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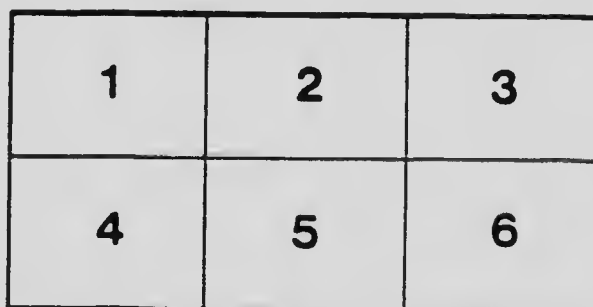
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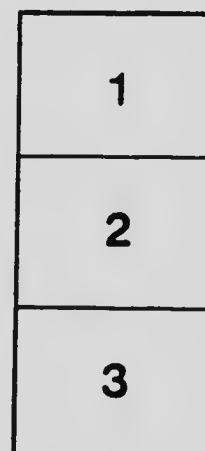
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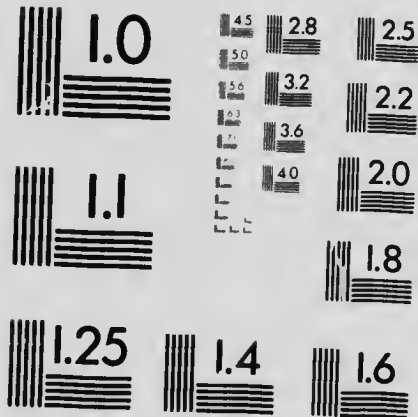
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BEFORE
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BEFORE THE GRINGO CAME

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BEFORE THE GRINGO CAME

("REZÁNOV" and "THE DOOMSWOMAN")

BY
GERTRUDE ATHERTON



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TO

DELFINA DE LA GUERRA Y MORENO

A FRIEND WHOM I GREATLY ADMIRE

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REZÁNOV

REZÁNOV

I

As the little ship that had three times raced with death sailed past the gray headlands and into the straits of San Francisco on that brilliant April morning of 1806, Rezánov forgot the bitter humiliations, the mental and physical torments, the deprivations and dangers of the past three years; forgot those harrowing months in the harbor of Nagasaki when the Russian bear had caged his tail in the presence of eyes aslant; his dismay at Kamchatka when he had been forced to send home another to vindicate his failure, and to remain in the Tsar's incontinent and barbarous northeastern possessions as representative of his Imperial Majesty, and plenipotentiary of the Company his own genius had created; forgot the year of loneliness and hardship and peril in whose jaws the bravest was impotent; forgot even his pitiable crew, diseased when he left Sitka, that had filled the *Juno* with their groans and laments; and the bells of youth, long still, rang in his soul once more.

"It is the spring in California," he thought, with a sigh that curled at the edge. "However," life had made him philosophical; "the moments of unreasonable happiness are the most enviable no doubt, for there is neither gall nor satiety in the reaction. All this is as enchanting as—well, as a woman's promise. What lies beyond? Illiterate and mercenary Spaniards, vicious natives, and boundless ennui, one may safely wager. But if all California is as beautiful as this, no man that has spent a winter in Sitka should ask for more."

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In the extent and variety of his travels Rezánov had seen Nature more awesome of feature but never more fair. On his immediate right as he sailed down the straits toward the narrow entrance to be known as the Golden Gate, there was little to interest save the surf and the masses of outlying rocks where the seals leapt and barked; the shore beyond was sandy and low. But on his left the last of the northern mountains rose straight from the water, the warm red of its deeply indented cliffs rich in harmony with the green of slope and height. There was not a tree; the mountains, the promontories, the hills far down on the right beyond the sand dunes, looked like stupendous waves of lava that had cooled into every gracious line and fold within the art of relenting Nature; granted ages after, a light coat of verdure to clothe the terrible mystery of birth. The great bay, as blue and tranquil as a high mountain lake, as silent as if the planet still slept after the agonies of labor, looked to be broken by a number of promontories, rising from their points far out in the water to the high back of the land; but as the *Juno* pursued her slanting way down the channel Rezánov saw that the most imposing of these was but the end of a large island, and that scattered near were other islands, masses of rock like the castellated heights that rise abruptly from the plains of Italy and Spain; far away, narrower straits, with a glittering expanse beyond; while bounding the whole eastern rim of this splendid sheet of water was a chain of violet hills, with the pale green mist of new grass here and there, and purple hollows that might mean groves of trees crouching low against the cold winds of summer; in the soft pale blue haze above and beyond, the lofty volcanic peak of a mountain range. Not a human being, not a boat, not even a herd of cattle was to be seen, and Rezánov, for a moment forgetting to exult in the length of Russia's arm, yielded himself to the subtle influence abroad in the air, and felt that he could dream as he had dreamed in a youth when the courts of Europe to the boy were

as fabulous as El Dorado in the immensity of ancestral seclusions.

"It is like the approach to paradise, is it not, Excellency?" a deferential voice murmured at his elbow.

The plenipotentiary frowned without turning his head. Dr. Langsdorff, surgeon and naturalist, had accompanied the Embassy to Japan, and although Rezánov had never found any man more of a bore and would willingly have seen the last of him at Kamchatka, a skilful dispenser of drugs and mender of bones was necessary in his hazardous voyages, and he retained him in his suite. Langsdorff returned his polite tolerance with all the hidden resources of his spleen; but his curiosity and scientific enthusiasm would have sustained him through greater trials than the exactions of an autocrat, whom at least he had never ceased to respect in the most trying moments at Nagasaki.

"Yes," said Rezánov. "But I wonder you find anything to admire in such unportable objects as mountains and water. I have not seen a living thing but gulls and seals, and God knows we had enough of both at Sitka."

"Ah, your excellency, in a land as fertile as this, and caressed by a climate that would coax life from a stone, there must be an infinite number of aquatic and aerial treasures that will add materially to the scientific lore of Europe."

"Humph!" said Rezánov, and moved his shoulder in an uncontrollable gesture of dismissal. But the spell of the April morning was broken, although the learned doctor was not to be the only offender.

The Golden Gate is but a mile in width and the swift current carried the *Juno* toward a low promontory from the base of which a shrill cry suddenly ascended. Rezánov, raising his glass, saw what he had taken to be a pile of fallen rocks was a fort, and that a group of excited men stood at its gates. Once more the plenipotentiary on a delicate mission, he ordered the two naval

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officers sailing the ship to come forward, and retired to the dignified isolation of the cabin.

The high-spirited young officers, who would have raised a gay hurrah at the sight of civilized man had it not been for the awe in which they held their chief, saluted the Spaniards formally, then stood in an attitude of extreme respect; the *Juno* was directly under the guns of the fort.

One of the Spaniards raised a speaking trumpet and shouted:

"Who are you?"

No one on the *Juno*, save Rezánov, could speak a word of Spanish, but the tone of the query was its own interpreter. The oldest of the lieutenants, through the ship's trumpet, shouted back:

"The *Juno*—Sitka—Russian."

The Spanish officer made a peremptory gesture that the ship come to anchor in the shelter given by an immense angle of the mainland, of which the fort's point was the western extreme. The Russians, as befitted the peaceful nature of their mission, obeyed without delay. Before their resting place, and among the sand hills a mile from the beach, was a quadrangle of buildings some two hundred feet square and surrounded by a wall about fourteen feet high and seven feet thick. This they knew to be the Presidio. They saw the officers that had hailed them gallop over the hill behind the fort to the more ambitious enclosure, and, in the square, confer with another group that seemed to be in a corresponding state of excitement. A few moments later a deputation of officers, accompanied by a priest in the brown habit of the Franciscan order, started on horseback for the beach. Rezánov ordered Lieutenant Davidov and Dr. Langsdorff to the shore as his representatives.

