

According to the Spanish custom I had become engaged by proxy, and in three months I was to be married. I was eager for the day to come, for, in Mexico, all the sweet days of courtship come after marriage. As yet there had been but the exchange of glances and smiles as we met going to, and coming from church. A few dances together, but always under the close surveillance of a parent or duenna, permitted the indulgence of courtesies only. The assistance of a *patrona* had done the rest.

The union had been consummated without the interchange of words. Words! What are words to the hearts of lovers?

But Antonio!—he was the marring feature in a blissful dream.

Antonio Duran had asked for the *senorita* Manuela only to be refused; and the disappointed Mexican looked upon me as an enemy.

The season of Lent is a long one to lovers in Mexico, for then they see each other only while attending to devotional duties.

I was promised by my Mexican friends an opportunity to see the *penitentes*, of whom I had heard so many strange accounts. I had never been able to see them while practising the peculiar rites of their order. The *penitentes* are a society of men who punish themselves in various ways, and in severe manner during Lent, and who observe the season with secret rites and great solemnity. To escape the notice of strangers and enemies they march in procession at night. Often while lying in bed I have heard the weird chanting of their singers, and the loud grinding of the heavy crosses dragged along the ground by the half naked men, accompanied by the sharp sounds of the scourges laid upon bleeding backs. Often with a feeling of horror I had heard this, yet I had long desired to see, with my own eyes, these things done. It fascinated me as the guillotine fascinates the people who desire to see the victim's head fall from the knife. No amount of discouragement from the clergy and people had been successful in breaking up the society, as mysterious and permanent as Freemasonry and Oddfellowship.

The people of the house where I lived had prepared a meal for the *penitentes*, and for all who would be present.

The time came. People began to arrive early in the night, and with each addition of old and young the

excitement of expectation increased. By midnight at which time the *penitentes* were expected, the rooms were crowded. One o'clock saw few of them gone, and yet no *penitentes*.

A sudden thrill went through the assembly. An uneasy movement and then complete silence followed, when the full burst of the unmistakable sounds that accompany the procession filled our senses. The expectation of it to me, was of a horror. The glimmer of lights lit up the ground without. The grinding became harsh and loud, the wailing chant filled my ears, and the sickening blow of the whips seemed to smite the brain of the listener. In a moment they appeared in front of the broad opening of the court forming the main entrance to the house. Shall I ever forget the effect it left upon me? Women all around hid their faces in their shawls and moaned; children cried, and for a few moments I lost my own head in the general excitement. Recovering from the first shock of their appearance, heightened as it was by the actions of those around me, I was able to observe, with a fair degree of calmness the ghostly spectacle. Save those who acted as leaders, and who carried rattles, and sang to drown the cries of agony occasionally wrung from the self-inflicted torture, they were naked to the waist and unshod. I doubt not many in the audience recognized husband, brother, or father disguised as they were with masks. The crosses they carried were immense. And the bearers staggered under the weight of them.

Quiet was at last restored, and the business of the evening commenced, namely, the meal.

It was found that four of the *penitentes* would have to be served in another room, and mine being the most convenient, and unoccupied, it was given up to them.

It was at last over. Tired out with the events of the night, I sat in my room as the faint sounds of the departing *penitentes* died out in the chill of the night. I gazed into the fire with a feeling of loneliness. I had lived through an experience the strangest of my life. The reaction that followed the awfulness and excitement of the night, brought a tinge of melancholy which kept away sleep. My thoughts found comfort in one sweet comforter only, Manuela. Suddenly my eye fell upon a mark on the wall which till now had escaped my notice. There, in bold and distinct outline upon the white wall was a red cross—a bloody cross—marked by a finger with the blood beaten from the