

Some moments I waited, and was beginning to fear that the maiden had feared to venture forth in the darkness and storm, when I discovered her approaching.

"Senorita!"

At the sound of my voice, she started, turned, and was about to flee, when I sprang from my place of concealment, and jumping, grasped her hand, saying hastily:

"Do not fear me. I would serve you."

"How, Senor?"

"I was driven by the storm to seek shelter in the ruin, and there my horse awaits; I discovered that it was the home of brigands, and I would know why you are there."

"Oh, Senor, leave at once! for, should they discover you here, they would kill us both;" and throwing down the stone jar, the little hands were clasped in agony.

"They will not discover us;" why are you there?"

"I was stolen from my father's *hacienda*, miles and miles away; I have now been their captive for months, and they treat me so cruelly."

"Then you shall remain no longer with them; tell me how they enter the hall where they now are."

"There is only one entrance, Senor, through an arched doorway, now nearly filled up with earth, for one has to crawl through to get in or out."

"That room is their rendezvous, then?"

"Yes, Senor; there they sleep and eat, and keep their plunder; another room opens into it, but that is mine; but it is only half roofed over, and there is no way of getting in and out except through the bandits' hall."

"How many robbers are there in the band?"

"Fifteen, and all in to-night on account of the storm."

"Then I will save you; do you know how to ride?"

"Indeed I do."

"Then listen; return with the water, and make that follow some coffee, after which you must slip out unperceived, and come around to the head of the ruin, where I will await you; then take my horse and ride like the wind to a *hacienda* seven miles from here, rouse the inmates, and tell the men to hasten hither, you guiding them, and we'll take the whole party. In the meanwhile I will now accompany you around to the entrance of the hall, and thus find out its locality; and then return and get my horse ready, and after you are gone I will stand guard at the outlet, and if any man comes out, he dies."

The young girl almost clapped her hands with joy, at the thought of soon being freed from the power of the bandits, and I filled her jar for her and at a safe distance, followed her back, and noted the way to reach the bandits' hall; after which I returned to my place of concealment, and once more put my eye to the opening.

In a sleepy sort of manner the young girl went about her task, preparing the coffee, and was cursed for her pains by the villainous leader, and then she sought her couch.

So quietly did she steal from the hall that I believe her still in it, when I was startled by a low—

"Senor!"

Turning, the young girl stood beside me, and soon she was mounted upon my horse, and was ready.