The Spaniards wore the undress uniform of black and scarlet in which they had been surprised, but their peaked straw hats were decorated with cords of gold or silver, the tassels hanging low on the broad brim; their high deer-skin boots were gaily embroidered, and bris-

tled with immense silver spurs. The commanding officer alone had invested himself with a gala serape, a square of red cloth with a bound and embroidered slit for the head. Leading the rapid procession, his left hand resting significantly on his sword, he was a fine specimen of the young California grandee, dark and dashing and reckless, lithe of figure, thoroughbred, ardent. His eyes were sparkling at the prospect of excitement; not only had the Russians, by their nefarious appropriation of the northwest-ern corner of the continent and a recent piratical excursion in pursuit of otter, inspired the Spanish Government with a profound disapproval and mistrust, but a rumor had run up the coast that made every sea-gull look like the herald of a hostile fleet. This was young Argüello's first taste of command, and life was dull on the northern peninsula; he would have welcomed a declaration of war.

Davidov and Langsdorff had come to shore in one of the *Juno's* canoes. The conversation was held in Latin between the two men of learning.

"Who are you and whence come you?" asked the priest.

Langsdorff, who had been severely drilled by the plenipotentiary as to text, replied with a profound bow: "We are Russians engaged in completing the circumnavigation of the globe. It was our intention to go directly to Monterey and present our official documents, as well as our respects, to your illustrious Governor, but owing to contrary winds and a resultant scarcity of provisions, we were under the necessity of putting into the nearest harbor. The *Juno* is navigated by Lieutenant Davidov and Lieutenant Khovstov, of the Imperial Navy of Russia; by gracious permission associated with the Marine of the Russo-American Company." He paused a moment, and then swept out his trump card with a magnificent flourish: "Our expedition is in command of His Excellency, Privy Counsellor and Grand Chamberlain Baron Rezánov, late Ambassador to the Court of Japan, Plenipotentiary of the Russo-American Company, Imperial Inspector of the extreme eastern

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and northwestern American dominions of His Imperial Majesty, Alexander the First, Emperor of all the Russias, whose representative in these waters he is."

The Spaniards were properly impressed as the priest translated with the glibness of the original; but Argüello, who now announced himself as Commandante ad interim of the Presidio of San Francisco during the absence of his father at Monterey, nodded sagely several times, and then held a short conference in Spanish with the interpreter. The priest turned to the Russians with a smile as diplomatic as that which Rezánov had drilled upon the ugly ingenuous countenance of his medicine man.

"Our illustrious Governor, Don José Arrillaga, received word from the court of Spain, now quite two years ago, of the sailing in 1803 from Kronstadt of the ships *Nadeshda* and *Neva*, in command of Captain Krusenstern and Captain Lisiansky, the former having on board the illustrious Ambassador to Japan, the Privy Counsellor and Chamberlain de Rezánov. It was expected that these ships would touch at more than one of His Most Holy Catholic Majesty's vast dominions, and all viceroys and gobernador propietarios were alike instructed to receive the exalted representative of the mighty Emperor of Russia with hospitality and respect. But we cannot understand why his excellency comes to us so late and in so small a ship, rather than in the state with which he sailed from Europe."

"The explanation is simple, my father. The original ships, from a variety of circumstances, were, upon our arrival at Kamchatka, at the conclusion of the embassy to Japan, under the necessity of returning at once to Europe. His Imperial Majesty, Alexander the First, ordered the Chamberlain and plenipotentiary, the representative of imperial power in the Russo-American possessions, to remove to the *Juno* for the purpose of visiting the Kurile and Aleutian Islands, Kadiak and the northwestern coast of America." The Tsar had never heard of the *Juno*, but as Rezánov was practically

his august self in these far-away waters, there was enough of truth in this statement to appease the conscience of a subordinate.

The Spaniards were satisfied. Lieutenant Argüello begged that the emissaries would return to the ship and invite the Chamberlain and his party to come at once to the Presidio and do it the honor to partake of the poor hospitality it afforded. An officer galloped furiously for horses.

A few moments later they were still more deeply impressed by the appearance of their distinguished visitor as he stood erect in the boat that brought him to shore. In full uniform of dark green and gold lace, with cocked hat and the splendid order of St. Ann on his breast, Rezánov was by far the finest specimen of a man the Californians, themselves of ampler build than their European ancestors, had ever beheld. Of commanding stature and physique, with an air of highest breeding and repose, he looked both a man of the great world and an intolerant leader of men. His long oval face was thin and somewhat lined, the mouth heavily molded and closely set, suggestive of sarcasm and humor; the nose long, with arching and flexible nostrils. His eyes, seldom widely opened, were light blue, very keen, usually cold. Like many other men of his position in Europe, he had discarded wig and queue and wore his short fair hair unpowdered.

It was a singularly imposing but hardly attractive presence, thought young Argüello, until Rezánov, after stepping on shore and bowing formally, suddenly smiled and held out his hand. Then the impressionable Spaniard "melted like a woman," as he told his sister, Concha, and would have embraced the stranger on either cheek had not awe lingered to temper his enthusiasm. But Rezánov never made a stauncher friend than Louis Argüello, who vowed to the last of his days that the one man who had fulfilled his ideal of the grand seigneur was he that sailed in from the North on that fateful April morning of 1806.

II

As Rezánov, heading the procession with young Argüello, entered the wide gates of the Presidio, he received an impression memorably different from that which led earlier travelers to describe it inelemently as a large square surrounded by mud houses thatched with reeds. It is true that the walls were of adobe and the roofs of tule, nor was there a tree on the sand hills encircling the stronghold. But in this early springtime—the summer of the peninsula—the hills showed patches of verdure, and all the low white buildings were covered by a network of soft dull green and archaic pink. The Castilian rose, full and fluted, and of a chaste and penetrating fragrance, hung singly and in clusters on the pillars of the dwellings, on the barracks and chapel, from the very roofs; bloomed upon bushes as high as young trees. The Presidio was as delicately perfumed as a lady's bower, and its cannon faced the ever-changing hues of water and island and hill.

As the party approached, heads of all ages appeared between the vines, and there was a low murmur of irrepressible curiosity and delight.

"We do not see many strangers in this lonely land," said Argüello apologetically. "And never before have we had so distinguished a guest as your excellency. It was always a gala day when even a Boston skipper came in with a few bales of goods and a complexion like the hides we sold him. Now, alas! they are no longer permitted to enter our ports. Governor Arrillaga will have none of contraband trade and slaying of our otter. And as for Europeans other than Spaniards, save for an English sea captain now and then, they know naught of our existence."

But Rezánov had not come to California on the impulse of a moment. He replied suavely: "There you are mistaken. Your illustrious father, Don José Mario de Argüello, is well known to us as the most respected, eminent and influential character in the Californias. It was my intention, after paying a visit of ceremony to his excellency, Governor Arrillaga, to come to San Francisco for the sole purpose of meeting a man whose record has inspired me with the deepest interest. And we have all heard such wonderful tales of your California, of its beauty, its fertility, of the beneficent lives of your missionaries—so different from ours!—and of the hospitality and elegance of the Spaniards, that it has been the objective point of my travels, and I have found it difficult to curb my impatience while attending to imperative duties elsewhere."

"Ay! señor!" exclaimed the young Californian. "What you say fills me with a pride I cannot express, and I can only regret that the reports of our poor habitations should be so sadly exaggerated. Such as our possessions are, however, they are yours while you deign to remain in our midst. This is my father's house. I beg that you will regard it as your own. Burn it if you will!" he cried with more enthusiasm than commonly enlivened the phrases of hospitality. "He will be proud to know that a lifetime of severe attention to duty and of devotion to his King have won him fame abroad as well as at home. He has risen to his present position from the ranks, but he is of pure Spanish blood, not a drop of Indian; and my mother was a Moraga, of the best blood of Spain," he added artlessly. "As to the beauty and variety of our country, señor, of course you will visit our opulent south; but——" They had dismounted at the Commandante's house in the southeast corner of the square. Argüello impulsively led Rezánov back to the gates and pointed to the east. "I have crossed those mountains and the mountains beyond, Excellency, and seen fertile and beautiful valleys of a vast extent, watered by five rivers and bounded far far

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away by mountains covered with snow and gigantic trees. The valley beyond the southern edge of the bay, where the Missions of Santa Clara and San José are, is also rich, but those between the two ranges is an empire; and one day when the King sends us more colonists, we shall recompense Spain for all she has lost."

