

BRET HARTE

MARUJA

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«Public Domain»

Harte B.

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CHAPTER I

Morning was breaking on the high road to San Jose. The long lines of dusty, level track were beginning to extend their vanishing point in the growing light; on either side the awakening fields of wheat and oats were stretching out and broadening to the sky. In the east and south the stars were receding before the coming day; in the west a few still glimmered, caught among the bosky hills of the canada del Raimundo, where night seemed to linger. Thither some obscure, low-flying birds were slowly winging; thither a gray coyote, overtaken by the morning, was awkwardly limping. And thither a tramping wayfarer turned, plowing through the dust of the highway still unslaked by the dewless night, to climb the fence and likewise seek the distant cover.

For some moments man and beast kept an equal pace and gait with a strange similarity of appearance and expression; the coyote bearing that resemblance to his more civilized and harmless congener, the dog, which the tramp bore to the ordinary pedestrians, but both exhibiting the same characteristics of lazy vagabondage and semi-lawlessness; the coyote's slouching amble and uneasy stealthiness being repeated in the tramp's shuffling step and sidelong glances. Both were young, and physically vigorous, but both displayed the same vacillating and awkward disinclination to direct effort. They continued thus half a mile apart unconscious of each other, until the superior faculties of the brute warned him of the contiguity of aggressive civilization, and he cantered off suddenly to the right, fully five minutes before the barking of dogs caused the man to make a detour to the left to avoid entrance upon a cultivated domain that lay before him.

The trail he took led to one of the scant water-courses that issued, half spent, from the canada, to fade out utterly on the hot June plain. It was thickly bordered with willows and alders, that made an arbored and feasible path through the dense woods and undergrowth. He continued along it as if aimlessly; stopping from time to time to look at different objects in a dull mechanical fashion, as if rather to prolong his useless hours, than from any curious instinct, and to occasionally dip in the unfrequent pools of water the few crusts of bread he had taken from his pocket. Even this appeared to be suggested more by coincidence of material in the bread and water, than from the promptings of hunger. At last he reached a cup-like hollow in the hills lined with wild clover and thick with resinous odors. Here he crept under a manzanita-bush and disposed himself to sleep. The act showed he was already familiar with the local habits of his class, who used the unfailing dry starlit nights for their wanderings, and spent the hours of glaring sunshine asleep or resting in some wayside shadow.

Meanwhile the light quickened, and gradually disclosed the form and outline of the adjacent domain. An avenue cut through a park-like wood, carefully cleared of the undergrowth of gigantic ferns peculiar to the locality, led to the entrance of the canada. Here began a vast terrace of lawn, broken up by enormous bouquets of flower-beds bewildering in color and profusion, from which again rose the flowering vines and trailing shrubs that hid pillars, veranda, and even the long facade of a great and dominant mansion. But the delicacy of floral outlines running to the capitals of columns and at times mounting to the pediment of the roof, the opulence of flashing color or the massing of tropical foliage, could not deprive it of the imperious dignity of size and space. Much of this was due to the fact that the original casa—an adobe house of no mean pretensions, dating back to the early Spanish occupation—had been kept intact, sheathed in a shell of dark-red wood, and still retaining its patio; or inner court-yard, surrounded by low galleries, while additions, greater in extent than the main building, had been erected—not as wings and projections, but massed upon it on either side, changing its rigid square outlines to a vague parallelogram. While the patio retained the Spanish

conception of al fresco seclusion, a vast colonnade of veranda on the southern side was a concession to American taste, and its breadth gave that depth of shadow to the inner rooms which had been lost in the thinner shell of the new erection. Its cloistered gloom was lightened by the red fires of cardinal flowers dropping from the roof, by the yellow sunshine of the jessamine creeping up the columns, by billows of heliotropes breaking over its base as a purple sea. Nowhere else did the opulence of this climate of blossoms show itself as vividly. Even the Castilian roses, that grew as vines along the east front, the fuchsias, that attained the dignity of trees, in the patio, or the four or five monster passion-vines that bestarred the low western wall, and told over and over again their mystic story—paled before the sensuous glory of the south veranda.

As the sun arose, that part of the quiet house first touched by its light seemed to waken. A few lounging peons and servants made their appearance at the entrance of the patio, occasionally reinforced by an earlier life from the gardens and stables. But the south facade of the building had not apparently gone to bed at all: lights were still burning dimly in the large ball-room; a tray with glasses stood upon the veranda near one of the open French windows, and further on, a half-shut yellow fan lay like a fallen leaf. The sound of carriage-wheels on the gravel terrace brought with it voices and laughter and the swiftly passing vision of a char-a-bancs filled with muffled figures bending low to avoid the direct advances of the sun.

As the carriage rolled away, four men lounged out of a window on the veranda, shading their eyes against the level beams. One was still in evening dress, and one in the uniform of a captain of artillery; the others had already changed their gala attire, the elder of the party having assumed those extravagant tweeds which the tourist from Great Britain usually offers as a gentle concession to inferior yet more florid civilization. Nevertheless, he beamed back heartily on the sun, and remarked, in a pleasant Scotch accent, that: Did they know it was very extraordinary how clear the morning was, so free from clouds and mist and fog? The young man in evening dress fluently agreed to the facts, and suggested, in idiomatic French-English, that one comprehended that the bed was an insult to one's higher nature and an ingratitude to their gracious hostess, who had spread out this lovely garden and walks for their pleasure; that nothing was more beautiful than the dew sparkling on the rose, or the matin song of the little birds.

The other young man here felt called upon to point out the fact that there was no dew in California, and that the birds did not sing in that part of the country. The foreign young gentleman received this statement with pain and astonishment as to the fact, with passionate remorse as to his own ignorance. But still, as it was a charming day, would not his gallant friend, the Captain here, accept the challenge of the brave Englishman, and "walk him" for the glory of his flag and a thousand pounds?

The gallant Captain, unfortunately, believed that if he walked out in his uniform he would suffer some delay from being interrogated by wayfarers as to the locality of the circus he would be pleasantly supposed to represent, even if he escaped being shot as a rare California bird by the foreign sporting contingent. In these circumstances, he would simply lounge around the house until his carriage was ready.

Much as it pained him to withdraw from such amusing companions, the foreign young gentleman here felt that he, too, would retire for the present to change his garments, and glided back through the window at the same moment that the young officer carelessly stepped from the veranda and lounged towards the shrubbery.

