

Aimard Gustave

The Tiger-Slayer: A Tale of the Indian Desert



Gustave Aimard

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of the Indian Desert**

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PREFACE

It is hardly necessary to say anything on behalf of the new aspirant for public favour whom I am now introducing to the reader. He has achieved a continental reputation, and the French regard him proudly as their Fenimore Cooper. It will be found, I trust, on perusal, that the position he has so rapidly assumed in the literature of his country is justified by the reality of his descriptions, and the truthfulness which appears in every page. Gustave Aimard has the rare advantage of having lived for many years as an Indian among the Indians. He is acquainted with their language, and has gone through all the extraordinary phases of a nomadic life in the prairie. Had he chosen to write his life, it would have been one of the most marvellous romances of the age: but he has preferred to weave into his stories the extraordinary events of which he has been witness during his chequered life. Believing that his works only require to be known in order to secure him as favourable a reception in this country as he has elsewhere, it has afforded me much satisfaction to have it in my power to place them in this garb. Some slight modifications have been effected here and there; but in other respects I have presented a faithful rendering.

LASCELLES WRAXALL.

CHAPTER I

LA FERIA DE PLATA

From the earliest days of the discovery of America, its distant shores became the refuge and rendezvous of adventurers of every description, whose daring genius, stifled by the trammels of the old European civilisation, sought fresh scope for action.

Some asked from the New World liberty of conscience – the right of praying to God in their own fashion; others, breaking their sword blades to convert them into daggers, assassinated entire nations to rob their gold, and enrich themselves with their spoils; others, lastly, men of indomitable temperament, with lions' hearts contained in bodies of iron, recognising no bridle, accepting no laws, and confounding liberty with license, formed, almost unconsciously, that formidable association of the "Brethren of the Coast," which for a season made Spain tremble for her possessions, and with which Louis XIV., the Sun King, did not disdain to treat.

The descendants of these extraordinary men still exist in America; and whenever any revolutionary crisis heaves up, after a short struggle, the dregs of the population, they instinctively range themselves round the grandsons of the great adventurers, in the hope of achieving mighty things in their turn under the leadership of heroes.

At the period when we were in America chance allowed us to witness one of the boldest enterprises ever conceived and carried out by these daring adventurers. This *coup de main* created such excitement that for some months it occupied the press, and aroused the curiosity and sympathy of the whole world.

Reasons, which our readers will doubtless appreciate, have induced us to alter the names of the persons who played the principal parts in this strange drama, though we adhere to the utmost exactness as regards the facts.

About ten years back the discovery of the rich Californian plains awakened suddenly the adventurous instincts of thousands of young and intelligent men, who, leaving country and family, rushed, full of enthusiasm, towards the new Eldorado, where the majority only met with misery and death, after sufferings and vexations innumerable.

The road from Europe to California is a long one. Many persons stopped half way; some at Valparaiso; others, again, at Mazatlan or San Blas, though the majority reached San Francisco.

It is not within the scope of our story to give the details, too well known at present, of all the deceptions by which the luckless emigrants were assailed with the first step they took on this land, where they imagined they needed only to stoop and pick up handfuls of gold.

We must ask our readers to accompany us to Guaymas six months after the discovery of the placers.

In a previous work we have spoken of Sonora; but as the history we purpose to narrate passes entirely in that distant province of Mexico, we must give a more detailed account of it here.

Mexico is indubitably the fairest country in the world, and every variety, of climate is found there. But while its territory is immense, the population unfortunately, instead of being in a fair ratio with it, only amounts to seven million, of whom nearly five million belong to the Indian or mixed races.

The Mexican Confederation comprises the federal district of Mexico, twenty-one states, and three territories or provinces, possessing no internal independent administration.

We will say nothing of the government, from the simple reason that up to the present the normal condition of that magnificent and unhappy country has ever been anarchy.

Still, Mexico appears to be a federative republic, at least nominally, although the only recognised power is the sabre.

The first of the seven states, situated on the Atlantic, is Sonora. It extends from north to south, between the Rio Gila and the Rio Mayo. It is separated on the east from the State of Chihuahua by the Sierra Verde, and on the west is bathed by the Vermilion Sea, or Sea of Cortez, as most Spanish maps still insist on calling it.

The State of Sonora is one of the richest in Mexico, owing to the numerous gold mines by which its soil is veined. Unfortunately, or fortunately, according to the point of view from which we like to regard it, Sonora is incessantly traversed by innumerable Indian tribes, against which the inhabitants wage a constant war. Thus the continual engagements with these savage hordes, the contempt of life, and the habit of shedding human blood on the slightest pretext, have given the Sonorians a haughty and decided bearing, and imprinted on them a stamp of nobility and grandeur, which separates them entirely from the other states, and causes them to be recognised at the first glance.

In spite of its great extent of territory and lengthened seaboard, Mexico possesses in reality only two ports on the Pacific – Guaymas and Acapulco. The rest are only roadsteads, in which vessels are afraid to seek shelter, especially when the impetuous *cordónazo* blows from the south-west and upheaves the Gulf of California.

We shall only speak here of Guaymas. This town, founded but a few years back on the mouth of the San José, seems destined to become, ere long, one of the chief Pacific ports. Its military position is admirable. Like all the Spanish American towns, the houses are low, whitewashed, and flat-roofed. The fort, situated on the summit of a rock, in which some cannon rust on carriages peeling away beneath the sun, is of a yellow hue, harmonising with the ochre tinge of the beach. Behind the town rise lofty, scarped mountains, their sides furrowed with ravines hollowed out by the rainy season, and their brown peaks lost in the clouds.

Unhappily, we are compelled to avow that this port, despite of its ambitious title of town, is still a miserable village, without church or hotel. We do not say there are no drinking-shops; on the contrary, as may be imagined in a port so near San Francisco, they swarm.

The aspect of Guaymas is sorrowful; you feel that, in spite of the efforts of Europeans and adventurers to galvanise this population, the Spanish tyranny which has weighed upon it for three centuries has plunged it into a state of moral degradation and inferiority, from which it will require years to raise it.

The day on which our story commences, at about two in the afternoon, in spite of the red-hot sun which poured its beams on the town, Guaymas, generally so quiet at that hour, when the inhabitants, overcome by the heat, are asleep indoors, presented an animated appearance, which would have surprised the stranger whom accident had taken there at that moment, and would have caused him to suppose, most assuredly, that he was about to witness one of those thousand *pronunciamientos* which annually break out in this wretched province. Still, it was nothing of the sort. The military authority, represented by General San Benito, Governor of Guaymas, was, or seemed to be, satisfied with the government. The smugglers, leperos, and hiaquis continued in a tolerably satisfactory state, without complaining too much of the powers that were. Whence, then, the extraordinary agitation that prevailed in the town? What reason was strong enough to keep this indolent population awake, and make it forget its siesta?

For three days the town had been a prey to the gold fever. The governor, yielding to the supplications of several considerable merchants, had authorised for five days a *feria de plata*, or, literally, a silver fair.

Gambling tables, held by persons of distinction, were publicly open in the principal houses; but the fact which gave this festival a strangeness impossible to find elsewhere was, that monte tables were displayed in every street in the open air, on which gold tinkled, and where everybody possessed of a real had the right to risk it, without distinction of caste or colour.

In Mexico everything is done differently from other countries. The inhabitants of this country, having no reminiscences of the past which they wish to forget, no faith in the future in which they

do not believe, only live for the present, and exist with that feverish energy peculiar to races which feel their end approaching.

The Mexicans have two marked tastes which govern them entirely, play and love. We say tastes, and not passions, for the Mexicans are not capable of those great emotions which conquer the will, and overthrow the human economy by developing an energetic power of action.

The groups round the monte tables were numerous and animated. Still, everything went on with an order and tranquility which nothing troubled, although no agent of the government was walking about the streets to maintain a good intelligence and watch the gamblers.

About halfway up the Calle de la Merced, one of the widest in Guaymas, and opposite a house of goodly appearance, there stood a table covered with a green baize and piled up with gold ounces, behind which a man of about thirty, with a crafty face, was stationed, who, with a pack of cards in his hand, and a smile on his lips, invited by the most insinuating remarks the numerous spectators who surrounded him to tempt fortune.

"Come, caballeros," he said in a honeyed tone, while turning a provocative glance upon the wretched men, haughtily draped in their rags, who regarded him with extreme indifference, "I cannot always win; luck is going to turn, I am sure. Here are one hundred ounces: who will cover them?"

No one answered.

The banker, not allowing himself to be defeated, let a tinkling cascade of ounces glide through his fingers, whose tawny reflection was capable of turning the most resolute head.

"It is a nice sum, caballeros, one hundred ounces: with them the ugliest man is certain of gaining the smiles of beauty. Come, who will cover them?"

"Bah," a lepero said, with a disdainful air, "what are one hundred ounces? Had you not won my last *tlaco*, Tío Lucas, I would cover them, that I would."

"I am in despair, Señor Cucharés," the banker replied with a bow, "that luck was so much against you, and I should feel delighted if you would allow me to lend you an ounce."

"You are jesting," the lepero said, drawing himself up haughtily. "Keep your gold, Tío Lucas; I know the way to procure as much as I want, whenever I think proper; but," he added, bowing with the most exquisite politeness, "I am not the less grateful to you for your generous offer."

And he offered the banker, across the table, his hand, which the latter pressed with great cordiality.

The lepero profited by the occasion to pick up with his free hand a pile of twenty ounces that was in his reach.

Tío Lucas had great difficulty in restraining himself, but he feigned not to have seen anything.

After this interchange of good offices there was a moment's silence. The spectators had seen everything that occurred, and therefore awaited with some curiosity the *dénouement* of this scene. Señor Cucharés was the first to renew the conversation.

"Oh!" he suddenly shouted, striking his forehead, "I believe, by Nuestra Señora de la Merced, that I am losing my head."

"Why so, caballero?" Tío Lucas asked, visibly disturbed by this exclamation.

"Caray! It's very simple," the other went on. "Did I not tell you just now that you had won all my money?"

"You certainly said so, and these caballeros heard it with me: to your last ochavo – those were your very words."

"I remember it perfectly, and it is that which makes me so mad."

"What!" the banker exclaimed with feigned astonishment, "You are mad because I won from you?"

"Oh, no, it's not that."

"What is it, then?"

"Caramba! It is because I made a mistake, and I have some ounces still left."

"Impossible!"

"Just see, then."

The lepero put his hand in his pocket, and, with unparalleled effrontery, displayed to the banker the gold he had just stolen from him. But the latter did not wince.

"It is incredible," said he.

"Eh?" the lepero interjected, fixing a flashing eye on the other.

"Yes, it is incredible that you, Señor Cucharés, should have made such a slip of memory."

"Well, as I have remembered it, all can be set right now; we can continue our game."

"Very good: one hundred ounces is the stake."

"Oh no! I haven't that amount."

"Nonsense! Feel in your pockets again."

"It is useless; I know I haven't got it."

"That is really most annoying."

"How so?"

"Because I have vowed not to play for less."

"Then you won't cover twenty ounces?"

"I cannot; I would not cover one short of a hundred."

"H'm!" the lepero went on, knitting his brows, "is that meant for an insult, Tío Lucas?"

The banker had no time to reply; for a man of about thirty, mounted on a magnificent black horse, had stopped for a few seconds before the table, and, while carelessly smoking his cigar, listened to the discussion between the banker and the lepero.

"Done for one hundred ounces," he said, as he cleared a way by means of his horse's chest up to the table, on which he dropped a purse full of gold.

The two speakers suddenly raised their heads.

"Here are the cards, caballero," the banker hastened to say, glad of an incident which temporarily freed him from a dangerous opponent. Cucharés shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and looked at the newcomer.

"Oh!" he muttered to himself, "the Tigrero! Has he come for Anita? I must know that."

And he gently drew nearer the stranger, and presently stood by his side.

He was a tall man, with an olive complexion, a piercing glance, and an open and resolute face. His dress, of the greatest richness, glistened with gold and diamonds. He wore, slightly inclined over his left ear, a broad brimmed sombrero, surrounded by a golilla of fine gold: his spencer of blue cloth, embroidered with silver, allowed a dazzling white shirt to be seen, under the collar of which passed a cravat of China crape, fastened with a diamond ring; his calzoneras, drawn up round the hips by a red silk scarf with gold fringed ends and two rows of diamond buttons, were open at the side, and allowed his *calzón* to float beneath; he wore *botas vaqueras* (or herdsmen) boots of figured leather, richly embroidered, attached below the knee by a garter of silver tissue; while his *manga*, glistening with gold, hung tastefully from his right shoulder.

His horse, with a small head and legs fine as spindles, was splendidly accoutred: *las armas de agua* and the *zarapé* fastened to the croup, and the magnificent *anquera* adorned with steel chains, completed a caparison of which we can form no idea in Europe.

Like all Mexicans of a certain class when travelling, the stranger was armed from head to foot; that is to say, in addition to the lasso fastened to the saddle, and the rifle laid across the saddle-bow, he had also by his side a long sword, and a pair of pistols in his girdle, without reckoning the knife whose silver inlaid hilt could be seen peeping out of one of his boots.