"I congratulate you!" Rezánov, indifferent to his host's ancestral tree, had lifted an alert ear. His quick incisive brain was at work. "I should like to stretch my legs over a horse for a week at a time, and even to climb your highest mountains. You may imagine how much exercise a man may get on a vessel of two hundred and six tons, and it is thirty-two days since I left Sitka. To look upon a vast expanse of green—to say nothing of possible sport—after a winter of incessant rain and impenetrable forests—what a prospect! I beg you will take me off into the wilderness as soon as possible."

"I promise you the Governor shall not withhold his consent—and there are bear and deer—quail, wild duck—your excellency will enjoy that beautiful wild country as I have done." Argüello was enchanted at the prospect of fresh adventure in the company of this fascinating stranger. "But we are once more at our poor abode, señor. I beg you to remember that it is your own."

They ascended the steps of the piazza, suddenly deserted, and it seemed to Rezánov that every sense in his being quivered responsively to the poignant sweetness of the Castilian roses. He throbbed with a sudden exultant premonition that he stood on the threshold of an historic future, with a pagan joy in mere existence, a sudden rush of desire for the keen wild happiness of youth. Such is the elixir of California in the north and the spring.

They entered a long sala typical of its day and of many to come; whitewashed walls hung with colored prints of the Virgin and saints; horsehair furniture, matting, deep window seats; and a perennial coolness. The Chamberlain (his court title and the one commonly

attached to his name) made himself as comfortable as the slippery chair would permit, and Argüello went for his mother.

Langsdorff, who had lingered on the piazza with the priest, entered in a moment.

"The good padre tells me that this rose of Castile is the only imported flower in California," he cried, with enthusiasm, for although not a botanist there was a bump between his eyes as big as a child's fist and he had a nose like the prow of a toy ship. "Many cuttings were brought from Spain——"

"What difference does it make where it came from?" interrupted Rezánov testily. "Is it not enough that it is beautiful, but it must have a pin stuck through it like some poor devil of a butterfly?"

"Your excellency has also the habit to probe into things he deems worthy of his attention," retorted the offended scientist; but he was obliged to closet his wrath. An inner door opened and the host reappeared with his mother and a fair demonstration of her virtues. She was a very large woman dressed loosely in black, but she carried herself with an air of complete, if somewhat sleepy, dignity, and it was evident that her beauty had been great. Her full face had lost its contours, but time had spared the fine Roman nose and the white skin, that birthright of the high-bred Castilian. Argüello presented his family ceremoniously as the guest of honor rose and bowed with formal deference.

"My mother, Doña Ignacia Argüello, your excellency, who unites with me in praying that you will regard our home as yours during your sojourn in the north. My sister, Maria de la Concepcion Marcella Argüello, and my little sisters, Ana Paula and Gertrudes Rudisinda. My brothers: Gervasio—soldado distinguido of the San Francisco Company; Santiago, a cadet in the same company; Francesco and Toribio, whose presence at the table I beg you will overlook, for when we are so fortunate as to be all together, señor, we cannot bear to be separated. My oldest brother, alas!—Ignacio—is study-

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ing for holy orders in Mexico, and my sister Isabel visits at the Presidio of Santa Barbara. I beg that you will be seated, Excellency." And he continued the introduction to the lesser luminaries, with equal courtesy but fewer periods.

Rezánov exchanged a few pleasant words with his smiling hostess before she returned to her distracted maids preparing the dinner; but his eyes during Argüello's declamation had wandered with a singular fidelity to the beautiful face of the eldest daughter of the house. She had responded with a humorous twinkle in her magnificent black eyes and not a hint of diffidence. As she entered the room his brain had flashed out the thought: "Thank heaven for a pretty girl after these three abominable years!" Possibly his pleasure would have been salted with pique had he guessed that her thought was the twin of his own. He was the first man of any world more considerable than the petty court of the viceroy of Mexico that had visited California in her time, and excellent as she found his tall military figure and pale cold face, the novelty of the circumstance fluttered her more.

Doña "Coneha" Argüello was the beauty of California, and although her years were but sixteen her blood was Spanish, and she carried her tall deep figure and fine head with the grace and dignity of an accomplished woman. She had inherited the white skin and delicate Roman-Spanish profile of the Moragas, but there was an intelligent fire in her eyes, a sharp accentuation of nostril, and a full mobility of mouth, childish, half-developed as that feature still was, that betrayed a strong cross-current forcing the placid maternal flow into rugged and unexplored channels, while assimilating its fine qualities of pride and high breeding. Gervasio and Santiago resembled their sister in coloring and profile, but lacked her subtle quality of personality and divine innocence. Luis was more the mother's son than the father's—saving his olive skin; a grandee, modified by the simplicities of a soldier's

life, amiable and upright. Doña Ignacia recognized in Concha the quintessence of the two opposing streams, and had long since ceased to impose upon a girl who had little else but her liberties, the conventional restrictions of the Spanish maiden. Concha had already received many offers of marriage and regarded men as mere swingers of incense. Moreover, her cultivated mind was filled with ideals and ideas far beyond anything California would yield in her day.

As Rezánov, upon Doña Ignacia's retreat, walked directly over to her, she smilingly seated herself on a sofa and swept aside her voluminous white skirts. She was not sure that she liked him, but in no doubt whatever of her delight at his advent.

Her manners were very simple and artless, as are the manners of most women whom Nature has gifted with complexity and depth.

"It is now two years and more that we have been excited over the prospect of this visit," she said. "But if you will tell me what you have been doing all this time, I, at least, will forgive you; for you will never be able to imagine, señor, how I long to hear of the great world. I stare at the map, then at the few pictures we have, I know many books of travel by heart; but I am afraid my imagination is a poor one, for I cannot conjure up great cities filled with people—thousands of people! Dios de mi alma! A world where there is something besides mountains and water, grain fields, orchards, forests, earthquakes, and climate! Will you, señor?"

"For quite as many hours as you will listen to me. I propose a compact. You shall improve my Spanish. I will impart all I know of Europe—and of Asia—if your curiosity reaches that far."

"Even of Japan?" There was a wicked sparkle in her eye.

"I see you already have some knowledge of the cause of my delay." His voice was even, but a wound smarted.

"It is quite true, señorita, that the first embassy to

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Japan, from which we hoped so much, was a humiliating failure, and that I was played with for six months by a people whom we had regarded as a nation of monkeys. When my health began to suffer from the long confinement on shipboard—we had previously been fourteen months at sea—and I asked to be permitted to live on shore while my claims to an audience were under consideration, I was removed with my suite to a cage on a strip of land nearly surrounded with water, where I had less liberty and exercise than on shipboard. Finally, I had a ridiculous interview with a 'great man,' in which I accomplished nothing but the preservation of what personal dignity a man may while sitting on his heels; the superb presents of the Tsar were returned to me, and I was politely told to leave; Japan wanted neither the friendship of Russia nor her gimcracks. That, señorita, is the history of the first Russian Embassy—for the tentative visit of Adam Lanxinann, twelve years before, can be dignified by no such title—to Oriental waters. It is to be hoped that Count Golofkin, who was to undertake a similar mission to China, has met with a better fate."

Underneath the polished armor of a man who was a courtier when he chose and the dominating spirit always, he was hot and quick of temper. His light cold eyes glowed with resentment at the dancing lights in hers, as he cynically gave her a bald abstract of the unfortunate mission. He reflected that commonly he would have fitted a different mask to the ugly skull of fact, but this young barbarian, as he chose to regard her, excited the elemental truth in him, defying him to appear at his worst. He was astonished to see her eyes suddenly soften and her mouth tremble.

"It must have been a hateful experience—hateful!" Her voice, beginning on its usual low soft note, rose to a hoarse pitch of indignation. "I should have killed somebody! To be a man, and strong, and caressed all one's life by fortune—and to be as helpless as an Indian! Madre de Dios!"

"I shall take my revenge," said Rezánov shortly; but the wound closed, and once more he became aware of the poignant sweetness of Castilian roses. Concha wore one in her soft dusky hair, and another where the little round jacket of white linen, gaily embroidered with pink, met on her bosom. But if sentiment tempted him, he was quickly poised by her next remarks. She uttered them in a low tone, although the animated conversation of the rest of the party would have permitted the two on the sofa to exchange the vows of love unheard.