"They've been watching each other for the last hour. I wonder what's up?" said the young man who remained.

The remark, without being confidential, was so clearly the first sentence of natural conversation that the Scotchman, although relieved, said, "Eh, man?" a little cautiously.

"It's as clear as this sunshine that Captain Carroll and Garnier are each particularly anxious to know what the other is doing or intends to do this morning."

"Why did they separate, then?" asked the other.

"That's a mere blind. Garnier's looking through his window now at Carroll, and Carroll is aware of it."

"Eh!" said the Scotchman, with good-humored curiosity. "Is it a quarrel? Nothing serious, I hope. No revolvers and bowie-knives, man, before breakfast, eh?"

"No," laughed the younger man. "No! To do Maruja justice, she generally makes a fellow too preposterous to fight. I see you don't understand. You're a stranger; I'm an old habitue of the house—let me explain. Both of these men are in love with Maruja; or, worse than that, they firmly believe her to be in love with THEM."

"But Miss Maruja is the eldest daughter of our hostess, is she not?" said the Scotchman; "and I understood from one of the young ladies that the Captain had come down from the Fort particularly to pay court to Miss Amita, the beauty."

"Possibly. But that wouldn't prevent Maruja from flirting with him."

"Eh! but are you not mistaken, Mr. Raymond? Certainly a more quiet, modest, and demure young lassie I never met."

"That's because she sat out two waltzes with you, and let you do the talking, while she simply listened."

The elder man's fresh color for an instant heightened, but he recovered himself with a good-humored laugh. "Likely—likely. She's a capital good listener."

"You're not the first man that found her eloquent. Stanton, your banking friend, who never talks of anything but mines and stocks, says she's the only woman who has any conversation; and we can all swear that she never said two words to him the whole time she sat next to him at dinner. But she looked at him as if she had. Why, man, woman, and child all give her credit for any grace that pleases themselves. And why? Because she's clever enough not to practice any one of them—as graces. I don't know the girl that claims less and gets more. For instance, you don't call her pretty?" ...

"Wait a bit. Ye'll not get on so fast, my young friend; I'm not prepared to say that she's not," returned the Scotchman, with good-humored yet serious caution.

"But you would have been prepared yesterday, and have said it. She can produce the effect of the prettiest girl here, and without challenging comparison. Nobody thinks of her—everybody experiences her."

"You're an enthusiast, Mr. Raymond. As an habitue of the house, of course, you—"

"Oh, my time came with the rest," laughed the young man, with unaffected frankness. "It's about two years ago now."

"I see—you were not a marrying man."

"Pardon me—it was because I was."

The Scotchman looked at him curiously.

"Maruja is an heiress. I am a mining engineer."

"But, my dear fellow, I thought that in your country—"

"In MY country, yes. But we are standing on a bit of old Spain. This land was given to Dona Maria Saltonstall's ancestors by Charles V. Look around you. This veranda, this larger shell of the ancient casa, is the work of the old Salem whaling captain that she married, and is all that is American here. But the heart of the house, as well as the life that circles around the old patio, is Spanish. The Dona's family, the Estudillos and Guitierrez, always looked down upon this alliance with the Yankee captain, though it brought improvement to the land, and increased its value forty-fold, and since his death ever opposed any further foreign intervention. Not that that would weigh much with Maruja if she took a fancy to any one; Spanish as she is throughout, in thought and grace and feature, there is enough of the old Salem witches' blood in her to defy law and authority in following an unhallowed worship. There are no sons; she is the sole heiress of the house and estate—though, according to the native custom, her sisters will be separately portioned from the other property, which is very large."

"Then the Captain might still make a pretty penny on Amita," said the Scotchman.

"If he did not risk and lose it all on Maruja. There is enough of the old Spanish jealousy in the blood to make even the gentle Amita never forgive his momentary defection."

Something in his manner made the Scotchman think that Raymond spoke from baleful experience. How else could this attractive young fellow, educated abroad and a rising man in his profession, have failed to profit by his contiguity to such advantages, and the fact of his being an evident favorite?

"But with this opposition on the part of the relatives to any further alliances with your countrymen, why does our hostess expose her daughters to their fascinating influence?" said the elder man, glancing at his companion. "The girls seem to have the usual American freedom."

"Perhaps they are therefore the less likely to give it up to the first man who asks them. But the Spanish duenna still survives in the family—the more awful because invisible. It's a mysterious fact that as soon as a fellow becomes particularly attached to any one—except Maruja—he receives some intimation from Pereo."

"What! the butler? That Indian-looking fellow? A servant?"

"Pardon me—the mayordomo. The old confidential servitor who stands in loco parentis. No one knows what he says. If the victim appeals to the mistress, she is indisposed; you know she has such bad health. If in his madness he makes a confidante of Maruja, that finishes him."

"How?"

"Why, he ends by transferring his young affections to her—with the usual result."

"Then you don't think our friend the Captain has had this confidential butler ask his intentions yet?"

"I don't think it will be necessary," said the other, dryly.

"Umph! Meantime, the Captain has just vanished through yon shrubbery. I suppose that's the end of the mysterious espionage you have discovered. No! De'il take it! but there's that Frenchman popping out of the myrtle bush. How did the fellow get there? And, bless me! here's our lassie, too!"

"Yes!" said Raymond, in a changed voice, "It's Maruja!"

She had approached so noiselessly along the bank that bordered the veranda, gliding from pillar to pillar as she paused before each to search for some particular flower, that both men felt an uneasy consciousness. But she betrayed no indication of their presence by look or gesture. So absorbed and abstracted she seemed that, by a common instinct, they both drew nearer the window, and silently waited for her to pass or recognize them.

She halted a few paces off to fasten a flower in her girdle. A small youthful figure, in a pale yellow dress, lacking even the maturity of womanly outline. The full oval of her face, the straight line of her back, a slight boyishness in the contour of her hips, the infantine smallness of her sandaled feet and narrow hands, were all suggestive of fresh, innocent, amiable youth—and nothing more.

