

by guarding it from within. It had not yet been attacked, and perhaps would not be, still it must be made secure.

The gypsy woman took a long rope, and asked Don Gomez to fasten it securely to a small rock, projecting over the top of the doorway. He did so, and she then ordered him to pull hard upon it, observing that she did not know where her fifty men were to come from to replace it; that it took even a much larger number to place it in its position forty years ago.

He pulled violently upon the rope, with all his strength, but he found himself unable to move it, until mother Corahani assisted him, then, as it gave way, a rock weighing probably many tons, lay before them, completely blocking up the passage.

"Now for the opening!" cried she, as she darted forward.

The youth advised her to be calm and to keep back, that if as she feared, any brigands were seeking to effect an entrance, he was better prepared to meet them than she.

"Ah, señor, I forgot one thing, I am now very old, and should I die on this day, will you see that my child, my *chabi*, is cared for?"

He assured her that he would, but considered her fears as useless; still he was willing to promise her what protection for her charge lay in his power.

"Swear it! No, no, there is no need! I have your word for it, señor, and will ask no more."

His horse, which he had brought into the cave, was much frightened at some object near him, and Don Gomez attempted to quiet him. It might have been some animal, or perhaps the Caloré woman darting past him that caused the charger to become so restless—he was quieted at last, however, and the young man dashed after the gypsy. He had scarcely left the stall when he heard a loud scream near a great opening, through which he could see the plain several hundred feet below. In an instant he was standing close to its mouth, where a strange spectacle was presented. A man had been lowered from above by means of a rope, and had gained a footing in the opening. The gypsy had flung herself upon him like a fury, burying her knife in his bosom. But he had clutched her wildly in his arms, and as he received the fatal blow, he reeled backwards and down over the dark cliff, full five hundred feet he fell headlong, dragging the unfortunate woman after him. Don Gomez was upon the scene just in time to catch the last expression of her face, which was that of triumph, and to see her long locks—white as the driven snow—float over the rocky edge of the opening; that was all, but he was unable to save her.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST LOVE.

During the afternoon of the day which succeeded the flight of Antonia from her faithless guardian and his nephew, Don Munez succeeded in sending a number of men to search for the young Señorita, lost in the mountains.

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