

"You have courage to undertake this trip, *Senorita*?"

"I have courage to undertake anything to gain my release," was the quiet answer.

"Then ride like the wind; my horse is swift, and you can manage him; the highway to the right, remember;" and in a second she was off.

I watched her until the gloom hid her from my view, then hastened around to stand at the entrance to the bandits' hall, where I could hear the loud laughter, rude jests, and vile Spanish oaths for some time, when all was quiet within.

An hour and a half passed, and then a heavy step was heard within, scraping around, and the creeping form of a man appeared coming from the entrance, and rising, glanced around him at the skies an instant, and then stooping down, yelled back into the entrance:—

"The storm has cleared away, and we must soon be on the move, for we've work before us."

So had I, and thus thinking, I shrank further back into the shadow of the broken archway where I stood, and knowing from the sound of the voices within that I had no time to lose, I raised my pistol and fired.

Without a groan, the brigand fell to the ground, a yell resounded within, and another dark form filled the entrance, and waiting till the man stood erect; I again fired, and one more robber bit the dust.

Then shrieks, curses, and threats came to me, and the entrance was filled by two dark forms, crowding out like bees from a hive, and hastily I fired, but without results, for one of the bandits sprang to his feet and the next instant the other followed his example, while more heads appeared in the opening.

I was in a dangerous place, and well did I know it, but long experience having taught me to nerve myself like iron, when my life depends upon my aim, I threw aside my cloak, and again fired, twice in quick succession, just as I was discovered, and received a return fire from the robbers.

They had fired their last shots, for my revolver had brought them both down, and my fifth and sixth balls missing fire, I drew my second pistol and opened rapidly upon the crowd in the entrance, and with a terrible effect, for howls of rage and pain answered the reports.

Four bandits lay dead before me, and I could see that one, or more, dark forms choked the entrance, but finding, from two shots in the opening, that I could be seen from within, I bounded to one side, and stood to the right of the arched tunnel-way.

But my courage arose, my blood was up, and I felt that I held the winning hand as long as my revolvers remained true to me.

I still had four loads in one pistol and then a small pair of Derringers, giving me six shots in all; if these did not miss fire I was all right, and should these fail me I had my bowie-knife, with which, as my adversaries had to creep out singly, or at the best, only two together, and would have to expose the backs of their necks by so doing, I could guillotine them in thorough Parisian style; hence I was rather sorry when the robbers failed to show themselves at the entrance.

But I had not long to wait, for the two bodies that blocked the passage way were drawn back, and quickly two forms appeared, for no doubt having discovered there was but one assailant, and feeling how successfully they were caught in a trap of their own finding, they determined to risk life at the pistol's muzzle rather than be hung, which fate they knew would be theirs if captured.