Such as we have described him, this man was the perfect type of a Mexican of Sonora – ever ready for peace or war, fearing the one no more than he despised the other. After bowing politely to Tío Lucas he took the cards the latter offered him, and shuffled them while looking around him.

"Ah!" he said, casting a friendly glance to the lepero, "you're here, gossip Cucharés?"

"At your service, Don Martial," the other replied, lifting his hand to the ragged brim of his beaver.

The stranger smiled.

"Be good enough to cut for me while I light my pajillo."

"With pleasure," the lepero exclaimed.

El Tigrero, or Don Martial, whichever the reader may please to call him, took a gold *mechero* from his pocket, and carelessly struck a light while the lepero cut the cards.

"Señor," the latter said in a piteous voice.

"Well?"

"You have lost."

"Good. Tío Lucas, take a hundred ounces from my purse."

"I have them, your excellency," the banker replied. "Would you please to play again?"

"Certainly, but not for such trifles. I should like to feel interested in the game."

"I will cover any stake your excellency may like to name," the banker said, whose practised eye had discovered in the stranger's purse, amid a decent number of ounces, some forty diamonds of the purest water.

"H'm! Are you really ready to cover any stake I name?"

"Yes."

The stranger looked at him sharply.

"Even if I played for a thousand gold ounces?"

"I would cover double that if your excellency dares to stake it," the baker said imperturbably.

A contemptuous smile played for the second time on the horseman's haughty lips.

"I do dare it," he said.

"Two thousand ounces, then?"

"Agreed."

"Shall I cut?" Cucharés asked timidly.

"Why not?" the other answered lightly.

The lepero seized the cards with a hand trembling from emotion. There was a hum of expectation from the gamblers who surrounded the table. At this moment a window opened in the house before which Tío Lucas had established his monte table, and a charming girl leant carelessly over the balcony, looking down into the street.

The stranger turned to the balcony, and rising in his stirrups, —

"I salute the lovely Anita," he said, as he doffed his hat and bowed profoundly.

The girl blushed, bent on him an expressive glance from beneath her long velvety eyelashes, but made no reply.

"You have lost, excellency," Tío Lucas said with a joyous accent, which he could not completely conceal.

"Very good," the stranger replied, without even looking at him, so fascinated was he by the charming apparition on the balcony.

"You play no more?"

"On the contrary, I double."

"What!" exclaimed the banker, falling back a step in spite of himself at this proposition.

"No, I am wrong; I have something else to propose."

"What is it, excellency?"

"How; much have you there?" he said, pointing to the table with a disdainful gesture.

"Why, at least seven thousand ounces."

"Not more? That's very little."

The spectators regarded with a stupor, mingled with terror, this extraordinary man, who played for ounces and diamonds as others did for ochavos. The girl became pale. She turned a supplicating glance to the stranger.

"Play no more," she murmured in a trembling voice.

"Thanks," he exclaimed, "thanks, Señorita; your beautiful eyes will bring me a fortune. I would give all the gold on the table for the súchil flower you hold in your hand, and which your lips have touched."

"Do not play, Don Martial," the girl repeated, as she retired and closed the window. But, through accident or some other reason, her hand let loose the flower. The horseman made his steed bound forward, caught it in its flight, and buried it in his bosom, after having kissed it several times.

"Cucharés," he then said to the lepero, "turn up a card."

The latter obeyed. "Seis de copas!" he said.

"Voto a brios!" the stranger exclaimed, "the colour of the heart we shall win. Tío Lucas, I will back this card against all the gold you have on your table."

The banker turned pale and hesitated; the spectators had their eyes fixed upon him.

"Bah!" he thought after a minute's reflection, "It is impossible for him to win. I accept, excellency," he then added aloud.

"Count the sum you have."

"That is unnecessary, Señor; there are nine thousand four hundred and fifty gold ounces."¹

At the statement of this formidable amount the spectators gave vent to a mingled shout of admiration and covetousness.

"I fancied you richer," the stranger said ironically. "Well, so be it then."

"Will you cut this time, excellency?"

"No, I am thoroughly convinced you are going to lose, Tío Lucas, and I wish you to be quite convinced that I have won fairly. In consequence, do me the pleasure of cutting, yourself. You will then be the artisan of your own ruin, and be unable to reproach anybody."

The spectators quivered with pleasure on seeing the chivalrous way in which the stranger behaved. At this moment the street was thronged with people whom the rumour of this remarkable stake had collected from every part of the town. A deadly silence prevailed through the crowd, so great was the interest that each felt in the *dénouement* of this grand and hitherto unexampled match. The banker wiped the perspiration that beaded on his livid brow, and seized the first card with a trembling hand. He balanced it for a few seconds between finger and thumb with manifest hesitation.

"Make haste," Cucharés cried to him with a grin.

Tío Lucas mechanically let the card fall as he turned his head away.

"Seis de copas!" the lepero shouted in a hoarse voice.

The banker uttered a yell of pain.

"I have lost!" he muttered.

"I was sure of it," the horseman said, still impassible. "Cucharés," he added, "carry that table and the gold upon it to Doña Anita. I shall expect you tonight you know where."

The lepero bowed respectfully. Assisted by two sturdy fellows, he executed the order he had just received, and entered the house, while the stranger started off at a gallop; and Tío Lucas, slightly recovered from the stunning blow he had received, philosophically twisted a cigar, repeating to those who forced their consolations upon him, —

"I have lost, it is true, but against a very fair player, and for a good stake. Bah! I shall have my revenge some day."

Then, so soon as the cigarette was made, the poor cleaned-out banker lighted it and walked off very calmly. The crowd, having no further excuse for remaining, also disappeared in its turn.

¹ About £31,500 Fact.

CHAPTER II

DON SYLVA DE TORRÉS

Guaymas is quite a new town, built somewhat from day to day according to the fancy of the emigrants, and hence no regular lines of streets have been maintained. However, we had better mention here that, with the exception of a few houses to which that name may be fairly given, all the rest are frightful dens, built of mud, and deplorably dirty.

In the Calle de la Merced, the principal, or to speak more truthfully, the only street in the town (for the others are only alleys), stood a one-storied house, ornamented with a balcony, and a peristyle supported by four pillars. The front was covered by a coating of lime of dazzling whiteness, and the roof was flat.

The proprietor of this house was one of the richest *mineros* in Sonora, and possessor of a dozen mines, all in work; he also devoted himself to cattle breeding, and owned several haciendas scattered over the province, the smallest of which was equal in size to an English county.

I am certain that, if Don Sylva de Torr s had wished to liquidate his fortune, and discover what he was really worth, it would have realised several millions.

Don Sylva had come to live in Guaymas some months back, where he ordinarily only paid flying visits, and those at lengthened intervals. This time, contrary to his usual custom, he had brought his daughter Anita with him. Hence the entire population of Guaymas was a prey to the greatest curiosity, and all eyes were fixed on Don Sylva's house, so extraordinary did the conduct of the *hacendero* appear.

Shut up in his house, the doors of which only opened to a few privileged persons, Don Sylva did not seem to trouble himself the least in the world about the gossips; for he was engaged in realising certain projects, whose importance prevented him noticing what was said or thought of him.

Though the Mexicans are excessively rich, and like to do honour to their wealth, they have no idea of comfort. The utmost carelessness prevails among them. Their luxury, if I may be allowed to employ the term, is brutal, without any discernment or real value.

These men, principally accustomed to the rude life of the American deserts, to struggle continually against the changes of a climate which is frequently deadly, and the unceasing aggressions of the Indians, who surround them on all sides, camp rather than live in the towns, fancying they have done everything when they have squandered gold and diamonds.

The Mexican houses are in evidence to prove the correctness of our opinion. With the exception of the inevitable European piano, which swaggers in the corner of every drawing room, you only see a few clumsy *butacas*, rickety tables, bad engravings hanging on the whitewashed walls, and that is all.

Don Sylva's house differed in no respect from the others; and the master's horses on returning to the stable from the watering place, had to cross the *sal n*, all dripping as they were, and leaving manifest traces of their passage.

At the moment when we introduce the reader into Don Sylva's house, two persons, male and female, were sitting in the saloon talking, or at least exchanging a few words at long intervals.

They were Don Sylva and his daughter Anita. The crossing of the Spanish and Indian races has produced the most perfect plastic type to be found anywhere. Don Sylva, although nearly fifty years of age, did not appear to be forty. He was tall, upright, and his face, though stern, had great gentleness imprinted upon it. He wore the Mexican dress in its most rigorous exactness; but his clothes were so rich, that few of his countrymen could have equalled it, much less surpassed it.

Anita who reclined on a sofa, half buried in masses of silk and gauze, like a hummingbird concealed in the moss, was a charming girl of eighteen at the most, whose black eyes, modestly shaded by long velvety lashes, were full of voluptuous promise, which was not gainsaid by the undulating and

serpentine outlines of her exquisitely modelled body. Her slightest gestures had grace and majesty completed by the ravishing smile of her coral lips. Her complexion, slightly gilded by the American sun, imparted to her face an expression impossible to render; and lastly her whole person exhaled a delicious perfume of innocence and candour which attracted sympathy and inspired love.

Like all Mexican women when at home, she merely wore a light robe of embroidered muslin; her *rebozo* was thrown negligently over her shoulders, and a profusion of jasmine flowers was intertwined in her bluish-black tresses. Anita seemed in deep thought. At one moment the arch of her eyebrows was contracted by some thought that annoyed her, her bosom heaved and her dainty foot, cased in a slipper lined with swan's down, impatiently tapped on the ground.

Don Sylva also appeared to be dissatisfied. After directing a severe glance at his daughter, he rose, and drawing near her, said, —

"You are mad, Anita: your behaviour is extravagant. A young, well-born girl ought not, in any case to act as you have just done."

The young Mexican girl only answered by a significant pout, and an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders.

Her father continued, —

"Especially," he said, laying a stress on each word, "in your position as regards the Count de Lhorailles."

The girl started as if a serpent had stung her, and fixing an interrogatory glance on the hacendero's immovable face, she replied, —

"I do not understand you, my father."

"You do not understand me, Anita? I cannot believe it. Have I not formally promised your hand to the count?"

"What matter, if I do not love him? Do you wish to condemn me to lifelong misery?"

"On the contrary, I regarded your happiness in this union. I have only you, Anita, to console me for the mournful loss of your beloved mother. Poor child! You are still, thank Heaven, at that happy age when the heart does not know itself, and when the words 'happiness, unhappiness,' have no meaning. You do not love the count, you say. All the better — your heart is free. When, at a later date, you have had occasion to appreciate the noble qualities of the man I give you as husband, you will then thank me for having insisted on a marriage, which today causes you so much vexation."

"Stay, father," the girl said with an air of vexation. "My heart is not free, and you are well aware of the fact."

"I know, Doña Anita de Torrés," the hacendero answered severely, "that a love unworthy yourself and me cannot enter your heart. Through my ancestors I am a Christiano Viejo; and if a few drops of Indian blood be mingled in my veins, what I owe to the memory of my ancestors is only the more deeply engraved on my mind. The first of our family, Antonia de Sylva, lieutenant to Hernando Cortez, married, it is true, a Mexican princess of the family of Moctecuhzoma, but all the other branches are Spanish."

"Are we not Mexicans then, my father?"

"Alas! My poor child, who can say who we are and what are we? Our unhappy country, since it shook off the Spanish yoke, has been struggling convulsively, and is exhausted by the incessant efforts of those ambitious men, who in a few years will have robbed it even of that nationality which we had so much difficulty in achieving. These disgraceful contests render us the laughing stocks of other people, and above all, cause the joy of our greedy neighbours, who with their eyes invariably fixed upon us, are preparing to enrich themselves with our spoils, of which they have pilfered some fragments already by robbing us of several of our rich provinces."

"But, father, I am a woman, and therefore unaffected by politics. I have nothing to do with the *gringos*."

"More than you can imagine, my child. I do not wish that at a given day the immense property my ancestors and myself have acquired by our toil should become the prey of these accursed heretics. In order to save it, I have resolved on marrying you to the Count de Lhorailles. He is a Frenchman, and belongs to one of the noblest families of that country. Besides he is a handsome and brave gentleman, scarcely thirty years of age, who combines the most precious moral qualifications with the physical qualities. He is a member of a powerful and respected nation which knows how to protect its subjects, in whatever corner of the world they may be. By marrying him your fortune is sheltered from every political reverse."

"But I do not love him, father."

"Nonsense, my dear babe. Do not talk longer of that. I am willing to forget the folly of which you were guilty a few moments back, but on condition that you forget that man, Martial."

"Never!" she exclaimed resolutely.

"Never! That is a long time, daughter. You will reflect, I am convinced. Besides, who is this man? What is his family? Do you know? He is called Martial el Tigrero. Voto a Dios, that is not a name! That man saved your life by stopping your horse when it ran away. Well, is that a reason for him to fall in love with you, and you with him? I offered him a magnificent reward, which he refused with the most supreme disdain. There is an end of it, then; let him leave me at peace. I have, and wish for, nothing more to do with him."

"I love him, father," the young girl repeated.

"Listen, Anita. You would make me angry, if I did not put a restraint on myself. Enough on that head. Prepare to receive the Count de Lhorailles in a proper manner. I have sworn that you shall be his wife, and, Cristo! It shall be so, if I have to drag you by force to the altar!"