"But what a practice for your diplomatie talents, Excellency! Poor California! At least let me be the first to hear what you have come for?" Her voice dropped to a soft cooing note, although her eyes twinkled. "For the love of God, señor! I am so bored in this life on the edge of the world! To see the seams and ravelings of a diplomatie intrigue! I have read and heard of many, but never had I hoped to link my finger in anything subtler than a quarrel between priest and Governor, or the jealousy of Los Angeles for Monterey. I even will help you—if you mean no harm to my father or my country. And I am not a friend to scorn, señor, for my blessed father is as wax in my hands, the dear old Governor adores me, and even Padre Abella, who thinks himself a great diplomat, and is watching us out of the corner of his eye, while I make him believe you pay me so many compliments my poor little head turns round—Bueno señor!" As she raised her voice she plucked the rose from her dress and tossed it to Rezánov. Then she lifted her chin and pouted her childish lips at the ironical smile of the priest.

Rezánov was close to betraying his surprise; but as he cherished a belief that the souls of all pretty women went to school to the devil before entering upon earthly enterprise, he wondered that he had been open to the illusion of complete ingenuousness in a descendant of one of the oldest and subtlest civilizations of earth. Within that luminous shell of youth there were, no doubt, wis- memories of men and women steeped

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in court intrigue to the eyes, of triumphant beauties that had lived for love and their power over the passions of men as ardent as himself. It was quite possible that she might be as useful as she desired. But his impulses were in leash. He merely looked and murmured his admiration.

"Better ask, what chance have I, a defenceless man, who has not seen a charming woman for three years, against such practised art? If you can hoodwink a Spanish priest, and manipulate a Governor who has won the confidence of the most suspicious court in Europe, what fortune for a barbarian of the north? Less than with Japan, I should think."

He divested the rose of its thorns and many tight little buds, and thrust the stem underneath the star of St. Ann. She lifted her chin again and tossed her head.

"You do not trust me, but you will. I fancy it will be before long—for it is quite true that the Californians are not so easily outwitted. And—even did I not help you, I would not—I vow, señor!—betray you. Is it true that Russia is at war with Spain?"

"What?"

"Have you not heard? It was for that we were all so excited this morning. We thought your ship might be the first of a fleet."

"I have heard no such rumor, and you may dismiss it. Russia is too much occupied with Napoleon Bonaparte, who has had himself crowned Emperor, and by this time is probably at war with half Europe——"

She interrupted him with flashing eyes. The pink in her cheeks had turned red. The thin nostrils of her pretty Roman nose fluttered like paper. "Ah!" she exclaimed, again with that note of hoarseness in her voice. "There is a great man, not a mere king on a throne his ancestors made for him. Papa hates him because he has seized a throne. Ay yi! Dios! you should hear the words fly when we go to war together. But I do not care that"—she snapped her firm white fingers—"for all the Bourbons that are in Europe.

Bonaparte! Do you know him Have you seen him?"

"I have seen him insult poor Markov, our ambassador to France, when I can assure you that he looked like neither a demi-god nor a gentleman. When you have improved my Spanish I will tell you many anecdotes of him. Meanwhile, am I to assume that you reserve your admiration for the man that carves his career in defiance of the rusty old machinery?"

"I do! I do! My father was of the people, a poor boy. He has risen to be the most powerful of all Californians, although the King he adores never makes him Gobernador Propietario. I tell him he should be the first to recognize the genius and the ambitions of a Bonaparte. The mere thought horrifies him. But in me that same strong plebeian blood makes another cry, and if my father had but enough men at his back, and the will to make himself King of the Californias—Madre de Dios! how I should help him!"

"At least I know her better than she knows me," thought Rezánov, as the inner door was thrown open and another bare room with a long table laden with savory food on a superb silver service was revealed. "And if I know anything of women, I can trust her—for as long as she may be necessary, at all events."

III

"SANTIAGO!" whispered Concha. "Do not go down to the ship. Take me for a walk. I have much to say."

Santiago, who had not been asked to form one of the escort upon the return of the Russians to the *Juno* for the night, felt injured and sulky and deigned no reply.

"If you do not, I'll not braid your hair to-morrow," said his sister, giving his arm a little shake; and he succumbed. The luxuriant tresses of the male Argüellos were combed and braided and tied with a ribbon every morning by the women of the family, and Concha's fingers were the gentlest and deftest. And Concha and Santiago were more intimate than even the rest of that united family. They had studied and read together, were equally dissatisfied with their narrow existence, ambitious for a wider experience. Santiago consoled himself with cards and training roosters for battle, and otherwise as a man may. He was but fifteen, this haughty severe-looking young hidalgo, but while in some respects many years older than his sister, in others he was younger, for he possessed none of her illuminating instinct.

She led him through a postern gate, round the first of the dunes, and they were alone in a waste of sand. She demanded abruptly:

"What do you think of our illustrious visitor?"

"I like him. He would wring your neck if you got in his way, but has a kind heart for those that call him master. I like that sort of a man. I wish he would take me away with him."

"He shall—one of these days. Santiago mio, let me

whisper——” She pulled his ear down to her lips. “He will marry me. I feel it. I know it. He has talked to me the whole day. He has told me grave secrets. Not even to you would I reveal them. So many have loved me—why should not he? I shall live in St. Petersburg, and see all Europe!—thousands of people—Dios mio! Dios mio!”

“Indeed!” Santiago, still unamiable, responded to this confidence with a sneer. “You aspire very high for a little girl of the wilderness, without fortune, and only half a coat-of-arms, so to speak. Do you know that this Rezánov—Dr. Langsdorff has told us all about him—is a great noble, one of the ten barons of Russia, and a Chamberlain in accordance with a decree of Peter the Great that court titles should be bestowed as a reward for distinguished services alone? He got a fortune in his youth by marriage with a daughter of Shelikov—that Siberian who founded the Russian colonies in America. The wife died almost immediately, but the Baron’s influence remained with Shelikov—for his influence at court was even greater—and after the older man’s death, with his mother-in-law, who is uncommonly clever. Shelikov’s schemes were but sketches beside Rezánov’s, who from merely a courtier and a gay blood about town developed into a great man of business, with an ambition to correspond. It was he who got the Imperial ukase that gave the Russian-American Company its power to squeeze all the other fur hunters and traders out of the northeast, and make Rezánov and everybody belonging to it so rich your head would swim if I told you the number of doubloons they spend in a year. Nobody has ever been so clever at managing those old beasts of autocrats as he. They think him merely the accomplished courtier, a brilliant dilettante, a condescending patron of art and letters, a devotee of pleasure, and all the time he is pulling their befuddled old brains about to suit himself. The Tsar Paul was a lunatic and they murdered him, but meanwhile he signed the ukase. The Tsar

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Alexander, who is not so bad nor so silly as the others, thinks there is no man so clever as Rezámov, who addresses him personally when sending home his reports. Do you know what all that means? Your plenipotentiary is not only a Chamberlain at court, a Privy Councillor, and the Tsar himself on this side of the world, but when his inspections and reforms are concluded, and he is one of the wealthiest men in Russia, he will return to St. Petersburg and become so high and mighty that a princess would snap at him. And you aspire! I never heard such nonsense."

"His excellency told me much of this," replied Concha imperturbably. "And I am sure that he cares nothing for princesses and will marry whom he most admires. He would not say, but I know he cared nothing for that poor little wife, dead so long ago. It was a marriage de convenance, such as all the great world is accustomed to. He will love me more than all the fine ladies he has ever seen. I feel it! I know it! And I am quite happy."

"Do you love him?" asked Santiago, looking curiously at his sister's flushed and glowing face. It seemed to him that she had never looked so young. "Many have loved you. I had begun to think you had no heart for men, no wish for anything but admiration. And now you give your heart in a day to this Russian—who must be nearly forty—unmasked."