Forgetting himself, the elder man mischievously crushed his companion against the wall in mock virtuous indignation. "Eh, sir," he whispered, with an accent that broadened with his feelings. "Eh, but look at the puir wee lassie! Will ye no be ashamed o' yerself for putting the tricks of a Circe on sic a honest gentle bairn? Why, man, you'll be seein' the sign of a limb of Satan in a bit thing with the mother's milk not yet out of her! She a flirt, speerin' at men, with that modest downcast air? I'm ashamed of ye, Mister Raymond. She's only thinking of her breakfast, puir thing, and not of yon callant. Another sacrilegious word and I'll expose you to her. Have ye no pity on youth and innocence?"

"Let me up," groaned Raymond, feebly, "and I'll tell you how old she is. Hush—she's looking."

The two men straightened themselves. She had, indeed, lifted her eyes towards the window. They were beautiful eyes, and charged with something more than their own beauty. With a deep brunette setting even to the darkened cornea, the pupils were blue as the sky above them. But they

were lit with another intelligence. The soul of the Salem whaler looked out of the passion-darkened orbits of the mother, and was resistless.

She smiled recognition of the two men with sedate girlishness and a foreign inclination of the head over the flowers she was holding. Her straight, curveless mouth became suddenly charming with the parting of her lips over her white teeth, and left the impress of the smile in a lighting of the whole face even after it had passed. Then she moved away. At the same moment Garnier approached her.

"Come away, man, and have our walk," said the Scotchman, seizing Raymond's arm. "We'll not spoil that fellow's sport."

"No; but she will, I fear. Look, Mr. Buchanan, if she hasn't given him her flowers to carry to the house while she waits here for the Captain!"

"Come away, scoffer!" said Buchanan, good-humoredly, locking his arm in the young man's and dragging him from the veranda towards the avenue, "and keep your observations for breakfast."

CHAPTER II

In the mean time, the young officer, who had disappeared in the shrubbery, whether he had or had not been a spectator of the scene, exhibited some signs of agitation. He walked rapidly on, occasionally switching the air with a wand of willow, from which he had impatiently plucked the leaves, through an alley of ceanothus, until he reached a little thicket of evergreens, which seemed to oppose his further progress. Turning to one side, however, he quickly found an entrance to a labyrinthine walk, which led him at last to an open space and a rustic summer-house that stood beneath a gnarled and venerable pear-tree. The summerhouse was a quaint stockade of dark madrono boughs thatched with red-wood bark, strongly suggestive of deeper woodland shadow. But in strange contrast, the floor, table, and benches were thickly strewn with faded rose-leaves, scattered as if in some riotous play of children. Captain Carroll brushed them aside hurriedly with his impatient foot, glanced around hastily, then threw himself on the rustic bench at full length and twisted his mustache between his nervous fingers. Then he rose as suddenly, with a few white petals impaled on his gilded spurs and stepped quickly into the open sunlight.

He must have been mistaken! Everything was quiet around him, the far-off sound of wheels in the avenue came faintly, but nothing more.

His eye fell upon the pear-tree, and even in his preoccupation he was struck with the signs of its extraordinary age. Twisted out of all proportion, and knotted with excrescences, it was supported by iron bands and heavy stakes, as if to prop up its senile decay. He tried to interest himself in the various initials and symbols deeply carved in bark, now swollen and half obliterated. As he turned back to the summer-house, he for the first time noticed that the ground rose behind it into a long undulation, on the crest of which the same singular profusion of rose-leaves were scattered. It struck him as being strangely like a gigantic grave, and that the same idea had occurred to the fantastic dispenser of the withered flowers. He was still looking at it, when a rustle in the undergrowth made his heart beat expectantly. A slinking gray shadow crossed the undulation and disappeared in the thicket. It was a coyote. At any other time the extraordinary appearance of this vivid impersonation of the wilderness, so near a centre of human civilization and habitation, would have filled him with wonder. But he had room for only a single thought now. Would SHE come?

Five minutes passed. He no longer waited in the summer-house, but paced impatiently before the entrance to the labyrinth. Another five minutes. He was deceived, undoubtedly. She and her sisters were probably waiting for him and laughing at him on the lawn. He ground his heel into the clover, and threw his switch into the thicket. Yet he would give her one—only one moment more.

"Captain Carroll!"

The voice had been and was to HIM the sweetest in the world; but even a stranger could not have resisted the spell of its musical inflection. He turned quickly. She was advancing towards him from the summer-house.

"Did you think I was coming that way—where everybody could follow me?" she laughed, softly. "No; I came through the thicket over there," indicating the direction with her flexible shoulder, "and nearly lost my slipper and my eyes—look!" She threw back the inseparable lace shawl from her blond head, and showed a spray of myrtle clinging like a broken wreath to her forehead. The young officer remained gazing at her silently.

"I like to hear you speak my name," he said, with a slight hesitation in his breath. "Say it again."

"Car-roll, Car-roll, Car-roll," she murmured gently to herself two or three times, as if enjoying her own native trilling of the r's. "It's a pretty name. It sounds like a song. Don Carroll, eh! El Capitan Don Carroll."

"But my first name is Henry," he said, faintly.

"Enry—that's not so good. Don Enrico will do. But El Capitan Carroll is best of all. I must have it always: El Capitan Carroll!"

"Always?" He colored like a boy.

"Why not?" He was confusedly trying to look through her brown lashes; she was parrying him with the steel of her father's glance. "Come! Well! Captain Carroll! It was not to tell me your name—that I knew already was pretty—Car-roll!" she murmured again, caressing him with her lashes; "it was not for this that you asked me to meet you face to face in this—cold"—she made a movement of drawing her lace over her shoulders—"cold daylight. That belonged to the lights and the dance and the music of last night. It is not for this you expect me to leave my guests, to run away from Monsieur Garnier, who pays compliments, but whose name is not pretty—from Mr. Raymond, who talks OF me when he can't talk TO me. They will say, This Captain Carroll could say all that before them."

"But if they knew," said the young officer, drawing closer to her with a paling face but brightening eyes, "if they knew I had anything else to say, Miss Saltonstall—something—pardon me—did I hurt your hand?—something for HER alone—is there one of them that would have the right to object? Do not think me foolish, Miss Saltonstall—but—I beg—I implore you to tell me before I say more."

"Who would have a right?" said Maruja, withdrawing her hand but not her dangerous eyes. "Who would dare forbid you talking to me of my sister? I have told you that Amita is free—as we all are."

Captain Carroll fell back a few steps and gazed at her with a troubled face. "It is possible that you have misunderstood, Miss Saltonstall?" he faltered. "Do you still think it is Amita that I"—he stopped and added passionately, "Do you remember what I told you?—have you forgotten last night?"

