

II.

MEANWHILE, the moon had risen and was flooding the broad roofs and various courts of the great buildings with a silvery brilliancy, which contrasted sharply with the inky shadows cast by moving creatures or solid wall or massive column. While it was early in the evening, the sound of voices was heard, mingling later with the monotonous minor tones of those half-playful, half-pathetic airs so dear to the ear and heart of the Mexican peasantry; but as night approached, silence gradually fell upon the scene, broken only by the mutter or snore of some heavy sleeper, or the stamping of the horses and mules in their stalls.

The new-comer Juan Planillos, who had joined readily in jest and song, — though his wit was scarce bright enough, it seemed, to attract attention to the speaker (while absolute silence certainly would have done so), — at length, following the example of those around him, sought the shaded side of the corridor, and wrapping himself in his striped blanket lay down a little apart from the others, and was soon fast asleep.

Men who are accustomed to rise before or with the dawn sleep heavily, seldom stirring in that deep lethargy which at midnight falls like a spell on weary man and beast; yet it was precisely at that hour that Juan Planillos, like a man who had composed himself to sleep with a definite purpose to arise at a specified time, uncovered his face, raised himself on his elbow, and glancing first at the sky (reading the position of the moon and stars), threw then a keen glance at the prostrate figures around him. The very dogs — of which, lean and mongrel curs, there were many — like the men, fearing the malefic influences of the rays of the moon, had retired under benches, and into the farthest corners, and upon every living creature profound oblivion had fallen.

It was some minutes before Planillos could thoroughly satisfy himself on this point, but that accomplished, he