The hacendero pronounced these words with such resolution in his voice, and with such a fierce accent, that the girl saw it would be better for her to appear to yield, and put a stop to a discussion which would only grow more embittered, and perhaps have grave consequences. She let her head fall, and was silent, while her father walked up and down the room with a very dissatisfied air.

The door was partly opened, and a peon thrust his head discreetly through the crevice.

"What do you want?" Don Sylva asked as he stopped.

"Excellency," the man replied, "a caballero, followed by four others bearing a table covered with pieces of gold, requests an audience of the señorita."

The hacendero shot a glance at his daughter full of expressiveness. Doña Anita let her head sink in confusion. Don Sylva reflected for a moment, and then his countenance cleared.

"Let him come in," he said.

The peon withdrew; but he returned in a few seconds, preceding an old acquaintance, Cucharés, still enwrapped in his ragged zarapé, and directing the four leperos who carried the table. On entering the saloon, Cucharés uncovered respectfully, courteously saluted the hacendero and his daughter, and with a sign ordered the porters to deposit the table in the centre of the apartment.

"Señorita," he said in a honied voice, "the Señor Don Martial, faithful to the pledge he had made you, humbly supplicates you to accept his gains at monte, as a feeble testimony of his devotion and admiration."

"You rascal!" Don Sylva angrily exclaimed as he took a step toward him "Do you know in whose presence you are?"

"In that of Doña Anita and her highly-respected parent," the scamp replied imperturbably, as he wrapped himself majestically in his tatters. "I have not, to my knowledge, failed in the respect I owe to both."

"Withdraw at once, and take with you this gold, which does not concern my daughter."

"Excuse me, excellency, I received orders to bring the gold here, and with your permission I will leave it. Don Martial would not forgive me if I acted otherwise."

"I do not know Don Martial, as it pleases you to style the man who sent you. I wish to have nothing in common with him."

"That is possible, excellency; but it is no affair of mine. You can have an explanation with him if you think proper. For my part, as my mission is accomplished, I kiss your hands."

And, after bowing once more to the two, the lepero went off majestically, followed by his four acolytes, with measured steps.

"See there," exclaimed Don Sylva violently, "see there, my daughter, to what insults your folly exposes me!"

"An insult, father?" she replied timidly. "On the contrary, I think that Don Martial has acted like a true caballero, and that he gives me a great proof of his love. That sum is enormous."

"Ah!" Don Sylva said wrathfully, "that is the way you take it. Well, I will act as a caballero also, *voto a brios!* As you shall see. Come here, someone!"

Several peons came in.

"Open the windows!"

The servants obeyed. The crowd was not yet dispersed, and a large number of persons was still collected round the house. The hacendero leant out and by a wave of his hand requested silence. The crowd was instinctively silent, and drew nearer, guessing that something in which it was interested was about to happen.

"Señores caballeros y amigos," the hacendero said in a powerful voice, "a man whom I do not know has dared to offer to my daughter the money he has won at monte. Doña Anita spurns such presents, especially when they come from a person with whom she does not wish to have any connection, friendly or otherwise. She begs me to distribute this gold among you, as she will not touch it in any way: she desires thus to prove, in the presence of you all, the contempt she feels for a man who has dared to offer her such an insult."

The speech improvised by the hacendero was drowned by the frenzied applause of the leperos and other assembled beggars, whose eyes sparkled with greed. Anita felt the burning tears swelling her eyelids. In spite of all her efforts to remain undisturbed, her heart was almost broken.

Troubling himself not at all about his daughter, Don Sylva ordered his servants to cast the ounces into the street. A shower of gold then literally began falling on the wretches, who rushed with incredible ardour on this new species of manna. The Calle de la Merced offered, at that moment, the most singular sight imaginable. The gold poured and poured on; it seemed to be inexhaustible. The beggars leaped like coyotes on the precious metal, overthrowing and trampling underfoot the weaker.

At the height of the shower a horseman came galloping up. Astonished, confounded by what he saw, he stopped for a moment to look around him; then he drove his spurs into his horse, and by dealing blows of his chicote liberally all around, he succeeded in clearing the dense crowd, and reached the hacendero's house, which he entered.

"Here is the count," Don Sylva said laconically to his daughter.

In fact, within a minute that gentleman entered the saloon.

"Halloh!" he said, stopping at the doorway, "What strange notion is this of yours, Don Sylva? On my soul, you are amusing yourself by throwing millions out of the window, to the still greater amusement of the leperos and other rogues of the same genus!"

"Ah, 'tis you, señor Conde," the hacendero replied calmly; "you are welcome. I shall be with you in an instant. Only these few handfuls, and it will be finished."

"Don't hurry yourself," the count said with a laugh. "I confess that the fancy is original;" and drawing near the young lady, whom he saluted with exquisite politeness, he continued, —

"Would you deign, Señorita, to give me the word of this enigma, which, I confess, interests me in the highest degree?"

"Ask my father, Señor," she answered with a certain dryness, which rendered conversation impossible.

The count feigned not to notice this rebuff; he bowed with a smile, and falling into a *butaca*, said coolly, —

"I will wait; I am in no hurry."

The hacendero, in telling his daughter that the gentleman he intended for her husband was a handsome man, had in no respect flattered him. Count Maxime Gaëtan de Lhorailles was a man of thirty at the most, well built and active, and slightly above the middle height. His light hair allowed him to be recognised as a son of the north; his features were fine, his glance expressive, and his hands and feet denoted race. Everything about him indicated the gentleman of an old stock; and if Don Sylva was not more deceived about the moral qualities than he had been about the physical, Count de Lhorailles was really a perfect gentleman.

At length the hacendero exhausted all the gold Cucharés had brought: he then hurled the table into the street, ordered the windows to be closed, and came back to take a seat by the side of the count, rubbing his hands.

"There," he said with a joyous air, "that's finished. Now I am quite at your service."

"First one word."

"Say it."

"Excuse me. You are aware that I am a stranger, and such as thirsting for instruction."

"I am listening to you."

"Since I have lived in Mexico I have seen many extraordinary customs. I ought to be *blasé* about novelties; still, I must confess that what I have just seen surpasses anything I have hitherto witnessed. I should like to be certain whether this is a custom of which I was hitherto ignorant."

"What are you talking about?"

"Why, what you were doing when I arrived — that gold you were dropping like a beneficent dew on the bandits of every description collected before your house; ill weeds, between ourselves, to be thus bedewed."

Don Sylva burst into a laugh.

"No, that is not a custom of ours," he replied.

"Very good. Then, you were indulging in the regal pastime of throwing a million to the scum. Plague! Don Sylva, a man must be as rich as yourself to allow such a gratification."

"Things are not as you fancy."

"Still I saw it raining ounces."

"True, but they did not belong to me."

"Better and better still. That renders the affair more complicated; you heighten my curiosity immensely."

"I will satisfy it."

"I am all attention, for the affair is growing as interesting to me as a story in the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"H'm!" the hacendero said, tossing his head, "It interests you more than you perhaps suspect."

"How so?"

"You shall judge."

Doña Anita was in torture; she knew not what to do. Seeing that her father was about to divulge all to the count, she did not feel in herself the courage to be present at such a revelation, and rose tottering.

"Gentlemen," she said in a feeble voice, "I feel indisposed; be kind enough to allow me to retire."

"Really," the count said, as he hurried towards her, and offered her his arm to support her, "you are pale, Doña Anita. Allow me to accompany you to your apartment."

"I thank you, caballero, but I am strong enough to proceed there alone, and, while duly grateful for your offer, pray permit me to decline it."

"As you please, señorita," the count replied, inwardly piqued by this refusal.

Don Sylva entertained for a moment the idea of ordering his daughter to remain; but the poor girl turned towards him so despairing a glance that he did not feel the courage to impose on her a longer torture.

"Go my child," he said to her.

Anita hastened to take advantage of the permission; she left the *salón*, and sought refuge in her bedroom, where she sank into a chair, and burst into tears.

"What is the matter with Doña Anita?" the count asked with sympathy, so soon as she had gone.

"Vapours – headache – what do I know?" the hacendero replied, shrugging his shoulders. "All young girls are like that. In a few minutes she will have forgotten it."

"All the better. I confess to you that I was alarmed."

"But now that we are alone, would you not like me to give you the explanation of the enigma which appeared to interest you so much?"

"On the contrary, speak without further delay: for, on my part, I have several important matters to impart to you."

CHAPTER III

THE TWO HUNTERS

About five miles from the town is the village of San José de Guaymas, commonly known as the *Rancho*.

This miserable *pueblo* is merely composed of a square of moderate size, intersected at right angles by tumbledown cabins, which are inhabited by Hiaqui Indians (a large number of whom hire themselves out annually at Guaymas to work as porters, carpenters, masons, &c), and all those nameless adventurers who have thronged to the shores of the Pacific since the discovery of the Californian plains.

The road from Guaymas to San José runs through a parched and sandy plain, on which only a few nopales and stunted cactuses grow, whose withered branches are covered with dust, and produce the effect of white phantoms at night.

The evening of the day on which our story commences, a horseman, folded to the eyes in a zarapé, was following this road, and proceeding in a gallop to the Rancho.

The sky, of a dark azure, was studded with glistening stars; the moon, which had traversed one-third of her course, illumined the silent plain, and indefinitely prolonged the tall shadows of the trees on the naked earth.

The horseman, doubtlessly anxious to reach the end of a journey which was not without peril at this advanced hour, incessantly urged on with spur and voice his horse, which did not, however, appear to need this constantly-renewed encouragement.

He had all but crossed the immense uncultivated plains, and was just entering the woods which surround the Rancho, when his horse suddenly leaped on one side, and pricked up its ears in alarm. A sharp sound announced that the horseman had cocked his pistols; and, when this precaution had been taken against all risk, he turned an inquiring glance around.

"Fear nothing, caballero," a frank and sympathetic voice exclaimed; "but have the kindness to go a little farther to the right, if it makes no difference to you."

The stranger looked, and saw a man kneeling under his steed's feet, and holding in his hands the head of a horse, which was lying nearly across the road.

"What on earth are you doing there?" he asked.

"You can see," the other replied sorrowfully, "I am bidding good-by to my poor companion. A man must have lived a long time in the desert to appreciate the value of such a friend as he was."

"That is true," the stranger remarked, and immediately dismounting, added, "Is he dead then?"

"No, not yet; but, unfortunately, he is as bad as if he were."

With these words he sighed.

The stranger bent over the animal, whose body was agitated by a nervous quivering, opened its eyelids, and regarded it attentively.

"Your horse has had a stroke," he said a moment later. "Let me act."

"Oh!" the other exclaimed, "do you think you can save him?"

"I hope so," the first speaker laconically observed.

"*Caray!* If you do that, we shall be friends for life. Poor Negro! My old comrade!"

The horseman bathed the animal's temples and nostrils with rum and water. At the end of a few moments, the horse appeared slightly recovered, his faded eyes began to sparkle again, and he tried to rise.

"Hold him tight," the improvised surgeon said.

"Be quiet, then, my good beast. Come, Negro, my boy, *quieto, quieto*; it is for your good," he said soothingly.

The intelligent animal seemed to understand. It turned its head towards its master, and answered him with a plaintive neigh. The horseman, during this period, had been feeling in his girdle; and bending again over the horse, —

"Mind and hold him tightly," he again recommended.

"What are you going to do?"

"Bleed him."

"Yes, that is it. I knew it; but unfortunately I did not dare risk doing it myself, through fear of killing the horse."

"All right?"

"Go on."

The horse made a hasty move, caused by the coldness of the wound; but its master held it down and checked its struggles. The two men suffered a moment of anxiety: the blood did not issue. At last a black drop appeared in the wound, then a second, speedily followed by a long jet of black and foaming blood.

"He is saved," the stranger said, as he wiped his lancet and returned it to his fob.

"I will repay you this, on the word of Belhumeur!" the owner of the horse said with much emotion. "You have rendered me one of those services which are never forgotten."

And, by an irresistible impulse, he held out his hand to the man who had so providentially crossed his path. The latter warmly returned the vigorous pressure. Henceforth all was arranged between them. These two men who a few moments previously were ignorant of each other's existence, were friends, attached by one of those services which in American countries possess an immense value.

The blood gradually lost its black tinge; it became vermillion, and flowed abundantly. The breathing of the panting steed had grown easy and regular. The first stranger made a copious bleeding, and when he considered the horse in a fair way of recovery he stopped the effusion.

"And now," he said, "what do you propose doing?"

"My faith, I don't know. Your help has been so useful to me that I should like to follow your advice."

"Where were you going when this accident occurred?"

"To the Rancho."

"I am going there too. We are only a few yards from it. You will get up behind me. We will lead your horse, and start when you please."

"I ask nothing better. You believe that my horse cannot carry me?"

"Perhaps he could do so, for he is a noble animal; but it would be imprudent, and you would run a risk of killing him. It would be better, believe me, to act as I suggested."

"Yes; but I am afraid —"

"What of?" the other sharply interrupted him. "Are we not friends?"

"That is true. I accept."