"Last night was—last night!" said Maruja, slightly lifting her shoulders. "One makes love at night—one marries in daylight. In the music, in the flowers, in the moonlight, one says everything; in the morning one has breakfast—when one is not asked to have councils of war with captains and commandantes. You would speak of my sister, Captain Car-roll—go on. Dona Amita Carroll sounds very, very pretty. I shall not object." She held out both her hands to him, threw her head back, and smiled.

He seized her hands passionately. "No, no! you shall hear me—you shall understand me. I love YOU, Maruja—you, and you alone. God knows I can not help it—God knows I would not help it if I could. Hear me. I will be calm. No one can hear us where we stand. I am not mad. I am not a traitor! I frankly admired your sister. I came here to see her. Beyond that, I swear to you, I am guiltless to her—to you. Even she knows no more of me than that. I saw you, Maruja. From that moment I have thought of nothing—dreamed of nothing else."

"That is—three, four, five days and one afternoon ago! You see, I remember. And now you want—what?"

"To let me love you, and you only. To let me be with you. To let me win you in time, as you should be won. I am not mad, though I am desperate. I know what is due to your station and mine—even while I dare to say I love you. Let me hope, Maruja, I only ask to hope."

She looked at him until she had absorbed all the burning fever of his eyes, until her ears tingled with his passionate voice, and then—she shook her head.

"It can not be, Carroll—no! never!"

He drew himself up under the blow with such simple and manly dignity that her eyes dropped for the moment. "There is another, then?" he said, sadly.

"There is no one I care for better than you. No! Do not be foolish. Let me go. I tell you that because you can be nothing to me—you understand, to ME. To my sister Amita, yes."

The young soldier raised his head coldly. "I have pressed you hard, Miss Saltonstall—too hard, I know, for a man who has already had his answer; but I did not deserve this. Good-by."

"Stop," she said, gently. "I meant not to hurt you, Captain Carroll. If I had, it is not thus I would have done. I need not have met you here. Would you have loved me the less if I had avoided this meeting?"

He could not reply. In the depths of his miserable heart, he knew that he would have loved her the same.

"Come," she said, laying her hand softly on his arm, "do not be angry with me for putting you back only five days to where you were when you first entered our house. Five days is not much of happiness or sorrow to forget, is it, Carroll—Captain Carroll?" Her voice died away in a faint sigh. "Do not be angry with me, if—knowing you could be nothing more—I wanted you to love my sister, and my sister to love you. We should have been good friends—such good friends."

"Why do you say, 'Knowing it could be nothing more'?" said Carroll, grasping her hand suddenly. "In the name of Heaven, tell me what you mean!"

"I mean I can not marry unless I marry one of my mother's race. That is my mother's wish, and the will of her relations. You are an American, not of Spanish blood."

"But surely this is not your determination?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "What would you? It is the determination of my people."

"But knowing this"—he stopped; the quick blood rose to his face.

"Go on, Captain Carroll. You would say, Knowing this, why did I not warn you? Why did I not say to you when we first met, You have come to address my sister; do not fall in love with me—I can not marry a foreigner."

"You are cruel, Maruja. But, if that is all, surely this prejudice can be removed? Why, your mother married a foreigner—an American."

"Perhaps that is why," said the girl, quietly. She cast down her long lashes, and with the point of her satin slipper smoothed out the soft leaves of the clover at her feet. "Listen; shall I tell you the story of our house? Stop! some one is coming. Don't move; remain as you are. If you care for me, Carroll, collect yourself, and don't let that man think he has found US ridiculous." Her voice changed from its tone of slight caressing pleading to one of suppressed pride. "HE will not laugh much, Captain Carroll; truly, no."

The figure of Garnier, bright, self-possessed, courteous, appeared at the opening of the labyrinth. Too well-bred to suggest, even in complimentary raillery, a possible sentimental situation, his politeness went further. It was so kind in them to guide an awkward stranger by their voices to the places where he could not stupidly intrude!

"You are just in time to interrupt or to hear a story that I have been threatening to tell," she said, composedly; "an old Spanish legend of this house. You are in the majority now, you two, and can stop me if you choose. Thank you. I warn you it is stupid; it isn't new; but it has the excuse of being suggested by this very spot." She cast a quick look of subtle meaning at Carroll, and throughout her recital appealed more directly to him, in a manner delicately yet sufficiently marked to partly soothe his troubled spirit.

"Far back, in the very old times, Caballeros," said Maruja, standing by the table in mock solemnity, and rapping upon it with her fan, "this place was the home of the coyote. Big and little, father and mother, Senor and Senora Coyotes, and the little muchacho coyotes had their home in the dark canada, and came out over these fields, yellow with wild oats and red with poppies, to seek their prey. They were happy. For why? They were the first; they had no history, you comprehend, no tradition. They married as they liked" (with a glance at Carroll), "nobody objected; they increased and multiplied. But the plains were fertile; the game was plentiful; it was not fit that it should be for the beasts alone. And so, in the course of time, an Indian chief, a heathen, Koorotora, built his wigwam here."

"I beg your pardon," said Garnier, in apparent distress, "but I caught the gentleman's name imperfectly."

Fully aware that the questioner only wished to hear again her musical enunciation of the consonants, she repeated, "Koorotora," with an apologetic glance at Carroll, and went on. "This gentleman had no history or tradition to bother him, either; whatever Senor Coyote thought of the matter, he contented himself with robbing Senor Koorotora's wigwam when he could, and skulking around the Indian's camp at night. The old chief prospered, and made many journeys round the country, but always kept his camp here. This lasted until the time when the holy Fathers came from the South, and Portala, as you have all read, uplifted the wooden Cross on the sea-coast over there, and left it for the heathens to wonder at. Koorotora saw it on one of his journeys, and came back to the canada full of this wonder. Now, Koorotora had a wife."

"Ah, we shall commence now. We are at the beginning. This is better than Senora Coyota," said Garnier, cheerfully.

"Naturally, she was anxious to see the wonderful object. She saw it, and she saw the holy Fathers, and they converted her against the superstitious heathenish wishes of her husband. And more than that, they came here—"

"And converted the land also; is it not so? It was a lovely site for a mission," interpolated Garnier, politely.

