astonished him. True, he had traded much among the Comanches, and was on friendly terms with that tribe, some of whom, in times of peace, even visited the settlement of San Ildefonso; but it seemed odd that these savages should have noticed the

fact – for fact it was – that the cibolero was somewhat of an outcast among his own people. Just then he had no time to reflect upon the singularity of the circumstances, as the warriors waited his reply.

He scarcely knew what reply to make. Hopeless outcast that he was, for a moment the proposal seemed worthy of acceptance. At home he was little better than a slave; here he would be ruler, the lord elect of all.

The Wacoes, though savages by name, were warriors, were men of hearts, human and humane. He had proofs of it before him. His mother and sister would share his destiny; but Catalina, – ha! that one thought resolved him; he reflected no further.

“Generous warriors!” he replied; “I feel from the bottom of my heart a full sense of the honour you have offered to confer upon me. I wish that by words I could prove how much I thank you, but I cannot. My words, therefore, shall be few and frank. It is true that in my own land I am not honoured, – I am one of the poorest of its people; but there is *a tie* that binds me to it —*a tie of the heart* that calls upon me to return. Wacoes, I have spoken!”

“Enough!” said the orator; “enough, brave stranger: it is not for us to inquire into the motives that guide your acts. If not our chief, you will remain our friend. We have yet a way – a poor one – left us to show our gratitude: you have suffered from our enemies; you have lost your property, but that has been recovered, and shall be yours again. Further we entreat you to remain with us for some days, and partake of our rude hospitality. *You* will stay with us?”

The invitation was promptly echoed by all, and as promptly accepted.

About a week after this time an atajo of pack-mules – nearly fifty in number – loaded with buffalo-hides and tasajo, was seen struggling up the eastern ceja of the Llano Estacado, and heading in a north-westerly direction over that desert plain. The arriero, mounted upon the *mulera*, was a half-blood Indian. Three carretas, drawn by oxen and driven by dusky peons, followed the mule-train, making noise enough to frighten even the coyotes that behind skulked through the coverts of mezquite. A dashing horseman mounted upon a fine black steed rode in advance, who, ever and anon turning in his saddle, looked back with a satisfied glance upon the fine atajo. That horseman was *Carlos*.

The Wacoes had not forgotten to be generous. That train of mules and those heavy packs were the gift of the tribe to the avenger of their chief. But that was not all. In the breast-pocket of the cibolero’s jacket was a “bolsa,” filled with rare stuff, also a present from the Wacoes, who promised some day that their guest should have more of the same. What did that bolsa contain? coin? money? jewels? No. It contained only dust; but that dust was yellow and glittering. It was *gold*!

Chapter Eighteen

On the second day after the fiesta there was a small dining party at the Presidio. Merely a few bachelor friends of the Comandante – the *beaux esprits* of the place – including the fashionable Echevarria. The cura was among the number, and also the mission padrés, both of whom enjoyed the convivialities of the table equal to any “friar of orders grey.”

The company had gone through the numerous courses of a Mexican meal – the “pucheros,” “guisados,” and endless mixtures of “chilé,” – and the dinner was at that stage when the cloth has been carried off, and the wine flows freely, “Canario” and “Xeres,” “Pedro do Ximenes,” “Madeira,” and “Bordeos,” in bottles of different shapes, stood upon the table; and for those who liked a stronger beverage there was a flask of golden “Catalan,” with another of Maraschino. A well-stored cellar was that of the Comandante. In addition to his being military governor, he was, as already hinted, collector of the *derechos de consume*, or custom-house dues. Hence he was the recipient of many a little present, as now and then a basket of champagne or a dozen of Bordeaux.

His company had got fairly into the wine. The cura had thrown aside his sanctity and become *human* like the rest; the padrés had forgotten their sackcloth and bead-roll, and the senior of them, Padre Joaquin, entertained the table with spicy adventures which had occurred to him *before* he became a monk. Echevarria related anecdotes of Paris, with many adventures he had encountered among the grisettes.

The Spanish officers being the hosts were, of course, least talkative, though the Comandante – vain as any young sub who wore his epaulettes for the first time – could not refrain from alluding occasionally to his terrible list of *bonnes fortunes* among the fair Sevillanas. He had long been stationed at the city of oranges, and “la gracia Andalusiana” was ever his theme of admiration.

Roblado believed in the belles of the Havannah, and descanted upon the plump, material beauty which is characteristic of the Quadroons; while the lieutenant expressed his *penchant* for the small-footed *Guadalaxareñas* – not of old Spain, but of the rich Mexican province Guadalajara. *He* had been quartered there.

So ran the talk – rough and ribald – upon that delicate theme – woman. The presence of the trio of churchmen was no restraint. On the contrary, both padrés and cura boasted of their *liaisons* with as much bawd and brass as the others, for padrés and cura were both as depraved as any of their dining companions. Any little reserve either might have shown upon ordinary occasions had disappeared after a few cups of wine; and none of them feared the company, which, on its part, stood as little in awe of them. The affectation of sanctity and self-denial was meant only for the simple poblanos and the simpler peons of the settlement. At the dinner-table it was occasionally assumed by one or the other, but only by way of joke, – to give point and piquancy to the relation of some adventure. In the midst of the conversation, which had grown somewhat general and confused, a name was pronounced which produced a momentary silence. That name was “Carlos the cibolero.”

At the mention of this name several countenances changed expression. Roblado was seen to frown; on Vizcarra’s face were portrayed mixed emotions; and both padrés and cura seemed to know the name unfavourably.

It was the beau Echevarria who had mentioned it.

“Pon the honour of a cavallero! the most impudent thing I ever witnessed in all my life, even in republican Paris! A fellow, – a demned trader in hides and tasajo – in short, a butcher of demned buffaloes to aspire —*Parbleu!*”

Echevarria, though talking Spanish, always swore in French. It was more polite.

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