The horse sprang up somewhat actively, and the two men who had met so strangely started at once, mounted on one horse. Twenty minutes later they reached the first buildings of the Rancho. At the entrance of the village the owner of the horse stopped, and turning to his companion, said, —

"Where will you get down?"

"That is all the same to me; let us go first where you are going."

"Ah!" the horseman said, scratching his head, "the fact is, I am going nowhere in particular."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! You will understand me in two words. I landed today at Guaymas; the Rancho is only the first station of a journey I meditate in the desert, and which will probably last a long time."

By the moonlight, a ray of which now played on the stranger's face, his companion attentively regarded his noble and pensive countenance, on which grief had already cut deep furrows.

"So that," he at length said, "any lodging will suit you?"

"A night is soon spent. I only ask a shelter for horse and self."

"Well, if you will permit me to act in my turn as guide, you shall have that within ten minutes."

"Agreed."

"I do not promise you a palace, but I will take you to a *pulquería*, where I am accustomed to put up when accident brings me to these parts. You will find the society rather mixed, but what would you have? And, as you said yourself, a night is soon spent."

"In Heaven's name, then, proceed."

Then, passing his arm through that of his comrade, the new guide seized the horse's reins, and steered to a house standing about two-thirds of the way down the street where they were, whose badly fitting windows gleamed in the night like the stoke holes of a furnace, while cries, laughter, songs, and the shrill sound of the *jarabes*, indicated that, if the rest of the *pueblo* were plunged in sleep, there, at least, people were awake.

The two strangers stopped before the door of this pothouse.

"Have you quite made up your mind?" the first said.

"Perfectly," the other answered.

The guide then rapped furiously at the worm-eaten door. It was long ere anyone answered. At length a hoarse voice shouted from inside, while the greatest silence succeeded, as if by enchantment, the noise that had hitherto prevailed.

"¿Quién vive?"

"Gente de paz," the stranger replied.

"Hum!" the voice went on, "That is not a name. What sort of weather is it?"

"One for all – all for one. The *cormuel* is strong enough to blow the horns off the oxen on the top of the Cerro del Huérfano."

The door was immediately opened, and the strangers entered. At first they could distinguish nothing through the thick and smoky atmosphere of the room, and walked hap-hazard. The companion of the first horseman was well known in this den; for the master of the house and several other persons eagerly collected round him.

"Caballeros," he said, pointing to the person who followed him, "this señor is my friend, and I must request your kindness for him."

"He shall be treated like yourself, Belhumeur," the host replied. "Your horses have been led to the corral, where a truss of alfalfa has been put before them. As for yourselves, the house belongs to you, and you can dispose of it as you please."

During this exchange of compliments the strangers had contrived to find their way through the crowd. They crossed the room, and sat down in a corner before a table on which the host himself placed pulque, mezcal, chinguirito, Catalonian refino, and sherry.

"Caramba, Señor Huesped!" the man whom we had heard called frequently Belhumeur, said with a laugh, "You are generous today."

"Do you not see that I have an angelito?" the other answered gravely.

"What, your son Pedrito – ?"

"Is dead. I am trying to give my friends a cordial welcome, in order the better to feast the entrance into heaven of my poor boy, who, having never sinned, is an angel by the side of God."

"That's very proper," Belhumeur said, hobnobbing with the rather stoical parent.

The latter emptied his glass of refino at a draught, and withdrew. The strangers, by this time accustomed to the atmosphere in which they found themselves, began to look around them. The room of the *pulquería* offered them a most singular sight.

In the centre some ten individuals, with faces enough to hang them, covered with rags, and armed to the teeth, were furiously playing at monte. It was a strange fact, but one which did not appear to astonish any of the honourable gamblers that a long dagger was stuck in the table to the

right of the banker, and two pistols lay on his left. A few steps further on, men and women, more than half intoxicated, were dancing and singing, with lubricious gestures and mad shouts, to the shrill sounds of two or three *vihuelas* and *jarabes*. In a corner of the room thirty people were assembled round a table, on which a child, four years of age at the most, was seated in a wicker chair. This child presided over the meeting. He was dressed in his best clothes, had a crown of flowers on his head, and a profusion of nosegays was piled up on the table all round him.

But alas! The child's brow was pale, his eyes glassy, his complexion leaden and marked with violet spots. His body had the peculiar stiffness of a corpse. He was dead. He was the angelito, whose entrance into heaven the worthy pulquero was celebrating.

Men, women and children were drinking and laughing, as they reminded the poor mother, who made heroic efforts not to burst into tears, of the precocious intelligence, goodness and prettiness of the little creature she had just lost.

"All this is hideous," the first traveller muttered, with signs of disgust.

"Is it not so?" the other assented. "Let us not notice it, but isolate ourselves amid these scoundrels, who have already forgotten our presence, and talk."

"Willingly, but unhappily we have nothing to say to each other."

"Perhaps we have. In the first place, we might let each other know who we are."

"That is true."

"You agree with me? Then I will give you the example of confidence and frankness."

"Good. After that my turn will come."

Belhumeur looked round at the company. The orgy had recommenced with fresh fury; it was evident that no one troubled himself about them. He rested his elbows on the table, leant over to his comrade, and began: —

"As you already know, my dear mate, my name is Belhumeur. I am a Canadian; that is to say almost a Frenchman. Circumstances too long to narrate at present, but which I tell you some day, brought me, when a lad into this country. Twenty years of my life have passed in traversing the desert in every direction: there is not a stream or a by-path which I do not know. I could, if I would, live quietly and free from care with a dear friend, an old companion, who has retired to a magnificent hacienda which he possesses a few leagues from Hermosillo; but the existence of a hunter has charms which only those who have lived it can understand: it always compels them to renew it in spite of themselves. I am still a young man, hardly five-and-forty years of age. An old friend of mine, an Indian chief of the name of Eagle-head, proposed to me to accompany him on an excursion he wished to make in Apacheria. I allowed myself to be tempted; said good-by to those I love, and who tried in vain to hold me back; and free from all ties, without regret for the past, happy in the present, and careless of the future, I went gaily ahead, bearing with me those inestimable treasures for the hunter, a strong heart, a gay character, excellent arms, and a horse accustomed, like his master, to good fortune and ill; and so here I am. And now, mate, you know me as well as if we had been friends for the last ten years."

The other had listened attentively to this story, fixing a thoughtful glance on the bold adventurer, who sat smiling before him. He gazed with interest on this man, with the loyal face and sharply-cut features, whose countenance exhaled the rude and noble frankness of a man who is really good and great.

When Belhumeur was silent he remained for some moments without replying, doubtlessly plunged in profound and earnest reflections; then, offering him across the table a white, elegant, and delicate hand, he replied with great emotion, and in the best French ever spoken in these distant regions, —

"I thank you, Belhumeur, for the confidence you have placed in me. My history is not longer, but more mournful than yours. You shall have it in a few words."

"Eh?" the Canadian exclaimed, vigorously pressing the hand offered him. "Do you happen to be a Frenchman?"

"Yes, I have that honour."

"By Jove! I ought to have suspected it," he burst out joyously. "Only to think that for an hour we have been stupidly talking bad Spanish, instead of employing our own tongue; for I come from Canada, and the Canadians are the French of America, are they not?"

"You are right."

"Well, then, it is agreed, no more Spanish between us."

"No, nothing but French."

"Bravo! Here's your health, my worthy fellow countryman! And now," he added, returning his glass to the table after emptying it, "let us have your story. I am listening."

"I told you that it is not long."

"No matter; go ahead. I am certain 'twill interest me enormously."

The Frenchman stifled a sigh.

"I, too, have lived the life of a wood ranger," he said; "I, too, have experienced the intoxicating charms of that feverish existence, full of moving incidents, no two of which are alike. Far from the country where we now are, I have traversed vast deserts, immense virgin forests, in which no man prior to myself had left the imprint of his footstep. Like you, a friend accompanied me in my adventurous travels, sustaining my courage, maintaining my gaiety by his inexhaustible humour and his unbounded courage. Alas! That was the happiest period of my life.

"I fell in love with a woman and married her. So soon as my friend saw me rich and surrounded by a family he left me. His departure was my first grief – a grief from which I never recovered, which each day rendered more poignant and which now tortures me like a remorse. Alas! Where is now that strong heart, that devoted friend who ever interposed between danger and myself, who loved me like a brother, and for whom I felt a son's affection? He is probably dead!"

In uttering the last words the Frenchman let his head sink in his hands, and yielded to a flood of bitter thoughts, which rose from his heart with every reminiscence he recalled. Belhumeur looked at him in a melancholy manner, and pressing his hand, said in a low and sympathising voice, "Courage, my friend."

"Yes," the Frenchman continued, "that was what he always said to me when, prostrated by grief, I felt hope failing me. 'Courage,' he would say to me in his rough voice, laying his hand on my shoulders; and I would feel galvanised by the touch, and draw myself up at the sound of that cherished voice, ready to recommence the struggle, for I felt myself stronger. Several years passed in the midst of a felicity which nothing came to trouble. I had a wife I adored, charming children for whom I formed dreams of the future; in short, I wanted for nothing save my poor comrade, about whom I could discover nothing from the moment he left me, in spite of my constant inquiries. Now, my happiness has faded away never to return. My wife, my children are dead – cruelly murdered in their sleep by Indians, who carried my hacienda by storm. I alone remained alive amid the smoking ruins of that abode where I had spent so many happy days. All I loved was eternally buried beneath the ashes. My heart was broken, and I did not wish to survive all that was dear to me; but a friend, the only one that remained to me, saved me. He carried me off by main force to his tribe, for he was an Indian. By his care and devotion he recalled me to life, and restored to me, if not the hope of a happiness henceforth impossible for me, at least the courage to struggle against that destiny whose blows had been so rude. He died only a few months back. Before closing his eyes for ever he made me swear to do all he asked of me. I promised him. 'Brother,' he said, 'every man must proceed in life toward a certain object. So soon as I am dead, go in search of that friend from whom you have so long been separated. You will find him, I feel convinced. He will trace your line of conduct.' Two hours later the worthy chief died in my arms. So soon as his body was committed to the earth I set

out. This very day, as I told you, I reached Guaymas. My intention is to bury myself immediately in the wilderness; for if my poor friend be still alive, I can only find him there."

There was a lengthened silence, at length broken by Belhumeur.

"Hum! All that is very sad, mate, I must allow," he said, tossing his head. "You are rushing upon a desperate enterprise, in which the chances of success are almost null. A man is a grain of sand lost in the desert. Who knows, even supposing he still lives, at what place he may be at this moment; and if, while you are seeking him on one side, he may not be on the other? Still, I have a proposition to make to you, which, I believe, can only prove advantageous."

"I know it, my friend, before you tell it me. I thank you, and accept it," the Frenchman replied quickly.

"It is agreed then. We start together. You will come with me into Apacheria?"

"Yes."

"By Jove! I am in luck. I have hardly separated from Loyal Heart ere Heaven brings me together with a friend as precious as he is."

"Who is that Loyal Heart you mention?"

"The friend with whom I lived so long, and whom you shall know some day. But come, we will start at daybreak."

"Whenever you please."

"I have the meeting with Eagle-head two days' journey from here. I am much mistaken, or he is waiting for me by this time."

"What are you going to do in Apacheria?"

"I do not know. Eagle-head asked me to accompany him, and I am going. It is my rule never to ask my friends more of their secrets than they are willing to tell me. In that way we are more free."

"Excellent reasoning, my dear Belhumeur; but, as we shall be together for a long time, I hope, at least – "

"I, too."

"It is right," the Frenchman continued, "that you should know my name, which I have hitherto forgotten to tell you."

"That need not trouble you; for I could easily give you one if you had reasons for preserving your incognito."

"None at all: my name is Count Louis de Prébois Crancé."

Belhumeur rose as if moved by a spring, took off his fur cap, and bowing before his new friend, said —

"Pardon me, sir count, for the free manner in which I have addressed you. Had I known in whose company I had the honour of being, I should certainly not have taken so great a liberty."

"Belhumeur, Belhumeur," the count said with a mournful smile, and seizing his hand quickly, "is our friendship to commence in that way? There are here only two men ready to share the same life, run the same dangers, and confront the same foes. Let us leave to the foolish inhabitants of cities those vain distinctions which possess no significance for us; let us be frankly and loyally brothers. I only wish to be to you Louis, your good comrade, your devoted friend, in the same way as you are to me only Belhumeur, the rough wood ranger."

The Canadian's face shone with pleasure at these words.

"Well spoken," he said gaily, "well spoken, on my soul! I am but a poor ignorant hunter; and, by my faith, why should I conceal it? What you have just said to me has gone straight to my heart. I am yours, Louis, for life and death; and I hope to prove to you soon, comrade, that I have a certain value."

"I am convinced of it; but we understand each other now, do we not?"

"By Jove – !"

At this moment there was such a tremendous disturbance in the street, that it drowned that in the room. As always happens under such circumstances, the adventurers assembled in the pulquería

were silent of a common accord, in order to listen. Shouts, the clashing of sabres, the stamping of horses, drowned at intervals by the discharge of fire arms, could be clearly distinguished.

"Caray!" Belhumeur exclaimed, "there's fighting going on in the street."