"They built a mission and brought as many of Koorotora's people as they could into the sacred fold. They brought them in in a queer fashion sometimes, it is said; dragoons from the Presidio, Captain Carroll, lassoing them and bringing them in at the tails of their horses. All except Koorotora. He defied them; he cursed them and his wife in his wicked heathenish fashion, and said that they too should lose the mission through the treachery of some woman, and that the coyote should yet prowl through the ruined walls of the church. The holy Fathers pitied the wicked man—and built themselves a lovely garden. Look at that pear-tree! There is all that is left of it!"

She turned with a mock heroic gesture, and pointed her fan to the pear-tree. Garnier lifted his hands in equally simulated wonder. A sudden recollection of the coyote of the morning recurred to Carroll uneasily. "And the Indians," he said, with an effort to shake off the feeling; "they, too, have vanished."

"All that remained of them is in yonder mound. It is the grave of the chief and his people. He never lived to see the fulfillment of his prophecy. For it was a year after his death that our ancestor, Manuel Guitierrez, came from old Spain to the Presidio with a grant of twenty leagues to settle where he chose. Dona Maria Guitierrez took a fancy to the canada. But it was a site already in possession of the Holy Church. One night, through treachery, it was said, the guards were withdrawn and the Indians entered the mission, slaughtered the lay brethren, and drove away the priests. The Commandant at the Presidio retook the place from the heathens, but on representation to the Governor that it was indefensible for the peaceful Fathers without a large military guard, the official ordered the removal of the mission to Santa Cruz, and Don Manuel settled his twenty leagues grant in the canada. Whether he or Dona Maria had anything to do with the Indian uprising, no one knows; but Father Pedro never forgave them. He is said to have declared at the foot of the altar that the curse of the Church was on the land, and that it should always pass into the hands of the stranger."

"And that was long ago, and the property is still in the family," said Carroll, hurriedly, answering Maruja's eyes.

"In the last hundred years there have been no male heirs," continued Maruja, still regarding Carroll. "When my mother, who was the eldest daughter, married Don Jose Saltonstall against the wishes of the family, it was said that the curse would fall. Sure enough, Caballeros, it was that year that the forged grants of Micheltorrena were discovered; and in our lawsuit your government, Captain, handed over ten leagues of the llano land to the Doctor West, our neighbor."

"Ah, the gray-headed gentleman who lunched here the other day? You are friends, then? You bear no malice?" said Garnier.

"What would you?" said Maruja, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. "He paid his money to the forger. Your corregidores upheld him, and said it was no forgery," she continued, to Carroll.

In spite of the implied reproach, Carroll felt relieved. He began to be impatient of Garnier's presence, and longed to renew his suit. Perhaps his face showed something of this, for Maruja added, with mock demureness, "It's always dreadful to be the eldest sister; but think what it is to be in the direct line of a curse! Now, there's Amita—SHE'S free to do as she likes, with no family responsibility; while poor me!" She dropped her eyes, but not until they had again sought and half-reproved the brightening eyes of Carroll.

"But," said Garnier, with a sudden change from his easy security and courteous indifference to an almost harsh impatience, "you do not mean to say, Mademoiselle, that you have the least belief in this rubbish, this ridiculous canard?"

Maruja's straight mouth quickly tightened over her teeth. She shot a significant glance at Carroll, but instantly resumed her former manner.

"It matters little what a foolish girl like myself believes. The rest of the family, even the servants and children, all believe it. It is a part of their religion. Look at these flowers around the pear-tree, and scattered on that Indian mound. They regularly find their way there on saints' days and festas. THEY are not rubbish, Monsieur Garnier; they are propitiatory sacrifices. Pereo would believe that a temblor would swallow up the casa if we should ever forego these customary rites. Is it a mere absurdity that forced my father to build these modern additions around the heart of the old adobe house, leaving it untouched, so that the curse might not be fulfilled even by implication?"

She had assumed an air of such pretty earnestness and passion; her satin face was illuminated as by some softly sensuous light within more bewildering than mere color, that Garnier, all devoted eyes and courteous blandishment, broke out: "But this curse must fall harmlessly before the incarnation of blessing; Miss Saltonstall has no more to fear than the angels. She is the one predestined through her charm, through her goodness, to lift it forever."

Carroll could not have helped echoing the aspirations of his rival, had not the next words of his mistress thrilled him with superstitious terror.

"A thousand thanks, Senor. Who knows? But I shall have warning when it falls. A day or two before the awful invader arrives, a coyote suddenly appears in broad daylight, mysteriously, near the casa. This midnight marauder, now banished to the thickest canyon, comes again to prowl around the home of his ancestors. Caramba! Senor Captain, what are you staring at? You frighten me! Stop it, I say!"

She had turned upon him, stamping her little foot in quite a frightened, childlike way.

"Nothing," laughed Carroll, the quick blood returning to his cheek. "But you must not be angry with one for being quite carried away with your dramatic intensity. By Jove! I thought I could see the WHOLE thing while you were speaking—the old Indian, the priest, and the coyote!" His eyes sparkled. The wild thought had occurred to him that perhaps, in spite of himself, he was the young woman's predestined fate; and in the very selfishness of his passion he smiled at the mere material loss of lands and prestige that would follow it. "Then the coyote has always preceded some change in the family fortunes?" he asked, boldly.

"On my mother's wedding-day," said Maruja, in a lower voice, "after the party had come from church to supper in the old casa, my father asked, 'What dog is that under the table?' When they lifted the cloth to look, a coyote rushed from the very midst of the guests and dashed out across the patio. No one knew how or when he entered."

"Heaven grant that we do not find he has eaten our breakfast!" said Garnier, gayly, "for I judge it is waiting us. I hear your sister's voice among the others crossing the lawn. Shall we tear ourselves away from the tombs of our ancestors, and join them?"

"Not as I am looking now, thank you," said Maruja, throwing the lace over her head. "I shall not submit myself to a comparison of their fresher faces and toilets by you two gentlemen. Go you

both and join them. I shall wait and say an Ave for the soul of Koorotora, and slip back alone the way I came."

She had steadily evaded the pleading glance of Carroll, and though her bright face and unblemished toilet showed the inefficiency of her excuse, it was evident that her wish to be alone was genuine and without coquetry. They could only lift their hats and turn regretfully away.

