

Dianega may advise. Dianega has lived more years than Vallandano has months! More than a hundred summers have come and gone since I was as old as you! These chabes were born in sorrow; their parents and their grandparents have I seen to sink into the cold earth by the great persecutions of the Busné; and I only am left. I have listened to the wisdom my forefathers taught me, in the dim years that are past. I have hearkened to the teaching of the God of the Caloré through every night of my long life, now so near its close! I have signs shown me in the winds, and the eternal writings of the stars are given to me to explain their mysteries and to read their warnings. Listen, then! Last night I could not sleep, I went out to gaze at the cold moon, and to think of my dead *ro*, dead so long ago. Signs were shown me there; I saw a lady, noble enough to be of our own pure blood, mounted upon a serpent that turned to the right or to the left, just as she willed. She laughed, and sang, and was merry, and she breathed defiance on many a brave knight, who sought to woo her, blinded by her beauty, seeing not the dragon, until too close, when a blow of the serpent's tail felled them like oxen stretched for slaughter, and they became food for the gluttonous demon, whilst the lady loudly laughed and caressed the beast. But the damsel held a twig of olive, which the dragon might not reach, or death would come to the lady. She exulted over a down-trodden victim, and the dragon seeing his chance, seized the bough and in an instant he was alone, alone with his slimy wrinkles, and the lady was far away in a deep, tangled wood, amid poisonous plants and still more poisonous reptiles. Thus was she left to perish.

"But a wolf was entranced by her beauty, and he gave her a home in the far mountain where splendor reigned; but playing him false she eloped with his younger brother, whom she ate up when she became hungry, and then she became a fiend and flew about destroying peace from land to land, and from home to home. She fought with the dragon, but could not vanquish him. The gods had helped her and they had assisted the serpent, so one was unable to destroy the other. Then they both went away, and they go about now, sometimes in the mountains of the Busné, and sometimes in the deserts of the Arabs.

"The Moors know them well," then stepping quite close to Vallandano, and elevating her voice, she shrieked, "Caramba! and one of them is at the posada of the *Beng!*"

Vallandano seized the old woman by the hands, and cried with deep emotion:

"*Garacia*, when all is ready, I will do as I have promised, I will marry the dark-haired *chabi* beauty, for I perceive she is fair as the queen of the night. Yes, mother Dianega, I will be her *ro*, she shall be my *romi*, if what you now tell me prove true."

"*Requiescio*, but the posada of the *Sese Beng* does now contain the accursed dog of a Busné or mother Dianega of the Chardi Moors will never read *baji* again, never see another sun, but die—yes, die!

"*Caramba, I never yet read wrongly!*"

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