"I am afraid so," the pulquero laconically answered, who was more than half drunk, as he swallowed a glass of refino.

Suddenly from sabre hilts and pistol butts resounded vigorously on the badly-joined plank of the door, and a powerful voice shouted angrily, —

"Open, in the devil's name, or I'll smash in your miserable door!"

CHAPTER IV

COUNT MAXIME GAËTAN DE LHORAILLES

Before explaining to the reader the cause of the infernal noise which suddenly rose to disturb the tranquility of the people assembled in the pulquería, we are obliged to go back a little distance.

About three years before the period in which our story opens, on a cold and rainy December night, eight men, whose costumes and manners showed them to belong to the highest Parisian society, were assembled in an elegant private room of the Café Anglais.

The night was far advanced; the wax candles, two-thirds consumed, only spread a mournful light; the rain lashed the windows, and the wind howled lugubriously. The guests, seated round the table and the relics of a splendid supper, seemed, in spite of themselves, to have been infected by the gloomy melancholy that brooded over nature, and, lying back on their chairs, some slept, while others, lost in thought, paid no attention to what was going on around them.

The clock on the mantelpiece slowly struck three, and the last sound had scarcely died away ere the repeated cracking of a postilion's whip could be heard beneath the windows of the room.

The door opened and a waiter came in.

"The post-chaise the Count de Lhorailles ordered is waiting," he said.

"Thanks," one of the guests said, dismissing the waiter by a sign.

The latter went out, and closed the door after him. The few words he had uttered had broken the charm which enchained the guests; all sat up, as if aroused from sleep suddenly; and turning to a young man of thirty, they said, —

"It is really true that you are going?"

"I am," he answered, with a nod of affirmation.

"Where to, though? People do not usually part in this mysterious way," one of the guests continued.

The gentleman to whom the remark was addressed smiled sorrowfully.

The Count de Lhorailles was a handsome man, with expressive features, energetic glance, and disdainful lip; he belonged to the most ancient nobility, and his reputation was perfectly established among the "lions" of the day. He rose, and looking round the circle, said, —

"Gentlemen, I can perfectly well understand that my conduct appears to you strange. You have a right to an explanation from me, and I am most desirous to give it to you. It was, indeed, for that purpose that I invited you to the last supper we shall enjoy together. The hour for my departure has struck — the chaise is waiting. Tomorrow I shall be far from Paris, and within a week I shall have left France never to return. Listen to me."

The guests made a marked movement as they gazed on the count.

"Do not be impatient, gentlemen," he said; "the story I have to tell you is not long, for it is my own. In two words, here it is: —

"I am completely ruined. I have only a small sum of money left, on which I should starve in Paris, and end in a month by blowing out my brains — a gloomy perspective which possesses no attractions for me, I assure you. On the other hand, I have such a fatal skill with arms, that, without any fault of my own, I enjoy a reputation as a duellist, which weighs on me fearfully, especially since my deplorable affair with that poor Viscount de Morsens, whom I was obliged to kill against my will, in order to close his mouth and put a stop to his calumnies. In short, for the reasons I have had the honour of imparting to you, and an infinity of others it is needless for you to know, and which I am convinced would interest you very slightly, France has become odious to me to such a degree that I am most anxious to quit it. So now a parting glass of champagne, and good-by to all."

"A moment," remarked the guest who had already spoken. "You have not told us, count, to what country you intend to proceed."

"Can't you guess? To America. I am allowed to possess a certain amount of courage and intelligence, and therefore am going to a country where, if I may believe all I hear, those two qualities are sufficient to make the fortune of their possessor. Have you any more questions to ask me, baron?" he added, turning to his questioner.

The latter, ere replying, remained for some moments plunged in serious reflections; at length he raised his head, and fixed a cold and searching glance on the count.

"You really mean to go, my friend?" he said quite seriously. "You swear it on your honour?"

"Yes, on my honour."

"And you are really resolved to make for yourself, in America, a position at the least equal to that you held here?"

"Yes," he said sharply, "by all means possible."

"That is good. In your turn listen to me, count, and if you will profit by what I am about to reveal to you, you may perhaps, by the help of Heaven, succeed in accomplishing the wild projects you have formed."

All the guests drew round curiously; the count himself felt interested in spite of himself.

The Baron de Spurtzheim was a man of about five-and-forty. His bronzed complexion, his marked features, and the strange expression of his eye gave him a peculiar aspect, which escaped the notice of the vulgar herd, and caused him to be regarded as a really remarkable man by all intelligent persons.

The only thing known about the baron was his colossal fortune, which he spent royally. As for his antecedents, everyone was ignorant of them, although he was received in the first society. It was merely remarked vaguely that he had been a great traveller, and had resided for several years in America; but nothing was more uncertain than these rumours, and they would not have been sufficient to open the *salons* of the noble suburb to him, had not the Austrian ambassador, without his knowledge, served as his guarantee most warmly in several delicate circumstances.

The baron was more intimately connected with the count than with his other companions. He seemed to feel a certain degree of interest in him; and several times, guessing his friend's embarrassed circumstances, he had delicately offered him his assistance. The Count de Lhorailles, though too proud to accept these offers, felt equally grateful to the baron, and had allowed him to assume a certain influence over him, without suspecting it.

"Speak, but be brief, my dear baron," the count said. "You know that the chaise is waiting for me."

Without replying, the baron rang the bell. The waiter came in.

"Dismiss the postilion, and tell him to return at five o'clock. You can go."

The waiter bowed and went out.

The count, more and more amazed at his friend's strange conduct, did not make the least observation. However, he poured out a glass of champagne, which he emptied at a draught, crossed his arms, leant back in his chair, and waited.

"And now, gentlemen," the baron said in his sarcastic and incisive voice, "as our friend De Lhorailles has told us his history, and we are becoming confidential, why should I not tell you mine? The weather is fearful – it is raining torrents. Here we are, comfortably tiled in: we have champagne and regalias – two excellent things when not abused. What have we better to do? 'Nothing,' I hear you say. Listen to me, then, for I believe what I have to tell you will interest you the more, because some among you will not be vexed to know the whole truth about me."

The majority of the guests burst into a laugh at this remark. When their hilarity was calmed the baron began: —

"As for the first part of my story, I shall imitate the count's brevity. In the present age gentlemen find themselves so naturally beyond the pale of the law through the prejudices of blood and education, that they all are fated to pass through a rough apprenticeship to life, by devouring in a few years, they know not how, the paternal fortune. This happened to me, gentlemen, as to yourselves. My ancestors in the middle ages were, to a certain extent, freebooters. True blood always shows itself. When my last resources were nearly exhausted, my instincts were aroused, and my eyes fixed on America. In less than ten years I amassed there the colossal fortune which I now have the distinguished honour, not of dissipating – the lesson was too rude, and I profited by it – but of spending in your honourable company, while careful to keep my capital intact."

"But," the count exclaimed impatiently, "how did you amass this colossal fortune, as you yourself term it?"

"About a million and a half," the baron coolly remarked.

A shudder of covetousness ran through the whole party.

"A colossal fortune indeed," the count continued; "but, I repeat, how did you acquire it?"

"If I had not intended to reveal it to you, my dear fellow, you may be sure I would not have abused your patience by making you listen to the trivialities you have just heard."

"We are listening," the guests shouted.

The baron coolly looked at them all.

"In the first place let us drink a glass of champagne to our friend's success," he said in a sarcastic tone.

The glasses were filled and emptied again in a twinkling, so great was the curiosity of the auditors. After putting down his glass before him the baron lighted a regalia, and, turning to the count, said to him, —

"I am now addressing myself more particularly to you, my friend. You are young, enterprising, gifted with an iron constitution and an energetic will. I am convinced, that if death does not thwart your plans, you will succeed, whatever may be the enterprise you undertake, or the objects you propose to yourself. In the life you are about to begin, the principal cause of success, I may say almost the only one, is a thorough knowledge of the ground on which you are about to manoeuvre, and the society you propose entering. If, on my entrance upon that adventurous life, I had possessed the good fortune of meeting a friend willing to initiate me into the mysteries of my new existence, my fortune would have been made five years earlier. What no one did for me I am willing to do for you. Perhaps, at a later date you will be grateful for the information I have given you, and which will serve as your guide in the inextricable maze you are about to enter. In the first place, lay down this principle: the people among whom you are about going to live are your natural enemies. Hence you will have to support a daily, hourly struggle. All means must appear to you good to emerge from the battle a victor. Lay on one side your notions of honour and delicacy. In America they are vain words, useless even to make dupes, from the very simple reason that no one believes in them. The sole deity of America is gold. To acquire gold the American is capable of everything; but not, as in old Europe, under the cloak of honesty, and by roundabout process, but frankly, openly, without shame, and without remorse. This laid down, your line of conduct is ready traced. There is no project, however extravagant it may appear, which in that country does not offer chances of success; for the means of execution are immense, and almost impossible of control. The American is the man who has best comprehended the strength of association: hence it is the lever by means of which his schemes are carried out. On arriving there alone, without friends or acquaintances, however intelligent and determined you may be, you will be lost, because you find yourself alone in the face of all."

"That is true," the count muttered with conviction.

"Patience!" the baron replied with a smile. "Do you think I intend to send you into action without a cuirass? No, no, I will give you one, and magnificently tempered, too, I assure you."

All those present looked with amazement on this man, who had grown enormously in their esteem in a few moments. The baron feigned not to perceive the impression he produced, and in a minute or so he continued, laying a stress on every word, as if wishful to engrave it more deeply on the count's memory: —

"Remember what I am about to tell you; it is of the utmost importance for you not to forget a word, my friend; from that positively depends the success of your trip to the New World."

"Speak – I am not losing a syllable!" the count interrupted him with a species of febrile impatience.

"When strangers began to flock to America, a company of bold fellows was formed without faith or law, and without pity as without weakness, who, denying all nationality, as they issued from every people, only recognised one government, that which they themselves instituted on Tortoise Island, a desolate rock, lost in the middle of the ocean – a monstrous government; for violence was at its basis, and it only admitted of right being might. These bold companions, attached to each other by a Draconian charter, assumed the name of Brethren of the Coast, and were divided into two classes – the Buccaneers and the Filibusters.

"The buccaneers, wandering, through the primeval forests, hunted oxen, while the filibusters scoured the seas, attacking every flag, plundering every vessel under the pretext of making war on the Spaniards, but in reality stripping the rich for the benefit of the poor – the only means they discovered to restore the balance between the two classes. The Brethren of the Coast, continually recruited from all the rogues of the new world, became powerful – so powerful, indeed, that the Spaniards trembled for their possessions, and a glorious King of France did not disdain to treat with them, and send an ambassador to them. At last, through the very force of circumstances, like all powers which are the offspring of anarchy, and consequently possess no inherent vitality, when the maritime nations recognised their own strength, the Brethren of the Coast grew gradually weaker, and finally disappeared entirely. By forcing them into obscurity, it was supposed that they were not merely conquered, but annihilated; but it was not so, as you shall now see. I ask your pardon for this long and tedious prologue, but it was indispensable, so that you should better comprehend the rest I have to explain to you."

"It is nearly half past four," observed the count; "we have not more than forty minutes left us."

"That period, though so short, will be sufficient," the baron answered. "I resume my narrative. The Brethren of the Coast were not destroyed, but transformed. They yielded with extraordinary cleverness to the exigencies of that progress which threatened to outstrip them: they had changed their skin – from tigers they had become foxes. The Brethren of the Coast were converted into *Dauph'yeers*. Instead of boldly boarding the enemies' ships, sword and hatchet in hand, as they formerly did, they became insignificant, and dug mines. At the present day the Dauph'yeers are the masters and kings of the New World; they are nowhere and everywhere, but they reign; their influence is felt in all ranks of society; they are found on every rung of the ladder, but are never seen. They detached the United States from England; Peru, Chili and Mexico, from Spain. Their power is immense, the more so because it is secret, ignored and almost denied, which displays their strength. For a secret society to be denied existence is a real power. There is not a revolution in America in which the influence of the Dauph'yeers does not step forward valorously, either to insure its triumph or to crush it. They can do everything – they are everything: without their golden circle nothing is possible. Such have the Brethren of the Coast become, in less than two centuries, by the force of progress! They are the axis round which the New World revolves though it little suspects it. It is a wretched lot for that magnificent country to have been condemned, ever since its discovery, to undergo the tyranny of bandits of every rank, who seem to have undertaken the mission of exhausting her in every way, while never giving her the chance of liberating herself."

There was a lengthened silence: each was reflecting on what he had just heard. The baron himself had buried his face in his hands, and was lost in that world of ideas which he had evoked, and which now assailed him in a mass with sensations of mingled pain and bitterness.

The distant sound of a rapidly approaching vehicle recalled the count to the gravity of the situation.

"Here is my chaise," he said. "I am about to set out, and I know nothing."

"Patience!" the baron replied. "Take leave of your friends, and we will start."

Yielding, in spite of himself, to the influence of this singular man, the count obeyed, without dreaming of offering the slightest opposition. He rose, embraced each of his old friends, exchanged with them hearty hand-shakings, received their auguries of success, and left the room, followed by the baron.