As the red cap of the young officer disappeared amidst the evergreen foliage, the young woman uttered a faint sigh, which she repeated a moment after as a slight nervous yawn. Then she opened and shut her fan once or twice, striking the sticks against her little pale palm, and then, gathering the lace under her oval chin with one hand, and catching her fan and skirt with the other, bent her head and dipped into the bushes. She came out on the other side near a low fence, that separated the park from a narrow lane which communicated with the high road beyond. As she neared the fence, a slinking figure limped along the lane before her. It was the tramp of the early morning.

They raised their heads at the same moment and their eyes met. The tramp, in that clearer light, showed a spare, but bent figure, roughly clad in a miner's shirt and canvas trousers, splashed and streaked with soil, and half hidden in a ragged blue cast-off army overcoat lazily hanging from one shoulder. His thin sun-burnt face was not without a certain sullen, suspicious intelligence, and a look of half-sneering defiance. He stopped, as a startled, surly animal might have stopped at some unusual object, but did not exhibit any other discomposure. Maruja stopped at the same moment on her side of the fence.

The tramp looked at her deliberately, and then slowly lowered his eyes. "I'm looking for the San Jose road, hereabouts. Ye don't happen to know it?" he said, addressing himself to the top of the fence.

It had been said that it was not Maruja's way to encounter man, woman, or child, old or young, without an attempt at subjugation. Strong in her power and salient with fascination, she leaned gently over the fence, and with the fan raised to her delicate ear, made him repeat his question under the soft fire of her fringed eyes. He did so, but incompletely, and with querulous laziness.

"Lookin'—for—San Jose road—here'bouts."

"The road to San Jose," said Maruja, with gentle slowness, as if not unwilling to protract the conversation, "is about two miles from here. It is the high road to the left fronting the plain. There is another way, if—"

"Don't want it! Mornin'."

He dropped his head suddenly forward, and limped away in the sunlight.

CHAPTER III

Breakfast, usually a movable feast at La Mision Perdida, had been prolonged until past midday; the last of the dance guests had flown, and the home party—with the exception of Captain Carroll, who had returned to duty at his distant post—were dispersing; some as riding cavalcades to neighboring points of interest; some to visit certain notable mansions which the wealth of a rapid civilization had erected in that fertile valley. One of these in particular, the work of a breathless millionaire, was famous for the spontaneity of its growth and the reckless extravagance of its appointments.

"If you go to Aladdin's Palace," said Maruja, from the top step of the south porch, to a wagonette of guests, "after you've seen the stables with mahogany fittings for one hundred horses, ask Aladdin to show you the enchanted chamber, inlaid with California woods and paved with gold quartz."

"We would have a better chance if the Princess of China would only go with us," pleaded Garnier, gallantly.

"The Princess will stay at home with her mother, like a good girl," returned Maruja, demurely.

"A bad shot of Garnier's this time," whispered Raymond to Buchanan, as the vehicle rolled away with them. "The Princess is not likely to visit Aladdin again."

"Why?"

"The last time she was there, Aladdin was a little too Persian in his extravagance: offered her his house, stables, and himself."

"Not a bad catch—why, he's worth two millions, I hear."

"Yes; but his wife is as extravagant as himself."

"His WIFE, eh? Ah, are you serious; or must you say something derogatory of the lassie's admirers too?" said Buchanan, playfully threatening him with his cane. "Another word, and I'll throw you from the wagon."

After their departure, the outer shell of the great house fell into a profound silence, so hollow and deserted that one might have thought the curse of Koorotora had already descended upon it. Dead leaves of roses and fallen blossoms from the long line of vine-wreathed columns lay thick on the empty stretch of brown veranda, or rustled and crept against the sides of the house, where the regular breath of the afternoon "trades" began to arise. A few cardinal flowers fell like drops of blood before the open windows of the vacant ball-room, in which the step of a solitary servant echoed faintly. It was Maruja's maid, bringing a note to her young mistress, who, in a flounced morning dress, leaned against the window. Maruja took it, glanced at it quietly, folded it in a long fold, and put it openly in her belt. Captain Carroll, from whom it came, might have carried one of his despatches as methodically. The waiting-woman noticed the act, and was moved to suggest some more exciting confidences.

"The Dona Maruja has, without doubt, noticed the bouquet on her dressing-room table from the Senor Garnier?"

The Dona Maruja had. The Dona Maruja had also learned with pain that, bribed by Judas-like coin, Faquita had betrayed the secrets of her wardrobe to the extent of furnishing a ribbon from a certain yellow dress to the Senor Buchanan to match with a Chinese fan. This was intolerable!

Faquita writhed in remorse, and averred that through this solitary act she had dishonored her family.

The Dona Maruja, however, since it was so, felt that the only thing left to do was to give her the polluted dress, and trust that the Devil might not fly away with her.

Leaving the perfectly consoled Faquita, Maruja crossed the large hall, and, opening a small door, entered a dark passage through the thick adobe wall of the old casa, and apparently left the present century behind her. A peaceful atmosphere of the past surrounded her not only in the low vaulted halls terminating in grilles or barred windows; not only in the square chambers whose dark

rich but scanty furniture was only a foil to the central elegance of the lace-bordered bed and pillows; but in a certain mysterious odor of dried and desiccated religious respectability that penetrated everywhere, and made the grateful twilight redolent of the generations of forgotten Guitierrez who had quietly exhaled in the old house. A mist as of incense and flowers that had lost their first bloom veiled the vista of the long corridor, and made the staring blue sky, seen through narrow windows and loopholes, glitter like mirrors let into the walls. The chamber assigned to the young ladies seemed half oratory and half sleeping-room, with a strange mingling of the convent in the bare white walls, hung only with crucifixes and religious emblems, and of the seraglio in the glimpses of lazy figures, reclining in the deshabelle of short silken saya, low camisa, and dropping slippers. In a broad angle of the corridor giving upon the patio, its balustrade hung with brightly colored serapes and shawls, surrounded by voluble domestics and relations, the mistress of the casa half reclined in a hammock and gave her noonday audience.

Maruja pushed her way through the clustered stools and cushions to her mother's side, kissed her on the forehead, and then lightly perched herself like a white dove on the railing. Mrs. Saltonstall, a dark, corpulent woman, redeemed only from coarseness by a certain softness of expression and refinement of gesture, raised her heavy brown eyes to her daughter's face.

"You have not been to bed, Mara?"

"No, dear. Do I look it?"

