

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ESCAPE.

WE must not suppose that Don Gomez had any intention of entering the convent by stealth to steal away the person whom he sought under cover of darkness, or what may have been conjectured, proving his devotion and courage by boldly entering the place and bearing away the novice, with the whole force of the Convent—from the abbess to the portress—opposing him. Far from this, he looked conscientiously upon the life vows of the Convent or Monastery as the most holy earthly vows which can bind the mortal to his Creator, and, consequently, too sacred to be even thought of in so irreverent a manner. Whether he were right or no, the cavalier was yet to discover. It is vain to attempt an enumeration of the plans suggested by Don Pedro, the greater number of which our friend was disposed to look upon as Quixotic in the extreme. At last they hit upon a scheme which was probably the best they had devised, a scheme which was the most plausible as it was strictly honourable, and one which reflects credit on both. This plan resulted from Don Gomez suddenly declaring the extent of his inquiries to be only to see the Señorita de Balboa,—providing she were merely a novice—and to hear from her own lips an assurance that she was content to assume the veil. *If she were already a nun?* then he *could* not see her, then he *dared* not see her! If she were only a novice and desired to return to Andalusia, and desired not to remain longer, then and then only could it behoove them to display their gallantry. They visited the Convent and sought an interview with Father Urbani, who received them cordially, as Don Pedro was a patron of the establishment, and then examined a pile of papers and letters in their presence, after which he looked at Don Gomez with a puzzled and even a somewhat suspicious expression, then turning from them rather abruptly he left the apartment.

Our friends were kept in suspense full half an hour, at the expiration of which time the confessor returned, informing Don Gomez that the abbess desired to see him.

It would be useless to describe the calm dignity of the Lady as she received the stranger. It would be useless to record the long conversation that passed between them, which assured the knight of the sympathy of that dignitary, who promised him to visit the novice, and what was more, she even told him that he might depend on her word for an interview if Sister Resurrection desired it. In the meantime Don Gomez was conducted by an old friar to the brothers' part of the structure, where he was invited to spend the night, which he accepted, and it was not until he was sleeping soundly that any thoughts of possible treachery entered his brain. Then in his dreams he heard a terrible tempest raging without, so black, so dark, so full of every imaginable terror, that he shuddered as the great Convent bell chimed forth the midnight hour,—so hollow and indistinct that the sound came floating through the grated window of his narrow