The post-chaise was waiting in front of the house. The young men had opened the windows, and were waving fresh adieux to their friend. The count turned a long look on the Boulevard. The night was gloomy, though the rain no longer fell; the sky was black; and the gas-jets glinted feebly in the distance like stars lost in a fog.

"Farewell," he said in a stifled voice, "farewell! Who knows whether I shall ever return?"

"Courage!" a stern voice whispered in his ear.

The young man shuddered: the baron was at his side.

"Come, my friend," he said, as he helped him to enter the carriage, "I will accompany you to the barrier."

The count got in and fell back on a cushion.

"The Normandy road," the baron shouted to the postilion, as he shut the door.

The driver cracked his whip, and the chaise started at a gallop.

"Good-by, good-by!" the young men loudly shouted as they leant out of the windows of the Café Anglais.

For a long time the two remained silent. At length the baron took the word.

"Gaëtan!" he said.

"What would you?" the latter replied.

"I have not yet finished my narrative."

"It is true," he muttered distractedly.

"Do you not wish me to end it?"

"Speak, my friend."

"In what a tone you say that, my good fellow! Your mind is wandering in imaginary space; you are doubtlessly dreaming of those you are leaving.

"Alas!" murmured the count with a sigh, "I am alone in the world. What have I to regret? I possess neither friends nor relations."

"Ungrateful man!" The baron said in a reproachful tone.

"It is true: Pardon me, my dear fellow; I did not think of what I was saying."

"I pardon you, but on condition that you listen to me."

"I promise it."

"My friend, if you desire success, the friendship and protection of those Dauph'yeers I mentioned are indispensable for you."

"How can I obtain them – I, a wretched stranger? How I tremble on thinking of the country in which I dreamed of creating such a glorious future! The veil that covered my eyes is fallen. I see the extravagance of my projects, and all hope abandons me."

"Already?" exclaimed the baron sternly. "Child without energy, to abandon a contest even before having engaged in it! Man without strength and courage! I will give you the means, if you like, of obtaining the friendship and protection so necessary for you."

"You!" the count said, quivering with excitement.

"Yes, I! Do you fancy I have been amusing myself with torturing your mind for the last two hours, like the jaguar plays with the lamb, for the mere pleasure of deriding you? No, Gaëtan. If you had that thought, you were wrong, for I am fond of you. When I learned your scheme I applauded, from the bottom of my heart, that resolution which restored you to your proper place in my mind. When you this night frankly avowed to us your position, and explained your plans, I found myself again in you; my heart beat; for a moment I was happy: and then I vowed to open to you that path so wide, so great, and so noble, that if you do not succeed, it will be because you do not desire to do so."

"Oh!" the count said energetically, "I may succumb in the contest which begins this day between myself and humanity at large, but fear nothing, my friend; I will fall nobly like a man of courage."

"I am persuaded of it, my friend. I have only a few more words to say to you. I, too, was a Dauph'yeer, and am so still. Thanks to my brethren, I gained the fortune I now possess. Take this portfolio: put round your neck this chain, from which a medallion hangs; then, when you are alone, read these instructions contained in the portfolio, and act as they prescribe. If you follow them point for point, I guarantee your success. That is the present I reserved for you, and which I would not give you till we were alone."

"O heavens!" the count said with effusion.

"Here we are at the barrier," the baron remarked, as he stopped the carriage. "It is time for us to separate. Farewell, my friend! Courage and good will! Embrace me. Above all, remember the portfolio and the medallion."

The two men remained for a long time in each other's arms. At length the baron freed himself by a vigorous effort, opened the door, and leaped out on the pavement.

"Farewell!" he cried for the last time; "Farewell, Gaëtan, remember me."

The post-chaise was bowling along the high road at full speed. Strange to say, both men muttered the same word, shaking heads with discouragement, when they found themselves alone – one walking at full speed along the footpath, the other buried in the cushions.

That word was "Perhaps!"

The reason was that, despite all their efforts to deceive each other, neither of them hoped.

CHAPTER V

THE DAUPH'YEERS

Now let us quit the old world, and, taking an immense stride, transport ourselves to the new one at a single leap.

There is in America a city which possibly cannot be compared to any other in the whole world. That city is Valparaiso!

Valparaiso! The word resounds in the enchanted ear like the gentle soft notes of a love song.

A coquettish, smiling, and mad city, softly reclining like a careless Creole, round a delicious bay, at the foot of three majestic mountains, lazily bathing her rosy and dainty feet in the azure waves of the Pacific, and veiling her dreamy brow in the storm-laden clouds which escape from Cape Horn, and roll with a sinister sound round the peaks of the Cordilleras, to form a splendid glory for them.

Although built on the Chilean coast, this strange city belongs, in fact, to no country, and recognises no nationality: or to speak more correctly, it admits all into its bosom.

At Valparaiso the adventurer of every clime have given each other the meeting. All tongues are spoken there, every branch of trade is carried on. The population is the quaintest amalgam of the most eccentric personalities, who have rushed from the most remote parts of the four quarters of the old world, to attack fortune in this city, the advanced sentinel of Transatlantic civilisation, and whose occult influence governs the Hispano-American republic.

Valparaiso, like nearly all the commercial centres of South America, is a pile of shapeless dens and magnificent palaces jostling each other, and hanging in abrupt clusters on the abrupt flanks of the three mountains.

At the period the event occurred which we are about to describe, the streets were narrow, dirty, deprived of air and sun. The paving, being perfectly ignored, rendered them perfect morasses, in which the wayfarer sank to the knee when the winter's rains had loosened the soil. This rendered the use of a horse indispensable, even for the shortest passage.

Deleterious exhalations incessantly escaped from these mud holes, heightened by the filth of every description which the daily cleaning of the inhabitants accumulated, while no one dreamed of draining these permanent abodes of pernicious fevers.

At the present day, we are told, this state of things has been altered, and Valparaiso no longer resembles itself. We should like to believe it; but the carelessness of the South American, so well known to us, compels us to be very circumspect in such a matter.

In one of the dirtiest and worst-famed streets of Valparaiso was a house which we ask the reader's permission to describe in a few words.

We are compelled at the outset, to confess that if the architect intrusted with its construction had shown himself more than sober in the distribution of the ornaments, he had built it perfectly to suit the trade of the various tenants destined in future to occupy it one after the other.

It was a clay-built hovel. The *façade* looked upon the Street de la Merced; the opposite side had an outlook of the sea, above which it projected for a certain distance upon posts.

This house was inhabited by an innkeeper. Contrary to the European buildings, which grow smaller the higher they rise from the ground, this house grew larger; so that the upper part was lofty and well lighted, while the shop and other ground floor rooms were confined and gloomy.

The present occupier had skilfully profited by this architectural arrangement to have a room made in the wall between the first and second floors, which was reached by a turning staircase, concealed in the masonry.

This room was so built that the slightest noise in the street distinctly reached the ears of persons in it, while stifling any they might make, however loud it might be.

The worthy landlord, occupier of this house, had naturally a rather mixed custom of people of every description – smugglers, *rateros*, rogues, and others, whose habits might bring them into unpleasant difficulties with the Chilean police; consequently, a whaleboat constantly fastened to a ring under a window opening on the sea, offered a provisional but secure shelter to the customers of the establishment whenever, by any accident, the agents of government evinced a desire to pay a domiciliary visit to his den.

This house was known – and probably is still known, unless an earthquake or a fire has caused this rookery to disappear from the face of the earth of Valparaiso – by the name of the *Locanda del Sol*.

On an iron plate suspended from a beam, and creaking with every breath of wind, there had been painted by a native artist a huge red face, surrounded by orange beams, possibly intended as an explanation of the sign to which I have alluded above.

Señor Benito Sarzuela master of the *Locanda del Sol*, was a tall, dry fellow with an angular face and crafty look; a mixture of the Araucano, Negro and Spaniard, whose *morale* responded perfectly to his *physique*; that is to say, he combined in himself the vices of the three races to which he belonged – red, black, and white – without possessing one single virtue of theirs, and that beneath the shadow of an avowed and almost honest trade he carried on clandestinely some twenty, the most innocent of which would have taken him to the *presidios* or galleys for life, had he been discovered.

Some two months after the events we described in a previous chapter, about eleven of the clock on a cold and misty night, Señor Benito Sarzuela was seated in melancholy mood within his bar, contemplating with mournful eye the deserted room of his establishment.

The wind blowing violently, caused the sign of the *mesón* to creak on its hinges with gloomy complaints, and the heavy black clouds coming from the south moved weightily athwart the sky, dropping at intervals heavy masses of rain on the ground loosened by previous storms.

"Come," the unhappy host muttered to himself with a piteous air, "there is another day which finishes as badly as the others. *Sangre de Dios!* For the last week I have had no luck. If it continues only a fortnight longer I shall be ruined a man."

In fact, through a singular accident, for about a month the *Locanda del Sol* had been completely shorn of its old brilliancy, and the landlord did not know any reason for its eclipse.

The sound of clanking glasses and cups was no longer heard in the room, usually affected by thirsty souls. Strange change in human things! Abundance had been too suddenly followed by the most perfect vacuum. It might be said that the plague reigned in this deserted house. The bottles remained methodically arranged on the shelves, and hardly two passers-by had come in during the past day to drink a glass of *pisco*, which they hastily paid for, so eager were they to quit this den, in spite of the becks, and nods, and wreathed smiles of the host, who tried in vain to keep them to talk of public affairs, and, above all, cheer his solitude.

After a few words we have heard him utter, the worthy Don Benito rose carelessly, and prepared, with many an oath, to close his establishment, so at any rate to save in candles, when suddenly an individual entered, then two, then ten, and at last such a number that the locandero gave up all attempts at counting them.

These men were all wrapped up in cloaks; their heads were covered by felt hats, whose broad brims, pulled down carefully over their eyes, rendered them perfectly unrecognisable.

The room was soon crowded with customers drinking and smoking, but not uttering a word.

The extraordinary thing was that, although all the tables were lined, such a religious silence prevailed among these strange bibbers that the noise of the rain pattering outside could be distinctly heard, as well as the footfall of the horses ridden by the serenos, which resounded hoarsely on the pebbles or in the muddy ponds that covered the ground.

The host, agreeably surprised by this sudden turn of fortune, had joyfully set to work serving his unexpected customers; but all at once a singular thing happened, which Señor Sarzuela was far

from anticipating. Although the proverb say that you can never have enough of a good thing – and proverbs are the wisdom of nations – it happened that the affluence of people, who appeared to have made an appointment at his house, became so considerable, and assumed such gigantic proportions, that the landlord himself began to be terrified; for his hostelry, empty a moment previously, was now so crammed that he soon did not know where to put the new arrivals who continued to flock in. In fact the crowd, after filling the common room, had, like a rising tide, flowed over into the adjoining room, then it escalated the stairs, and spread over the upper floors.

At the first stroke of eleven more than two hundred customers occupied the Locanda del Sol.

The locandero, with that craft which was one of the most salient points of his character, then comprehended that something extraordinary was about to happen, and that his house would be the scene.

At the thought a convulsive tremor seized upon him, his hair began to stand on end, and he sought in his brain for the means he must employ to get rid of these sinister and silent guests.

In his despair he rose with an air which he sought to render most resolute, and walked to the door as if for the purpose of closing his establishment. The customers, still silent as fish, did not make a sign of moving; on the contrary, they pretended they noticed nothing.

Don Benito felt his nervousness redoubled.

Suddenly the voice of a sereno singing in the distance furnished him with the pretext he vainly sought, by shouting as he passed the locanda, —

"*Ave Maria purísima. Las onze han dado y llueve.*"²

Although accompanied by modulations capable of making a dog weep, the sacramental cry of the sereno absolutely produced no impression on mine host's customers. The force of terror at length restoring him a slight degree of courage, Señor Sarzuela decided on directly addressing his obstinate customers. For this purpose he deliberately posted himself in the centre of the room, thrust his fist into his side, and raising his head, said in a voice which he tried in vain to render firm, but whose tremor he could not hide, —

"Señores caballeros, it is eleven o'clock. The police regulations forbid me keeping open longer. Have the goodness, I beg you, to withdraw without delay, so that I may close my establishment."

This harangue, from which he promised himself the greatest success, produced an effect exactly contrary to what he expected. The strangers vigorously smote the table with their glasses, shouting unanimously, —

"Drink!"

The landlord bounded back at this fearful disturbance.

"Still, caballeros," he ventured to remark, after a moment's hesitation, "the police regulations are severe. It is eleven, and —"

He could say no more: the noise recommenced with even greater intensity, and the customers shouted together, in a voice of thunder, "Drink!"

A reaction, easy to comprehend, then took place in the mind of mine host. Fancying that a personal attack was made on himself, persuaded that his interests were at stake, the coward disappeared to make room for the miser, threatened in what is dearest to him – his property.

"Ah," he shouted in feverish exasperation, "that is the game! Well, we will see if I am master in my own house. I will go and fetch the alcalde."

This threat of justice from the mouth of the worthy Sarzuela appeared so droll, that the customers broke out, with a unanimity that did them all credit, into a burst of Homeric laughter right under the poor fellow's nose. This was the *coup de grâce*. The host's anger was converted into raving madness, and he rushed headforemost at the door, under the laughter and inextinguishable shouts of his persecutors. But he had hardly crossed the threshold of his house ere a new arrival seized

² I salute you, most pure Mary! Eleven has struck, and it rains.

him unceremoniously by the arm and hurled him back roughly into the room, saying in a bantering voice, —

"What fly has stung you, my dear landlord? Are you mad to go out bareheaded in such weather, at the risk of catching a pleurisy?"