"I have not thought of my heart at all. But I could love him, of course. He is so handsome, so kind, so grand, so gay! But love is for men and wives—has not my mother said so? Now I think only of St. Petersburg! of Paris! of London! of the beautiful gowns and jewels I shall wear at court—a red velvet train as long as a queen's, and all embroidered with gold, a white veil sparkled with gold, a head-dress a foot high studded with jewels, ropes of diamonds and pearls—I made him tell me how the great ladies dressed. Ah! there is the pleasure of being a girl—to think and dream of all those beautiful things, not of when the wife must live always

for the husband and childrer That comes soon enough. And why should I not hav all! all!—there is so little in life for the girl. It seems to me now that I have had nothing. When he asks me to marry him he will tell me of the fine things I shall have and the great sights I shall witness—the ceremonies at court, the winter streets—with snow—snow, Santiago!—where the great nobles drive four horses through the drifts like little hills, and are wrapped in furs like bears! The grand military parades—how I shall laugh when I think of our poor little Presidios with their dozen officers strutting about——” She stopped abruptly and bursting wildly into tears flung herself into her brother’s arms. “But I never could leave you! And my father! my mother! all! all! Ay, Dios de mi alma! what an ingrate I am! I should die of homesickness! My Santiago! My Santiago!”

Santiago patted her philosophically. “You are not going to-morrow,” he reminded her. “Don’t cross your bridges until you come to them. That is a good proverb for maids and men. You might take us all with you, or spend every third year or so in California. No doubt you would need the rest. And meanwhile remember that the high and mighty Chamberlain has not yet asked for the honor of an alliance with the house of Argüello, and that your brother will match his best fighting cock against your new white lace mantilla from Mexico, that he is not meditating any project so detrimental to his fortunes. Console yourself with the reflection that if he were, our father and the priests, and the Governor himself, would die of apoplexy. He is a heretic—a member of the Greek Church! Hast thou lost thy reason, Conehita? Dry your eyes and come home to sleep, and let us hear no more of marriage with a man who is not only a barbarian of the north and a heretic, but so proud he does not think a Californian good enough to wash his deck.”

IV

It was long before Rezánov slept that night. The usual chill had come in from the Pacific as the sun went down, and the distinguished visitor had intimated to his hosts that he should like to exercise on shore until ready for his detested quarters; but Argüello dared not, in the absence of his father, invite the foreigner even to sleep in the house so lavishly offered in the morning; although he had sent such an abundance of provisions to the ship that the poor sailors were deep in sleep, gorged like boa-constrictors; and he could safely promise that while the *Juno* remained in port her larder should never be empty. He shared the evening bowl of punch in the cabin, then went his way lamenting that he could not take his new friends with him.

Rezánov paced the little deck of the *Juno* to keep his blood in stir. There was no moon. The islands and promontories on the great sheet of water were black save for the occasional glow of an Indian camp-fire. There was not a sound but the lapping of the waves, the roar of distant breakers. The great silver stars and the little green stars looked down upon a solitude that was almost primeval, yet mysteriously disturbed by the restless currents in the brain of a man who had little in common with primal forces.

Rezánov was uneasy on more scores than one. He was annoyed and mortified at the discovery—made over the punch bowl—that the girl he had taken to be twenty was but sixteen. It was by no means his first experience of the quick maturity of southern women—but sixteen! He had never wasted a moment on a chit before, and although he was a man of imagination, and notwithstanding her intelligence and dignity, he could

not reconcile properties so conflicting with any sort of feminine ideal.

And the pressing half of his mission he had confided to her! No man knew better than he the value of a tactful and witty woman in the political dilemmas of life; more than one had given him devoted service, nor ever yet had he made a mistake. After several hours spent in the society of this clever political dissatisfied girl he had come to the conclusion that he could trust her, and had told her of the lamentable condition of the creatures in the employ of the Russian-American Company; of their chronic state of semi-starvation, of the scurvy that made them apathetic of brain and body, and eventually would exterminate them unless he could establish reciprocal trade relations with California and obtain regular supplies of farinaceous food; acknowledged that he had brought a cargo of Russian and Boston goods necessary to the well-being of the Missions and Presidios, and that he would not return to the wretched people of Sitka, at least, without a generous exchange of breadstuffs, dried meats, peas, beans, barley and tallow. Not only had he no longer the courage to witness their misery, but his fortune and his career were at stake. His entire capital was invested in the Company he had founded, and he had failed in his embassy to Japan—to the keen mortification of the Tsar and the jubilation of his enemies. If he left the Emperor's northeastern dominions unreclaimed and failed to rescue the Company from its precarious condition, he hardly should care to return to St. Petersburg.

Doña Coneha had listened to this eloquent harangue—they sat alone at one end of the long sala while Luis at the other toiled over letters to the Governor and his father advising them of the formidable honor of the Russian's visit—in exactly the temper he would have chosen. Her fine eyes had melted and run over at the moving tale of the sufferings of the servants of the Company—until his own had softened in response and

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he had impulsively kissed her hand; they had dilated and flashed as he spoke of his personal apprehensions; and when he had given her a practical explanation of his reasons for coming to California she had given him advice as practical in return.

He must withhold from her father and the Governor the fact of his pressing need; they were high officials with an inflexible sense of duty, and did all they could to enforce the law against trading with foreigners. He was to maintain the fiction of belting the globe, but admit that he had indulged in a dream of commercial relations—for a benefit strictly mutual—between neighbors as close as the Spanish and Russians in America. This would interest them—what would not, on the edge of the world?—and they would agree to lay the matter, reinforced by a strong personal plea, before the Viceroy of Mexico; who in turn would send it to the Cabinet and King at Madrid. Meanwhile, he was to confide in the priests at the Mission. Not only would their sympathies be enlisted, but they did much trading under the very nose of the government. Not for personal gain—they were vowed to a life of poverty; but for their Indian converts, and there were twelve hundred at the Mission of San Francisco, they would wink at many things condemnable in the abstract. He had engaged to visit them on the morrow, and he must take presents to tempt their impersonal cupidity, and invite them to inspect the rest of his wares—which the Governor would be informed he had been forced to buy with the *Juno* from the Yankee skipper, D'Wolf, and would rid himself of did opportunity offer.

Rezánov had never received sounder advice, and had promptly accepted it. Now, as he reflected that it had been given by a girl of sixteen, he was divided between admiration of her precocity and fear lest she prove to be too young to keep a secret. Moreover, there were other considerations.

Rezánov, although in his earlier years he had so far sacrificed his interests and played into the hands of

his enemies, in avoiding the too embarrassing partiality of Catherine the Great, had nevertheless held a high place at court by right of birth, and been a man of the world always; rarely absent from St. Petersburg during the last and least susceptible part of the imperial courtesan's life, the brief reign of Paul, and the two years between the accession of Alexander and the sailing of the *Nadeshda*. Moreover, there was hardly another court of importance in Europe with which he was not familiar, and few men had had a more complete experience of life. And the life of a courtier, a diplomat, a traveller, noble, wealthy, agreeable to women by divine right, with active enemies and a horde of flatterers, in daily contact with the meaner and more disingenuous corners of human nature, is not conducive to a broad optimism and a sweet and immutable Christianity. Rezánov inevitably was more or less cynical and blasé, and too long versed in the ways of courts and courtiers to retain more than a whimsical tolerance of the naked truth and an appreciation of its excellence as a diplomatic manœuvre. Nevertheless, he was by nature too impetuous ever to become under any provocation a dishonest man, and too normally a gentleman to deviate from a certain personal code of honor. He might come to California with fair words and a very definite intention of annexing it to Russia at the first opportunity, but he was incapable of abusing the hospitality of the Argüellos by making love to their sixteen-year-old daughter. Had she been of the years he had assumed, he would have had less scruple in embarking upon a flirtation, both for the pastime and the use he might make of her. A Spanish beauty of twenty, still unmarried, would be more than his match. But a child, however precocious, inevitably would fall in love with the first uncommon stranger she met; and Rezánov, less vain than most men of his kind, and with a fundamental humanity that was the chief cause in his efforts to improve the condition of his wretched promuschleniki, had no taste for the rôle of heart-breaker.

