

And through the rain and the night, doubly dark in the canals, Hualpa sped to the open lake, followed by nine canoes, fashioned for speed, each driven by six oarsmen, and carrying four warriors ; so there were with him nine and thirty chosen men, with linked mail under their white tunics, and swords of steel on their long lances,—arms and armor of the Christians.

Off the causeway, beyond the first canal, he waited, until the great flotillas, answering his signal, closed in on the right hand and left ; then he started for the canal, chafing at the delay of his vessels.

"Faster, faster, my men !" he said aloud ; then to himself, "Now will I wrest her from the robber, and after that she will give me her love again. O happy, happy hour !"

He sought the canal, thinking, doubtless, that the Christians would find it impassable, and that in their front, as the place of safety, they would most certainly place Nenetzin. There, into the press he drove.

"Not here ! Back, my men !" he shouted.

The chasm was bridged.

And marvelling at the skill of the strangers, which overcame difficulties as by magic, and trembling lest they should escape and his love be lost to him after all, he turned his canoe,—if possible, to be the first at the next canal. Others of his people were going in the same direction, but he outstript them.

"Faster, faster !" he cried ; and the paddles threshed the water,—wings of the lake-birds not more light and free. Into the causeway he bent, so close as to hear the tramp of horses ; sometimes shading his eyes against the rain, and looking up, he saw the fugitives, black against the clouds,—strangers and Tlascalans,—plumes of men, but never scarf of woman.

Very soon the people on the causeway heard his call to the boatmen, and the plash of the paddles, and they quickened their pace.

"*Adelante ! adelante !*" cried Sandoval, and forward dashed the cavaliers.

"O my men, land us at the canal before the strangers come up, and in my palace at ease you shall eat and drink all your lives ! Faster, faster !"

So Hualpa urged his rowers, and in their sinewy hands the oaken blades bent like bows.

Behind dropped the footmen,—even the Tlascalans ; and weak from hunger and wounds, behind dropped some of the horses. Shook the causeway, foamed the water. A hundred yards,—and the coursers of the lake were swift as the coursers of the land ; half a mile,—and the appeal of the infidel and the cheering cry of the Christian went down the wind on the same gale. At last, as Hualpa leaped from his boat, Sandoval checked his horse,—both at the canal.