"You must lie down presently. They tell me that Captain Carroll returned suddenly this morning."

"Do you care?"

"Who knows? Amita does not seem to fancy Jose, Esteban, Jorge, or any of her cousins. She won't look at Juan Estudillo. The Captain is not bad. He is of the government. He is—"

"Not more than ten leagues from here," said Maruja, playing with the Captain's note in her belt. "You can send for him, dear little mother. He will be glad."

"You will ever talk lightly—like your father! She was not then grieved—our Amita—eh?"

"She and Dorotea and the two Wilsons went off with Raymond and your Scotch friend in the wagonette. She did not cry—to Raymond."

"Good," said Mrs. Saltonstall, leaning back in her hammock. "Raymond is an old friend. You had better take your siesta now, child, to be bright for dinner. I expect a visitor this afternoon—Dr. West."

"Again! What will Pereo say, little mother?"

"Pereo," said the widow, sitting up again in her hammock, with impatience, "Pereo is becoming intolerable. The man is as mad as Don Quixote; it is impossible to conceal his eccentric impertinence and interference from strangers, who can not understand his confidential position in our house or his long service. There are no more mayordomos, child. The Vallejos, the Briones, the Castros, do without them now. Dr. West says, wisely, they are ridiculous survivals of the patriarchal system."

"And can be replaced by intelligent strangers," interrupted Maruja, demurely.

"The more easily if the patriarchal system has not been able to preserve the respect due from children to parents. No, Maruja! No; I am offended. Do not touch me! And your hair is coming down, and your eyes have rings like owls. You uphold this fanatical Pereo because he leaves YOU alone and stalks your poor sisters and their escorts like the Indian, whose blood is in his veins. The saints only can tell if he did not disgust this Captain Carroll into flight. He believes himself the sole custodian of the honor of our family—that he has a sacred mission from this Don Fulano of Koorotora to avert its fate. Without doubt he keeps up his delusions with aguardiente, and passes for a prophet among the silly peons and servants. He frightens the children with his ridiculous stories, and teaches them to decorate that heathen mound as if it were a shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows. He was almost rude to Dr. West yesterday."

"But you have encouraged him in his confidential position here," said Maruja. "You forget, my mother, how you got him to 'duena' Euriqueta with the Colonel Brown; how you let him frighten the young Englishman who was too attentive to Dorotea; how you set him even upon poor Raymond, and failed so dismally that I had to take him myself in hand."

"But if I choose to charge him with explanations that I can not make myself without derogating from the time-honored hospitality of the casa, that is another thing. It is not," said Dona Maria, with a certain massive dignity, that, inconsistent as it was with the weakness of her argument, was not without impressiveness, "it is not yet, Blessed Santa Maria, that we are obliged to take notice ourself of the pretensions of every guest beneath our roof like the match-making, daughter-selling English and Americans. And THEN Pereo had tact and discrimination. Now he is mad! There are strangers and strangers. The whole valley is full of them—one can discriminate, since the old families year by year are growing less."

"Surely not," said Maruja, innocently. "There is the excellent Ramierrez, who has lately almost taken him a wife from the singing-hall in San Francisco; he may yet be snatched from the fire. There is the youthful Jose Castro, the sole padrono of our national bull-fight at Soquel, the famous horse-breaker, and the winner of I know not how many races. And have we not Vincente Peralta, who will run, it is said, for the American Congress. He can read and write—truly I have a letter from him here." She turned back the folded slip of Captain Carroll's note and discovered another below.

Mrs. Saltonstall tapped her daughter's hand with her fan. "You jest at them, yet you uphold Pereo! Go, now, and sleep yourself into a better frame of mind. Stop! I hear the Doctor's horse. Run and see that Pereo receives him properly."

Maruja had barely entered the dark corridor when she came upon the visitor,—a gray, hard-featured man of sixty,—who had evidently entered without ceremony. "I see you did not wait to be announced," she said, sweetly. "My mother will be flattered by your impatience. You will find her in the patio."

"Pereo did not announce me, as he was probably still under the effect of the aguardiente he swallowed yesterday," said the Doctor, dryly. "I met him outside the tienda on the highway the other night, talking to a pair of cut-throats that I would shoot on sight."

"The mayordomo has many purchases to make, and must meet a great many people," said Maruja. "What would you? We can not select HIS acquaintances; we can hardly choose our own," she added, sweetly.

The Doctor hesitated, as if to reply, and then, with a grim "Good-morning," passed on towards the patio. Maruja did not follow him. Her attention was suddenly absorbed by a hitherto unnoticed motionless figure, that seemed to be hiding in the shadow of an angle of the passage, as if waiting for her to pass. The keen eyes of the daughter of Joseph Saltonstall were not deceived. She walked directly towards the figure, and said, sharply, "Pereo!"

The figure came hesitatingly forward into the light of the grated window. It was that of an old man, still tall and erect, though the hair had disappeared from his temples, and hung in two or three straight, long dark elf-locks on his neck. His face, over which one of the bars threw a sinister shadow, was the yellow of a dried tobacco-leaf, and veined as strongly. His garb was a strange mingling of the vaquero and the ecclesiastic—velvet trousers, open from the knee down, and fringed with bullion buttons; a broad red sash around his waist, partly hidden by a long, straight chaqueta; with a circular sacerdotal cape of black broadcloth slipped over his head through a slit-like opening braided with gold. His restless yellow eyes fell before the young girl's; and the stiff, varnished, hard-brimmed sombrero he held in his wrinkled hands trembled.

"You are spying again, Pereo," said Maruja, in another dialect than the one she had used to her mother. "It is unworthy of my father's trusted servant."

"It is that man—that coyote, Dona Maruja, that is unworthy of your father, of your mother, of YOU!" he gesticulated, in a fierce whisper. "I, Pereo, do not spy. I follow, follow the track of the

prowling, stealing brute until I run him down. Yes, it was I, Pereo, who warned your father he would not be content with the half of the land he stole! It was I, Pereo, who warned your mother that each time he trod the soil of La Mision Perdida he measured the land he could take away!" He stopped pantingly, with the insane abstraction of a fixed idea glittering in his eyes.