And then, while the locandero, terrified and confounded by this rude shock, tried to regain his balance and re-establish a little order in his ideas, the unknown, as coolly as if he were at home, had, with the help of some of the customers, to whom he made signs, shut the shutters and bolted the door with as much care as Sarzuela himself usually devoted to this delicate operation.

"There, now that is done," the stranger said, turning to the amazed host "suppose we have a chat, *compadre*? Ah, I suppose you do not recognise me?" he added, as he removed his hat and displayed a fine intelligent face, over which a mocking smile was at this moment playing.

"Oh, el Señor Don Gaëtano!" said Sarzuela, whom this meeting was far from pleasing, and who tried to conceal a horrible grimace.

"Silence!" the other said. "Come hither."

"With a gesture he drew the landlord into a corner of the room, and, leaning down to his ear, said in a low voice, —

"Are there any strangers in your house?"

"Look!" he said with a piteous glance, as he pointed to the still drinking customers, "that legion of demons invaded my house an hour back. They drink well, it is true; but there is something suspicious about them not at all encouraging to an honest man."

"The more reason that you should have nothing to fear. Besides, I am not alluding to them. I ask you if you have any strange lodgers? As for those men, you know them as well as I do, perhaps better."

"From top to bottom of my house I have no other persons than these caballeros, whom you say I know. It is very possible; but as ever since they have been here, thanks to the way in which they are muffled, it has been impossible for me to see the tip of a nose, I was utterly unable to recognise them."

"You are a donkey, my good friend. These men who bother you so greatly are all Dauph'yeers."

"Really!" the amazed host exclaimed: "then why do they hide their faces?"

"My faith, Master Sarzuela, I fancy it is probably because they do not wish to have them seen."

And laughing at the landlord, who was sadly out of countenance, the stranger made a sign. Two men rose, rushed on the poor fellow, and before he could even guess what they intended, he found himself so magnificently garroted that he could not even cross himself.

"Fear nothing, Master Sarzuela; no harm will befall you," the stranger continued. "We only want to talk without witnesses, and as you are naturally a chatterer, we take our precautions, that is all. So be calm; in a few hours you will be free. Come, look sharp, you fellows," he continued, addressing his men. "Gag him, lay him on his bed, and turn the key in his door. Good-by, my worthy host, and pray keep calm."

The stranger's orders were punctually executed; the luckless Sarzuela, tied and gagged, was carried from the room on the shoulders of two of his assailants, borne upstairs, thrown on his bed, and locked in in a twinkling, ere he had even time to think of the slightest resistance.

We will leave him to indulge in the gloomy reflections which probably assailed him in a throng so soon as he was alone, face to face with his despair, and return to the large room of the locanda, where persons far more interesting to us than the poor landlord are awaiting us.

The Dauph'yeers, so soon as they found themselves masters of the hostelry, ranged the tables one on the other against the walls, so as to clear the centre of the room, and drew up the benches in a line, on which they seated themselves.

The Locanda del Sol, owing to the changes it underwent, was in a few moments completely metamorphosed into a club.

The last arrival, the man who had given the order to gag the host, enjoyed, according to all appearances, a certain influence over the honourable company collected at this moment on the ground

floor room of the hostelry. So soon as the master of the house had disappeared he took off his cloak, made a sign commanding silence, and speaking in excellent French, said in a clear and sonorous voice, —

"Brethren, thanks for your punctuality."

The Dauph'yeers politely returned his salute.

"Gentlemen," he continued, "our projects are advancing. Soon, I hope, we shall attain the object to which we have so long been tending, and quit that obscurity in which we are languishing, to conquer our place in the sunshine. America is a marvellous land, in which every ambition can be satisfied. I have taken all the necessary measures, as I pledged myself to you to do a fortnight ago, when I had the honour of convening you for the first time. We have succeeded. You were kind enough to appoint me director of the Mexican movement, and I thank you for it, gentleman. A concession of three thousand acres of land has been made me at Guetzalli, in Upper Sonora. The first step has been taken. My lieutenant, De Laville, started yesterday for Mexico, to take possession of the granted territory. I have today another request to make of you. You who listen to me here are all European or North Americans, and you will understand me. For a very long time the Dauph'yeers, the successors of the Brethren of the Coast have been calmly watching, as apparently disinterested spectators of the endless drama of the American republics, the sudden changes and shameless revolutions of the old Spanish colonies. The hour has arrived to throw ourselves into the contest. I need one hundred and fifty devoted men. Guetzalli will serve them as a temporary refuge. I shall soon tell them what I expect from their courage; but you must strive to carry out what I attempt. The enterprise I meditate, and in which I shall possibly perish, is entirely in the interest of the association. If I succeed, every man who took part in it will have a large reward and splendid position insured him. You know the man who introduced me to you, and he had gained your entire confidence. The medal he gave me, and which I now show you, proves to you that he entirely responds for me. Will you, in your turn, trust in me as he has done? Without you I can do nothing. I await your reply."

He was silent. His auditors began a long discussion among themselves, though in a low voice, which they carried on for some time. At length silence was restored, and a man rose.

"Count Gaëtan de Lhorailles," he said, "my brethren have requested me to answer you in their name. You presented yourself to us, supported by the recommendation of a man in whom we have the most entire confidence. Your conduct has appeared to confirm this recommendation. The one hundred and fifty men you ask for are ready to follow you, no matter whither you may lead them, persuaded as they are that they can only gain by seconding your plans. I, Diégo Léon, inscribe myself at the head of the list."

"And I!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

The Dauph'yeers shouted, outcrying each other. The count gave a signal, and silence was re-established.

"Brothers, I thank you," he said. "The nucleus of our association will remain at Valparaiso, and if I need them I will draw from that city the resolute men I may presently want. For the moment one hundred and fifty men are sufficient for me. If my plans succeed, who knows what the future may have in store for us? I have drawn up a charter-party, all the stipulations of which will be rigorously kept by myself and by you, I have no doubt. Read and sign. In two days I start for Talca: but in six weeks I will meet here those among you who consent to follow me, and then I will communicate to them my plans in their fullest details."

"Captain de Lhorailles," Diégo Léon replied, "you say that you have only need of one hundred and fifty men. Draw them by lots, then; for all wish to accompany you."

"Thank you once again, my brave comrades. Believe me, each shall have his turn. The project I have formed is grand and worthy of you. Selection would only arouse jealousy among men all equally

worthy. Diégo Léon, I intrust to you the duty of drawing lots for the names of those who are to form part of the first expedition."

"It shall be done," said Léon, a methodical and steady Bearnese and ex-corporal of the Spahis.

"And now, my friends, one last word. Remember that in three months I shall expect you at Guetzalli; and, by the aid of Heaven, the star of the Dauph'yeer shall not be dimmed. Drink, brothers, drink to the success of our enterprise!"

"Let us drink!" all the Brethren of the Coast shouted quite electrified.

The wine and brandy then began flowing. The whole night was spent in an orgie, whose proportions became, towards morning, gigantic. The Count de Lhorailles – thanks to the talisman the baron gave him on parting – had found himself, immediately on his arrival in America, at the head of resolute and unscrupulous men, by whose help it was easy for an intellect like his to accomplish great things.

Two months after the meeting to which we have introduced the reader, the count and his one hundred and fifty Dauph'yeers were assembled at the colony of Guetzalli – that magnificent concession which M. de Lhorailles had obtained through his occult influences.

The count appeared to command good fortune, and everything he undertook succeeded. The projects which appeared the wildest were carried out by him. His colony prospered and assumed proportions which delighted the Mexican government. The count, with the tact and knowledge of the world he thoroughly possessed, had caused the jealous and the curious to be silent. He had created a circle of devoted friends and useful acquaintances, who on various occasions pleaded in his behalf and supported him by their credit.

Our readers can judge of the progress he had made in so short a time – scarce three years – when we say that, at the moment we introduce him on the stage, he had almost attained the object of his constant efforts. He was about to gain an honourable rank in society by marrying the daughter of Don Sylva de Torrés, one of the richest hacenderos in Sonora: and through the influence of his future father-in-law he had just received a commission as captain of a free corps, intended to repulse the incursions of the Comanches and Apaches on the Mexican territory, and the right of forming this company exclusively of Europeans if he thought proper.

We will now return to the house of Don Sylva de Torrés, which we left almost at the moment the Count de Lhorailles entered it.

CHAPTER VI BY THE WINDOW

When the young lady left the sitting room to retire to her sleeping apartment, the count followed her with a lingering look, apparently not at all understanding the extraordinary conduct of his betrothed, especially under the circumstances in which they stood to each other, as they were so shortly to be married; but, after a few moments' reflection, the count shook his head, as if to dispel the mournful thoughts by which he was assailed, and, turning to Don Sylva, said: —

"Let us talk about business matters. Are you agreeable?"

"Have you anything new, then, to tell me?"

"Many things."

"Interesting?"

"You shall be the judge."

"Go on, then. I am all impatience to hear them."

"Let us proceed in rotation. You are aware, my friend, why I left Guetzalli?"

"Perfectly. Well, have you succeeded?"

"As I expected. Thanks to certain letters of which I was the bearer, and, above all, your kind recommendation, General Marcos received me in the most charming manner. The reception he deigned to accord me was most affectionate. In short, he gave me *carte blanche*, authorising me to raise, not only one hundred and fifty men, but double the number if I considered it necessary."

"Oh, that is magnificent."

"Is it not? He told me also that in a war like that I was about to undertake — for my chase of the Apaches is a real war — he left me at liberty to act as I pleased, ratifying beforehand all I might do, being persuaded, as he added, that it would ever be for the interest and glory of Mexico."

"Come, I am delighted with the result. And now, what are your intentions?"

"I have resolved on quitting you to proceed, in the first place, to Guetzalli, whence I have now been absent nearly three weeks. I want to revisit my colony, in order to see if all goes on as I would wish, and if my men are happy. On the other hand, I shall not be sorry, before departing for possibly a long period with the greater part of my forces, to protect my colonists from a *coup de main*, by throwing up round the establishment earthworks strong enough to repulse an assault of the savages. This is the more important, because Guetzalli must always remain, to a certain extent, my headquarters."

"All right; and you start?"

"This very evening."

"So soon?"

"I must. You are aware how time presses at present."

"It is true. Have you nothing more to say to me?"

"Pardon me, I have one other point which I expressly reserved for the last."

"You attach a great interest to it, then?"

"Immense."

"Oh, oh! I am listening to you, then, my friend. Speak quickly."

"On my arrival in this country, at a period when the enterprises I have since successfully carried out were only in embryo, you were good enough, Don Sylva, to place at my disposal not only your credit, which is immense, but your riches, which are incalculable."

"It is true," the Mexican said with a smile.

"I availed myself largely of your offers, frequently assailing your strong box, and employing your credit whenever the occasion presented itself. Permit me now to settle with you the only part of

the debt I can discharge, for I am incapable of repaying the other. Here," he added, taking a paper from his portfolio, "is a bill for 100,000 piastres, payable at sight on Walter Blount and Co., bankers, of Mexico. I am happy, believe me, Don Sylva, to be able to pay this debt so promptly, not because – "

"Pardon me," the hacendero quickly interrupted him, and declining with a gesture the paper the Count offered him, "we no longer understand each other, it seems to me."

"How so?"

"I will explain. On your arrival at Guaymas, you presented yourself to me, bearing a pressing letter of recommendation from a man to whom I owed very great obligations a few years back. The Baron de Spurtzheim described you to me rather as a beloved son than as a friend in whom he took interest. My house was at once opened to you – it was my duty to do so. Then, when I knew you, and could appreciate all that was noble and grand in your character, our relations, at first rather cold, became closer and more intimate. I offered you my daughter's hand, which you accepted."

"And gladly so," the count explained.

"Very good," the hacendero continued with a smile. "The money I could receive from a stranger – money which he honestly owes me – belongs to my son-in-law. Tear up that paper, then, my dear count, and pray do not think of such a trifle."

"Ah!" the count said, in a tone of vexation, "that was exactly what troubled me. I am not your son-in-law yet, and may I confess it? I fear I never shall be."

"What can make you fancy that? Have you not my promise? The word of Don Sylva de Torr s, Sir Count de Lhorailles, is a pledge which no one has ever yet dared to doubt."

"And for that reason I have no such idea. It is not you I am afraid of."

"Who, then?"

"Do a Anita."

"Oh, oh! My friend, you must explain yourself, for I confess I do not understand you at all," Don Sylva said sharply, as he rose and began walking up and down the room in considerable agitation.

"Good gracious, my friend, I am quite in despair at having produced this discussion! I love Do a Anita. Love, as you know, easily takes umbrage. Although my betrothed has ever been amiable, kind, and gracious to me, still I confess that I fancy she does not love me."

"You are mad, Don Ga tano. Young girls know not what they like or dislike. Do not trouble yourself about such a childish thing. I promised that she shall be your wife, and it shall be so."