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But the girl had proved her timeliness; would, if trustworthy, be of further use in inclining her father and the Governor toward such of his designs as he had any intention of revealing; and, weighing carefully his conversations with her, he was disposed to believe that she would screen and abet him through vanity and love of intrigue. After the dinner, in the seclusion of the sala, he had taken pains to explore for the causes of her mental maturity. Coneha had told him of Don José Argüello's ambition that his children in their youth should have the education he had been forced to acquire in his manhood; he had taught them himself, and notwithstanding his piety and the disapproval of the priests, had permitted them to read the histories, travels, and biographies he received once a year from the City of Mexico. Rezánov had met Madame de Staël and other *bas bleus*, and given them no more of his society than politeness demanded, but although astonished at the amount of information this young girl had assimilated, he found nothing in her manner of wearing her intellectual crown to offend his fastidious taste. She was wholly artless in her love of books and of discussing them; and nothing in their contents had disturbed the sweetest innocence he had ever met. Of the little arts of *equettry* she was mistress by inheritance and much provocation, but her unawakened inner life breathed the simplicity and purity of the elemental roses that hovered about her in his thoughts. Her very unsusceptibility made the game more dangerous; if it piqued him—and he aspired to be no more than human—he either should have to marry her, or nurse a sore spot in his conscience for the rest of his life; and for neither alternative had he the least relish.

He dismissed the subject at last with an impatient shrug. Perhaps he was a conceited ass, as his English friends would say; perhaps the Governor would be more amenable than she had represented. No man could forecast events. It was enough to be forearmed.

But his thoughts swung to a theme as little disbur-

dening. His needs, as he had confided to Concha, were very pressing. The dry or frozen fish, the sea-dogs, the fat of whales, upon which the employees of the Company were forced to subsist in the least hospitable of climes, had ravaged them with scorbutic diseases until their numbers were so reduced by death and desertion that there was danger of depopulation and the consequent bankruptcy of the Company. Since June of the preceding year until his departure from New Archangel in the previous month, he had been actively engaged in inspection of the Company's holdings from Kamchatka to Sitka: reforming abuses, establishing schools and libraries, conceiving measures to protect the fur-bearing animals from reckless slaughter both by the promuschleniki and marauding foreigners; punishing and banishing the worst offenders against the Company's laws; encouraging the faithful, and sharing hardships with them that sent memories of former luxuries and pleasures scurrying off to the realms of fantasy. But his rule would be incomplete and his efforts end in failure if the miserable Russians and natives in the employ of the Company were not vitalized by proper food and cheered with the hope of its permanence.

In Santiago's story of the Russian visitor's achievements and status there was the common mingling of truth and fiction the exalted never fail to inspire. Rezánov, although he had accomplished great ends against greater odds, was too little of a courtier at heart ever to have been a prime favorite in St. Petersburg until the accession of a ruler with whom he had something in common. A dissolute woman and a crack-brained despot were the last to appreciate an original and independent mind, and the seclusion of Alexander had been so complete during the lifetime of his father that Rezánov barely had known him by sight. But the Tsarovitz, enthusiastic for reform and a passionate admirer of enterprise, knew of Rezánov, and no sooner did he mount his gory throne than he confirmed the Chamberlain in his enterprise, and two years later made him a

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Privy Counsellor, invested him with the order of St. Ann, and chose him for the critical embassy to the verdant realm with the blind and gateless walls.

Rezánov had conquered so far in life even less by address than by the demonstration of abilities very singular in a man of his birth and education. When he met Shelikov, during the Siberian merchant-trader's visit to St. Petersburg in 1788, he was a young man with little interest in life outside of its pleasures, and a patrimony that enabled him to command them to no great extent and barely to maintain the dignity of his rank. Shelikov's plan to obtain a monopoly of the fur trade in the islands and territories added by his Company to Russia, possibly throughout the entire possession, thus preventing the destruction of sables, seals, otters, and foxes by small traders and foreigners, interested him at once; or possibly he was merely fascinated at first by the shrewd and dauntless representative of a class with which he had never before come in contact. The accidental acquaintance ripened into intimacy, Rezánov became a partner in the Shelikov-Golikov Company, and married the daughter of his new friend. After the death of his father-in-law, in 1795, his ambitions and business abilities, now fully awake, prompted him to obtain for himself and his partners rights analogous to those granted by England to the East India Company. Shelikov had won little more than half the power and privileges he had solicited of Catherine, although he had amalgamated the two leading companies, drawn in several others, and built ships and factories and forts to protect them. And if the regnant merchants made large fortunes, the enterprise in general suffered from the rivalries between the various companies, and above all from lack of imperial support.

Rezánov, his plans made, brought to bear all the considerable influence he was able to command, called upon all his resources of brain and address, and brought Catherine to the point of consenting to sign the charter

he needed. Before it was ready for the imperial signature she died. Rezánov was forced to begin again with her ill-balanced and intractable son. Natalie Shelikov, his famous mother-in-law, the old shareholders of the Company, and the many new ones that had subscribed to Rezánov's ambitious project, gave themselves up to despair. For a time the outlook was dark. The personal enemies of Rezánov and the bitter and persistent opponents of the companies threw themselves eagerly into the scale with tales of the brutality of the merchants and the threatened extirpation of the fur-bearing animals. Paul announced his intention to abolish all the companies and close the colonies to traders big and little.

But the enemy had a very subtle antagonist in Rezánov. Apparently dismissing the subject, he applied himself to gaining a personal ascendancy over the erratic but impressionable Tsar. No one in the opposing camp could compare with him in that fine balance of charm and brain which was his peculiar gift, or in the adroit manipulation of a mind propelled mainly by vanity. He studied Paul's moods and character, discovered that after some senseless act of oppression he suffered from a corresponding remorse, and was susceptible to any plan that would increase his power and add lustre to his name. The commercial and historic advantages of prosperous northeastern possessions were artfully instilled. At the opportune moment Rezánov laid before him a scheme, mature in every detail, for a great company that would add to the wealth of Russia, and convince Europe of the sound commercial sense and immortal wisdom of its sovereign. Without more ado he obtained his charter.

This momentous instrument granted to the "Russian-American Company under our Highest Protection," "full privileges, for a period of twenty years on the coast of northwestern America, beginning from latitude 55 degrees north, and including the chain of islands extending from Kamchatka northward, and southward to

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Japan; the exclusive right to all enterprises, whether hunting, trading, or building, and to new discoveries; with strict prohibition from profiting from any of these pursuits, not only to all parties who might engage in them on their own responsibility, but also to those who formerly had ships and establishments there, except those who have united with the new Company." All private traders who refused to join the Company were to be allowed to sell their property and depart in peace.

Thus was formed the first Trust Company of America; and the United States never has had so formidable a menace to her territorial greatness as this Russian nobleman who paced that night the wretched deck of the little ship he had bought from one of her skippers. Perturbed in mind at his recent failures and immediate prospects, he was no less determined to take California from the Spaniards either by absorption or force.

On his way from New Archangel to San Francisco he had met with his second failure since leaving St. Petersburg. It was his intention to move the Sitkan colony down to the mouth of the Columbia River, not only pressed by the need of a more beneficent soil, but as a first insidious advance upon San Francisco Bay. Upon this trip it would be enough to make a survey of the ground and bury a copper plate inscribed: "Possession of the Russian Empire." The *Juno* had encountered terrific storms. After three desperate attempts to reach the mouth of the river, Rezánov had been forced to relinquish the enterprise for the moment and hasten with his diseased and almost useless crew to the nearest port. It was true that the attempt could be made again later, but Rezánov, sanguine of temperament, was correspondingly depressed by failure and disposed to regard it as an ill-omen.

An ambassador inspired by heaven could have accomplished no more with the Japanese at that mediæval stage of their development than he had done, and the most indomitable of men cannot yet control the winds of heaven; but sovereigns are rarely governed by logic,

and frequently by the favorite at hand. The privilege of writing personally to the Tsar, in his ease, meant more and less than appeared on the surface. It was a measure to keep the reports of the Company out of the hands of the Admiralty College, its bitterest enemy, and always jealous of the Civil Service. Nevertheless, Rezánov knew that he had no immediate reason to apprehend the loss of Alexander's friendship and esteem; and if he placed the Company, in which all the imperial family had bought shares, on a sounder basis than ever before, and doubled its earnings by insuring the health of its employees, he would meet, when in St. Petersburg again, with practically no opposition to his highest ambitions. These ambitions he deliberately kept in a fluid state for the present. Whether he should aspire to great authority in the government, or choose to rule with the absolute powers of the Tsar himself these already vast possessions on the Pacific—to be extended indefinitely—would be decided by events. All his inherited and cultivated instincts yearned for the brilliant and complex civilizations of Europe, but the new world had taken a firm hold upon his humaner and appealed more insidiously to his despotism. Moreover, Europe, torn up by that human earthquake, Napoleon Bonaparte, must lose the greater half of its sweetness and savor. All that, however, could be determined upon his return to St. Petersburg in the autumn.