"And it was YOU, Pereo," she said, caressingly, laying her soft hand on his heaving breast, "YOU who carried me in your arms when I was a child. It was you, Pereo, who took me before you on your pinto horse to the rodeo, when no one knew it but ourselves, my Pereo, was it not?" He nodded his head violently. "It was you who showed me the gallant caballeros, the Pachecos, the Castros, the Alvarados, the Estudillos, the Peraltas, the Vallejos." His head kept time with each name as the fire dimmed in his wet eyes. "You made me promise I would not forget them for the Americanos who were here. Good! That was years ago! I am older now. I have seen many Americans. Well, I am still free!"

He caught her hand, and raised it to his lips with a gesture almost devotional. His eyes softened; as the exaltation of passion passed, his voice dropped into the querulousness of privileged age. "Ah, yes!—you, the first-born, the heiress—of a verity, yes! You were ever a Guitierrez. But the others? Eh, where are they now? And it was always: 'Eh, Pereo, what shall we do to-day? Pereo, good Pereo, we are asked to ride here and there; we are expected to visit the new people in the valley—what say you, Pereo? Who shall we dine to-day?' Or: 'Enquire me of this or that strange caballero—and if we may speak.' Ah, it is but yesterday that Amita would say: 'Lend me thine own horse, Pereo, that I may outstrip this swaggering Americano that clings ever to my side,' ha! ha! Or the grave Dorotea would whisper: 'Convey to this Senor Presumptuous Pomposo that the daughters of Guitierrez do not ride alone with strangers!' Or even the little Liseta would say, he! he! 'Why does the stranger press my foot in his great hand when he helps me into the saddle? Tell him that is not the way, Pereo.' Ha! ha!" He laughed childishly, and stopped. "And why does Senorita Amita now—look—complain that Pereo, old Pereo, comes between her and this Senor Raymond—this maquinista? Eh, and why does SHE, the lady mother, the Castellana, shut Pereo from her councils?" he went on, with rising excitement. "What are these secret meetings, eh?—what these appointments, alone with this Judas—without the family—without ME!"

"Hearken, Pereo," said the young girl, again laying her hand on the old man's shoulder; "you have spoken truly—but you forget—the years pass. These are no longer strangers; old friends have gone—these have taken their place. My father forgave the Doctor—why can not you? For the rest, believe in me—me—Maruja"—she dramatically touched her heart over the international complications of the letters of Captain Carroll and Peralta. "I will see that the family honor does not suffer. And now, good Pereo, calm thyself. Not with aguardiente, but with a bottle of old wine from the Mision refectory that I will send to thee. It was given to me by thy friend, Padre Miguel, and is from the old vines that were here. Courage, Pereo! And thou sayest that Amita complains that thou comest between her and Raymond. So! What matter? Let it cheer thy heart to know that I have summoned the Peraltas, the Pachecos, the Estudillos, all thy old friends, to dine here to-day. Thou wilt hear the old names, even if the faces are young to thee. Courage! Do thy duty, old friend; let them see that the hospitality of La Mision Perdida does not grow old, if its mayordomo does. Faquita will bring thee the wine. No; not that way; thou needest not pass the patio, nor meet that man again. Here, give me thy hand. I will lead thee. It trembles, Pereo! These are not the sinews that only two years ago pulled down the bull at Soquel with thy single lasso! Why, look! I can drag thee; see!" and with a light laugh and a boyish gesture, she half pulled, half dragged him along, until their voices were lost in the dark corridor.

Maruja kept her word. When the sun began to cast long shadows along the veranda, not only the outer shell of La Mision Perdida, but the dark inner heart of the old casa, stirred with awakened life. Single horsemen and carriages began to arrive; and, mingled with the modern turnouts of the home party and the neighboring Americans, were a few of the cumbrous vehicles and chariots of fifty years ago, drawn by gayly trapped mules with bizarre postilions, and occasionally an outrider. Dark faces

looked from the balcony of the patio, a light cloud of cigarette-smoke made the dark corridors the more obscure, and mingled with the forgotten incense. Bare-headed pretty women, with roses starring their dark hair, wandered with childish curiosity along the broad veranda and in and out of the French windows that opened upon the grand saloon. Scrupulously shaved men with olive complexion, stout men with accurately curving whiskers meeting at their dimpled chins, lounged about with a certain unconscious dignity that made them contentedly indifferent to any novelty of their surroundings. For a while the two races kept mechanically apart; but, through the tactful gallantry of Garnier, the cynical familiarity of Raymond, and the impulsive recklessness of Aladdin, who had forsaken his enchanted Palace on the slightest of invitations, and returned with the party in the hope of again seeing the Princess of China, an interchange of civilities, of gallantries, and even of confidences, at last took place. Jovita Castro had heard (who had not?) of the wonders of Aladdin's Palace, and was it of actual truth that the ladies had a bouquet and a fan to match their dress presented to them every morning, and that the gentlemen had a champagne cocktail sent to their rooms before breakfast? "Just you come, Miss, and bring your father and your brothers, and stay a week and you'll see," responded Aladdin, gallantly. "Hold on! What's your father's first name? I'll send a team over there for you tomorrow." "And is it true that you frightened the handsome Captain Carroll away from Amita?" said Dolores Briones, over the edge of her fan to Raymond. "Perfectly," said Raymond, with ingenuous frankness. "I made it a matter of life or death. He was a soldier, and naturally preferred the former as giving him a better chance for promotion." "Ah! we thought it was Maruja you liked best." "That was two years ago," said Raymond, gravely. "And you Americanos can change in that time?" "I have just experienced that it can be done in less," he responded, over the fan, with bewildering significance. Nor were these confidences confined to only one nationality. "I always thought you Spanish gentlemen were very dark, and wore long mustaches and a cloak," said pretty little Miss Walker, gazing frankly into the smooth round face of the eldest Pacheco—"why, you are as fair as I am," "Eaf I tink that, I am for ever mizzarable," he replied, with grave melancholy. In the dead silence that followed he was enabled to make his decorous point. "Because I shall not ezcape ze fate of Narcissus." Mr. Buchanan, with the unrestrained and irresponsible enjoyment of a traveler, entered fully into the spirit of the scene. He even found words of praise for Aladdin, whose extravagance had at first seemed to him almost impious. "Eh, but I'm not prepared to say he is a fool, either," he remarked to his friend the San Francisco banker. "Those who try to pick him up for one," returned the banker, "will find themselves mistaken. His is the prodigality that loosens others' purse-strings besides his own, Everybody contents himself with criticising his way of spending money, but is ready to follow his way of making it."

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