"Still, if she loved another, I should not like – "

"What! Really what you say has not common sense. Anita loves no one but you, I am sure; and stay, would you like to be reassured? You say that you start for Guetzalli this evening?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Prepare apartments for my daughter and myself. In a few days we will join you at your hacienda."

"Is it possible?" the count said joyfully.

"Tomorrow at daybreak we will start; so make haste."

"A thousand thanks."

"Come, you are now easier?"

"I am the happiest of mortals."

"All the better."

The two men exchanged a few words further, and separated with renewed promises of meeting again soon.

Don Sylva, accustomed to command despotically in his establishment, and to allow no one to discuss his will, told his daughter, through her waiting maid, that she must prepare for a rather long journey the next morning, and felt certain of her obedience.

The news was a thunderbolt for the young lady. She sank half fainting into an easy chair, and melted into tears. It was evident to her that this journey was only a pretext to separate her from the

man she loved, and place, her a defenceless victim, in the power of the man she abhorred, and who was to be her husband. The poor child remained thus for several hours, a prey to violent despair, and not dreaming of seeking impossible repose; for, in the state in which she found herself, she knew that sleep would not close her eyes, all swollen with tears, and red with fever.

Gradually the sounds of the town died away one after the other. All slept, or seemed to sleep. Don Sylva's house was plunged into complete darkness; a weak light alone glistened like a star through the young girl's windows, proving that there at least someone was watching.

At this moment two hesitating shadows were cast on the wall opposite the hacendero's house. Two men, wrapped in long cloaks, stopped and examined the dimly lighted window with that attention only found in thieves and lovers. The two men to whom we allude incontestably belonged to the latter category.

"Hum!" the first said in a sharp but suppressed voice, "You are certain of what you assert, Cucharés?"

"As of my eternal salvation, Señor Don Martial," the scamp replied in the same tone. "The accursed Englishman entered the house while I was there. Don Sylva appeared on the best terms with the heretic. May his soul be confounded!"

We may here remark that a few years ago, and possibly even now, in the eyes of the Mexicans all foreigners were English, no matter the nation to which they belonged, and consequently heretics. Hence they naturally ranked, though little suspecting it, with the men whom it is no crime to kill, but whose assassination is rather looked upon as a meritorious action. We are bound to add, to the credit of the Mexicans, that whenever the occasion offered, they killed the English with an ardour which was a sufficient proof of their piety.

Don Martial continued: —

"On the faith of the Tigrero, this man has twice crossed my path, and I have spared him; but let him be careful against the third meeting."

"Oh!" Cucharés said, "the reverend Fra Becchico says that a man gains splendid indulgences by 'cutting' an Englishman. I have not yet had the luck to come across one, although I owe about eight dead men. I am much inclined to indulge myself with this one; it would be so much gained."

"On thy life, picaro, let him alone. That man belongs to me."

"Well, we'll not mention it again," he replied, stifling a sigh; "I will leave him to you. For all that it annoys me, although the niña seems to detest him cordially."

"Have you any proof of what you say?"

"What better proof than the repugnance she displays so soon as he appears, and the pallor which then covers her face without any apparent reason?"

"Ah, I would give a thousand ounces to know what to believe."

"What prevents you? Everybody is asleep – no one will see you. The story is not high – fifteen feet at the most. I am certain that Doña Anita would be delighted to have a chat with you."

"Oh, if I could but believe it!" he muttered with hesitation, casting a side glance at the still lighted window.

"Who knows? Perhaps she is expecting you."

"Silence, you scoundrel!"

"By'r Lady only listen! If what is said be true, the poor child must be in a perplexity, if not worse: she has probably great need of assistance."

"What do they say? Come, speak, but be brief."

"A very simple thing – that Doña Anita de Torrés marries within a week the Englishman, Don Gaëtano."

"You lie villain!" said the Tigrero with badly-restrained wrath. "I know not what prevents me thrusting down your throat with my dagger the odious words you have just uttered."

"You would do wrong," the other said, without being in the least discovered. "I am only an echo that repeats what it hears, nothing more. You alone in all Guaymas are ignorant of this news. After all, there is nothing astonishing in that, as you have only returned to town this day, after an absence of more than a month."

"That is true; but what is to be done?"

"Caray! Follow the advice I give you."

The Tigrero turned another long glance on the window, and let his head sink with an irresolute air.

"What will she say on seeing me?" he muttered.

"Caramba!" the lepero said in a sarcastic tone, "She will cry, 'You are welcome, *alma mia!*' It is clear, caray! Don Martial, have you become a timid child, that a woman's glance can make you tremble? Opportunity has only three hairs, in love as in war. You must seize her when she presents herself: if you do not, you run a risk of not meeting her again."

The Mexican approached the lepero near enough to touch him, and, fixing his glance on his tiger-cat eyes, said in a low and concentrated voice, —

"Cucharés, I trust in you. You know me. I have often come to your assistance. Were you to deceive my confidence I would kill you like a coyote."

The Tigrero pronounced these words with such an accent of dull fury, that the lepero, who knew the man before whom he was standing, turned pale in spite of himself, and felt a shudder of terror pass through his limbs.

"I am devoted to you, Don Martial," he replied in a voice, which he tried in vain to render firm. "Whatever may happen, count on me. What must I do?"

"Nothing; but wait, watch, at the least suspicious sound, the first hostile shadow that appears in the darkness, warn me."

"Count on me. Go to work. I am deaf and dumb, and during your absence I will watch over you like a son over his father."

"Good!" the Tigrero said.

He drew a few steps nearer, undid the reata fastened round his loins, and held it in his right hand. Then he raised his eyes, measured the distance and turning the reata forcibly round his head, hurled it into Doña Anita's balcony. The running knot caught in an iron hook, and remained firmly attached.

"Remember!" the Tigrero said, as he turned toward Cucharés.

"Go on," the latter said, as he leaned against the wall and crossed his legs; "I answer for everything."

Don Martial was satisfied, or feigned to be satisfied, with this assurance. He seized the reata, and taking a leap, like one of those panthers he had so often tracked on the prairies, he raised himself by the strength of his wrists, and speedily reached the balcony. He climbed over and went up to the window.

Doña Anita was asleep, half reclining in an easy chair. The poor girl, pale and exhausted, her eyes swollen with tears, had been conquered by sleep, which never gives up its claim on young and vigorous constitutions. On her marbled cheeks the tears had traced a long furrow, which was still humid. Martial surveyed with a tender glance the woman he loved, though not daring to approach her. Surprised thus during her sleep, Anita appeared to him even more beautiful; a halo of purity and candour seemed to surround her, watch over her repose, and render her holy and unassailable.

After a long and voluptuous contemplation, the Tigrero at length decided on advancing. The window, which was only leaned to (for the young girl had not dreamed of falling to sleep, as she had done), opened at the slightest push. Don Martial took one step, and found himself in the room. At the sight of this virginal chamber a religious respect fell on the Tigrero. He felt his heart beat rebelliously; and tottering, mad with fear and love, he fell on his knees by the side of the being he adored.

Anita opened her eyes.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, on seeing Don Martial, "Blessed be God, since He sends you to my assistance!"

The Tigrero surveyed her with moistened eye and panting chest. But suddenly the girl drew herself up; her memory returned, and with it that timid modesty innate in all women.

"Begone," she said, recoiling to the extremity of the room, "begone, caballero! How are you here? Who led you to my room? Answer I command you."

The Tigrero humbly bowed his head.

"God," he said, in an inarticulate voice, "God alone has conducted me to your side, señorita, as you yourself said. Oh, pardon me for having dared to surprise you thus! I have committed a great fault, I am aware; but a misfortune menaces you – I feel it, I guess it. You are alone, without support, and I have come to say to you, 'Madam, I am very low, very unworthy to serve you, but you have need of a firm and devoted heart. Here I am! Take my blood, take my life. I would be so happy to die for you!' In the name of Heaven, señora, in the name of what you love most on earth, do not reject my prayer. My arm, my heart, are yours: dispose of them."

These words were uttered by the young man in a choking voice, as he knelt in the middle of the room, his hands clasped, and fixing on Doña Anita his eyes, into which he had thrown his entire soul.

The hacendero's daughter turned her limpid glance on the young man, and, without removing her eyes, approached him with short steps, hesitating and trembling despite herself. When she arrived near him she remained for a moment undecided. At length she laid her two small, dainty hands on his shoulders, and placed her gentle face so near his, that the Tigrero felt on his forehead the freshness of her embalmed breath, while her long, black, and perfumed tresses gently caressed him.

"It is true, then," she said in a harmonious voice, "you love me then, Don Martial?"

"Oh!" the young man murmured, almost mad with love at this delicious contact.

The Mexican girl bent over him still more, and grazing with her rosy lips the Tigrero's moist brow, —

"Now," she said to him, starting back with the ravishing movement of a startled fawn, while her brow turned purple with the effort she had made to overcome her modesty, "now defend me, Don Martial; for in the presence of God, who sees us and judges us, I am your wife!"

The Tigrero leaped on his feet beneath the corrosive sting of this kiss. With a radiant brow and sparkling eyes, he seized the girl's arm and drawing her to the corner of the room, where was a statue of the Virgin, before which perfumed oil was burning, —

"On your knees, señorita," he said in an inspired voice, and himself bowed the knee.

The girl obeyed him.

"Holy Mother of Sorrow!" Don Martial went on, "*Nuestra Señora de la Soledad!* Divine succour of the afflicted, who soundest all hearts! Thou seest the purity of our souls, the holiness of our love. Before thee I take for my wife Doña Anita de Torrés. I swear to defend and protect her, before and against everybody, even if I lose my life in the contest I commence this day for the happiness of her I love, and who from this day forth is really my betrothed."

After pronouncing this oath in a firm voice the Tigrero turned to the maiden.

"It is your turn now, señorita," he said to her.

The girl fervently clasped her hands, and raising her tear-laden eyes to the holy image, —

"*Nuestra Señora de la Soledad,*" she said in a voice broken with emotion, "thou, my only protector since the day of my birth, knowest how truly I am devoted to thee! I swear that all this man has said is the truth. I take him for my husband in thy sight, and will never have another."

They rose, and Doña Anita led the Tigrero to the balcony.

"Go!" she said to him. "Don Martial's wife must not be suspected. Go, my husband, my brother! The man to whom they want to deliver me is called the Count de Lhorailles. Tomorrow at daybreak we leave this place, probably to join him."

"And he?"

"Started this night."

"Where is he going?"

"I know not."

"I will kill him."

"Farewell, Don Martial, farewell!"

"Farewell, Doña Anita! Take courage: I am watching over you."

And after imprinting a last and chaste kiss on the young girl's pure brow, he clambered over the balcony, and hanging by the reata, glided down into the street. The hacendero's daughter unfastened the running knot, leant out and gazed on the Tigrero as long as she could see him; then she closed the window.

"Alas, alas!" murmured she, suppressing a sigh, "What have I done? Holy Virgin, thou alone canst restore me the courage which is deserting me."

She let the curtain fall which veiled the window, and turned to go and kneel before the Virgin; but suddenly she recoiled, uttering a cry of terror. Two paces from her Don Sylva was standing with frowning brow and stern face.

"Doña Anita, my daughter," said he, in a slow and stern voice, "I have seen and heard everything; spare yourself, then, I beg you, all useless denial."

"My father!" the poor child stammered in a broken voice.

"Silence!" he continued. "It is three o'clock; we set out at sunrise. Prepare yourself to marry in a fortnight Don Gaëtano de Lhorailles."

And, without deigning to add a word, he walked out slowly, carefully closing the door after him.

As soon as she was alone the young girl bent down as if listening, tottered a few steps forward, raised her hands with a nervous gesture to her contracted throat – then, pealing forth a piercing cry, fell back on the floor.

She had fainted.

CHAPTER VII

THE DUEL

It was about eight in the evening when the Count de Lhorailles left the residence of Don Sylva de Torrés. The *feria de plata* was then in all its splendour. The streets of Guaymas were thronged with a joyful and motley crowd: the shouts of songs and laughter rose on every side. The piles of gold heaped on the monte tables emitted their yellow and intoxicating reflection in the dazzling gleams of the lights, that shone in every door and window: here and there the sounds of the *vihuelas* and *jarabes* escaped from the pulquerías, invaded by the drinkers. The count, elbowed and elbowing, traversed as quickly as was possible the dense groups which at every instant barred his passage; but the conversation he had had with Don Sylva had put him in too happy a temper for him to dream of being vexed at the numerous collisions he endured at every moment.

At length, after numberless difficulties, and wasting at least thrice the time he would have employed under other circumstances, he reached at about ten in the evening, the house where he lodged. He had spent about two hours in covering less than six hundred yards.

On arriving at the mesón, the count proceeded first to the corral to see his horse, to which he gave, with his own hand, two trusses of alfalfa; then, after ordering that he should be called at one o'clock, if by accident (which was most improbable) he retired to his *cuarto* to take a few hours' rest.

The count intended to start at such an early hour in order to avoid the heat of the day, and travel more quickly. Besides, after his lengthened conversation with Don Sylva, the noble adventurer was not sorry to find himself alone, in order to go over in his mind all the happy things that had happened during the past evening.

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