But meanwhile he must succeed with these Californians, or they might prove, toy soldiers as they were, more perilous to his fortunes than enemies at court. He could not afford another failure; and news of this attempt and an exposition of all that depended upon it were already on the road to the capital of Russia.

He had known, of course, of the law that forbade the Spanish colonies to trade with foreign ships, but he had relied partly upon the use he could make of the orders given by the Spanish King at the request of the Tsar regarding the expedition under Krusenstern, partly upon his own wit and address. But although the royal

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order had insured him immediate hospitality and saved him many wearisome formalities, he had already discovered that the Spanish on the far rim of their empire had lost nothing of their connate suspicion. Rather, their isolation made them the more wary. Although they little appreciated the richness and variousness of California's soil, and not at all this wonderful bay that could accommodate the combined navies of the world, pocketing several, the pious zeal of the clergy in behalf of the Indians, and the general policy of Spain to hold all of the western hemisphere that disintegrating forces would permit, made her as tenacious of this vast territory she had so sparsely populated as had she been aware that its foundations were of gold, conceived that its climate and soil were a more enduring source of wealth than ever she would command again. If Rezánov was not gifted with the prospector's sense for ores—although he had taken note of Argüello's casual reference to a vein of silver and lead in the Monterey hills—no man ever more thoroughly appreciated the visible resources of California than he. Baránhov, chief-manager of the Company, had talked with American and British skippers for twenty years, and every item he had accumulated Rezánov had extracted. To-day he had drawn further information from Coneha and her brothers; and their artless descriptions as well as this incomparable bay had filled him with enthusiasm. What a gift to Russia! What an achievement to his immortal credit! The fog had rolled in from the Pacific in great white waves and stealthily enfolded him, obliterated the sea and the land. But he did not see it. Apprehension left him. Once more he fell to dreaming. In the course of a few years the Company would attract a large population to the mouth of the Columbia River, be strong enough to make use of any favorable turn in European politics and sweep down upon California. The geographical position of Mexico, the arid and desolate, herbless and waterless wastes intervening, would prohibit her sending any considerable assistance overland;

and, all powerful at court by that time, he would take care that the Russian navy inspired Spain with a distaste for remote Pacific waters. He had long since recovered from the disappointment induced by the orders compelling him to remain in the colonies. The great Company he had heretofore regarded merely as a source of income and a means of advancing his ambitions, he now loved as his child. Even during the marches over frozen swamps and mountains, during the terrible winter in Sitka when he had become familiar with illness and even with hunger, his ardor had grown, as well as his determination to force Russia into the front rank of commercial Europe. The United States he barely considered. He respected the new country for the independent spirit and military genius that had routed so powerful a nation as Great Britain, but he thought of her only as a new and tentative civilization on the far shores of the Atlantic. After some experience of travel in Siberia, and knowing the immensity and primeval conditions of northwestern America, he did not think it probable that the little cluster of states, barely able to walk alone, would indulge in dreams of expansion for many years to come. He had heard of the projected expedition of Lewis and Clarke to the mouth of the Columbia, but—perhaps he was too Russian—he did not take any adventure seriously that had not a mighty nation at its back. And as it was almost the half of a century from that night before the American flag flew over the Custom House of Monterey, there is reason to believe that Russian aggression under the leadership of so energetic and resourceful a spirit as Nicolai Petrovich de Rezánov was in a fair way to make history first in the New Albion of Drake and the California of the incompetent Spaniard.

V

THE Russians were to call at the house of the Commandante on their way to the Mission, and Concha herself made the chocolate with which they were to be detained for an hour. It was another sparkling morning, one of the few that came between winter and summer, summer and winter, and made even this bleak peninsula a land of enchantment before the cold winds took the sand hills up by their foundations and drove them down to Yerba Buena, submerging the battery and every green thing by the way; or the great fogs rolled down from the tule lands of the north and in from the sea, making the shivering San Franciscan forget that not ten miles away the sun was as prodigal as youth. For a few weeks San Francisco had her springtime, when the days were warm and the air of a wonderful lightness and brightness, the atmosphere so clear that the flowers might be seen on the islands, when man walked with wings on his feet and a song in his heart; when the past was done with, the future mattered not, the present with its ever changing hues on bay and hill, its cool electrical breezes stirring imagination and pulse, was all in all.

And it was in San Francisco's springtime that Concha Argüello made chocolate for the Russian to whom she was to give a niche in the history of her land; and sang at her task. She whirled the molinillo in each cup as it was filled, whipping the fragrant liquid to froth; pausing only to scold when her servant stained one of the dainty saucers or cups. Poor Rosa did not sing, although the spring attuned her broken spirit to a gentler melancholy than when the winds howled and the fog was cold in her marrow. She had been sen-

teneed by the last Governor, the wise Borica, to eight years of domestic servitude in the house of Don José Argüello for abetting her lover in the murder of his wife. Coneha, thoughtless in many things, did what she could to exorcise the terror and despair that stared from the eyes of the Indian, and puzzled her deeply. Rosa adored her young mistress and exulted even when Coneha's voice rose in wrath; for was not she noticed by the loveliest señorita in all the Californias, while others, envious and spiteful to a poor girl no worse than themselves, were ignored?

Coneha's cheeks were as pink as the Castilian roses that grew even before the kitchen door and were quivering at the moment under the impassioned carolling of a choir of larks. Her black eyes were full of dancing lights, like the imprisoned sun-flecks under the rose bush, and never had indolent Spanish hands moved so quickly.

"Mira! Mira!" she cried to the luckless Rosa. "That is the third time thou hast spilt the chocolate. Thy hands are of wood when they should be of air. A soft bit of linen to clean them, not that coarse rag. Dios de mi alma! I shall send for Malia."

"For the love of Mary, señorita, have pity!" wailed Rosa. "There—see—thanks to the Virgin I have poured three cups without spilling a drop. And this rag is of soft linen. Look, Doña Coneha, is it not true?"

"Bueno; take care thou leavest not one drop on a saucer and I will forgive thee—do not kiss my hand now, foolish one! How can I whirl the molinillo? Be always good and I will burn a candle for thee every time I go to the Mission. The Russians go to the Mission this morning. Hast thou seen the Russians, Rosa?"

"I have seen them, señorita. Did I not serve at table yesterday?"

"True; I had forgotten. What didst thou think of them?"

"What matters it to such great folk what a poor Indian girl thinks of them? They are very fair, which

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may be the fashion in their country; but I am not accustomed to it; and I like not beards."

"His excellency wore no beard—he who sat on my mother's right and opposite to me."

"He is very grand, señorita; more grand than the Governor, who after all has red hair and is old. He is even grander than Don José, whom may the saints preserve; or than the padres at the Mission. Perhaps he is a king, like our King and natural lord in Spain. (El rey nuestro y señor natural.) Is he a king, señorita?"

"No, but he should be. Rosa, thou mayst have my red cloak that came from Mexico—last year. I have a new one and that is too small. I had intended to give it to Ana Paula, but thou art a good girl and should have a gay mantle for Sunday, like the other girls. I have also a red ribbon for thy hair——"

Rosa spilt half the contents of the chocolate pot on the floor and Concha gave her a sound box on the ear. However, she did not dismiss her, a sentence for which the trembling girl prepared herself.

"Make more—quickly!" cried the lady of caprice. "They come. I hear them. But this is enough for the first. Make the rest and beat with the molinillo as I have done, and Malia will bring all to the corridor."

She ran to her room and her mirror. Both were small, the room little more luxurious than the cell of a nun. But the roses hung over the window, the birds had built in the eaves, and over the wall the sun shone in. In one corner was an altar and a crucifix. If the walls were rough and white, they were as spotless as the hands that shook out and then twisted high the fine dusky masses of hair. When a fold had been drawn down over either ear, in the most fashion of the California maid and wife, and the tall shell comb had fastened the rest, Concha instead of finishing the head-dress with her long Spanish pins, divested the stems of two half-blown roses of their thorns and thrust them obliquely through the knot. Her dress was of simple

white linen made with a very full skirt and little round jacket, but embroidered by her own deft fingers with the color she loved best. She patted her frock, rolled down her sleeves, and went out to the "corridor" to stand demurely behind her mother as the Russians, escorted by Father Ramon Abella, rode into the square.

Rezánov had intended merely to pay a call of ceremony upon the hospitable Argüellos, but after he had dismounted and kissed the hands of the smiling señora and her beautiful daughter he was nothing loath to linger over a cup of chocolate.

It was served out there in the shade of the vines. Rezánov and Coneha sat on the railing, and the man stared over his cup at the girl with the roses touching her cheek and ruffling her hair.

"Do you like chocolate, señor?" asked Coneha, who was not in the intellectual mood of yesterday. "I made it myself—I and my poor Rosa."

"It is the most delectable foam I have ever tasted. I am interested to know that it has the solid foundation of a name. What is the matter with your Rosa?"

"She is an unfortunate. Her lover killed his wife, and it is said that she is not innocent herself. The lover serves in chains for eight years, and she is with us that we may make her repent and keep her from further sin. She is very unhappy and will marry the man when his punishment is over. I am very sorry for her."

"Fancy you living close to a woman like that! I find it detestable."

"Why?—if I can do her good—and make her happy, sometimes?"

"Does she ever talk about her life—before she came here?"

"Oh, no; she is far too sad. Once only, when I told her I would pray for her in the Mission, she asked me to burn a candle that her lover might serve his sentence more quickly and come out and marry her. Will you light one for her to-day, señor?"

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"With the greatest pleasure; if you really want your maid to marry a man who no doubt will murder her for the sake of some other woman."

"Oh, surely not! He loves her. I know that many men love more than once, but when they are punished like that, they must remember."

"Is it true that you are only sixteen? Is that an impertinent question? I cannot help it. Those years are so few, and so much wisdom has gone into that little head."

"Sixteen is quite old." Concha drew herself up with an air of offended dignity. "Elena Castro, who lives on the other side, is but eighteen and she has three little ones. The Virgin brought them in the night and left them in the big rosebush you see before the door—one at a time, of course. Only the old nurse knew; the Virgin whispered it while she was saying a prayer for Elena; and early in the morning she came and found the dear little baby and put it in Elena's arms. I am the godmother of the first—Conchitita. In Santa Barbara, where we lived for some years, Anita Amanda Carillo, the friend of Ana Paula, is married, although she is but twelve and sits on the floor all day and plays with her dolls. She prays every night to the Virgin to bring her a real baby, but she is not old enough to take care of it and must wait. Twelve is too young to marry." Concha shook her head. Her eyes were wise, and Rezánov noted anew that her mouth alone was as young as her years. "My father would not permit such a thing. I am glad he is not anxious we should marry soon. I should love to have the babies, though; they are so sweet to play with and make little dresses for. But my mother says the Virgin does not bring the little ones to good girls—poor Rosa had one but it died—until their parents find them a husband first. I have never wanted a husband——" Concha darted a swift glance over her shoulder, but Santiago was in the clutches of the learned doctor and wishing

that he knew no Latin; "so I go every day and play with Elena's babies, which is well enough."

Rezánov listened to this innocent revelation with the utmost gravity, but for the first time in many years he was conscious of a novel fascination in a sex to which he had paid no niggard's tribute. In his world the married woman reigned; it was doubtful if he had ever had ten minutes' conversation with a young girl before, never with one whose face and form were as arresting as her crystal purity. He was fascinated, but more than ever on his guard. As he rode over the sand hills to the Mission she clung fast to his thoughts and he speculated upon the woman hidden away in the depths of that lovely shell like the deep color within the tight Castilian buds that opened so slowly. He recalled the personalities of the young officers that surrounded her. They were charming fellows, gay, kindly, honest; but he felt sure that not one of them was fit to hold the cup of life to the exquisite young lips of Concha Argüello. The very thought disposed him to twist their necks.

VI

THE Mission San Francisco de Assisi stood at the head of a great valley about a league from the Presidio and facing the eastern hills. Behind it, yet not too close, for the priests were ever on their guard against Indians more lustful of loot than salvation, was a long irregular chain of hills, breaking into twin peaks on its highest ridge, with a lone mountain outstanding. It was an imposing but forbidding mass, as steep and bare as the walls of a fortress; but in the distance, north and south, as the range curved in a tapering arc that gave the valley the appearance of a colossal stadium, the outlines were soft in a haze of pale color. The sheltered valley between the western heights and the sand hills far down by the bay where it turned to the south, was green with wheat fields, and a small herd of cattle grazed on the lower slopes. The beauty of this superbly proportioned valley was further enhanced by groves of oaks and bay trees, and by a lagoon, communicating with an arm of the bay, which the priests had named for their Lady of Sorrows—Nuestra Señora de los Dolores. The little sheet of water was almost round, very green and set in a thicket of willows that were green, too, in the springtime, and golden in summer. Near its banks, or closer to the protecting Mission—on whose land grant they were built—were the comfortable adobe homes of the few Spanish pioneers that preferred the bracing north to the monotonous warmth of the south. Some of these houses were long and rambling, others built about a court; all were surrounded by a high wall, enclosing a garden where the Castilian roses grew even more luxuriantly than at the Presidio. The walls, like the houses, were white, and on those of Don Juan

Moraga, a cousin of Doña Ignacia Argüello, the roses had been trained to form a border along the top in a fashion that reminded Rezánov of the pink-edged walls of Fiesole.

The white red-tiled church and the long line of rooms adjoining were built of adobe with no effort at grandeur, but with a certain noble simplicity of outline that harmonized not only with the lofty reserve of the hills but with the innocent hope of creating a soul in the lowest of human bipeds. The Indians of San Francisco were as immedicable as they were hideous; but the fathers belabored them with sticks and heaven with prayer, and had so far succeeded that if as yet they had sown piety no higher than the knees they had trained some twelve hundred pairs of hands to useful service.

On the right was a graveyard, with little in it as yet but rose trees; behind the church and the many spacious rooms built for the consolation of virtue in the wilderness was a large building surrounding a court. Girls and young widows occupied the cells on the north side, and the work rooms on the east, while the youths, under the sharp eye of a lay brother, were opposite. All lived a life of unwilling industry: cleaning and combing wool, spinning, weaving, manufacturing chocolate, grinding corn between stones, making shoes, fashioning the simple garments worn by priest and Indian. Between the group of buildings and the natural rampart of the "San Bruno Mountains" was the Rancharia, where the Indian families lived in eight long rows of isolated huts.

In spite of vigilance an Indian escaped now and again to the mountains, where he could lie naked in the sun and curse the fetich of civilization. As the Russians approached, a friar, with deer-skin armor over his cassock, was tugging at a recalcitrant mule, while a body-guard of four Indians stood ready to attend him down the coast in search of an enviable brother. The mule, as if in sympathy with the fugitive, had planted his four feet in the earth and lifted his voice in derision,

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while the young friar, a recruit at the Mission, and far from enamored of his task, strained at the rope, and an Indian pelted the hindquarters with stones. Suddenly, the mule flung out his heels, the enemy in the rear sprawled, the rope flew loose, the beast with a loud bray fled toward the willows of Dolores. But the young priest was both agile and angry. With a flying leap he reached the heaving back. The mule acknowledged himself conquered. The body-guard trotted on their own feet, and the party disappeared round a bend of the hills.

Rezánov laughed heartily and even the glum visage of Father Abella relaxed.

"It is a common sight, Excellency," he said. "We are thankful to have a younger friar for such fatiguing work. Many a time have I belabored stubborn mules and bestrode bucking mustangs while searching for one of these ungrateful but no doubt chosen creatures. It is the will of God, and we make no complaint; but we are very willing, Father Landaeta and I, that youth should cool its ardor in so certain a fashion while we attend to the more reasonable duties at home."

They dismounted at the door of the church. The horses were led off by waiting Indians. The soldiers on guard saluted and stepped aside, and the party entered. Two priests in handsome vestments stood before the altar, but the long dim nave was empty. The Russians had been told that a mass would be said in their honor, and they marched down the church and bent their knees with as much ceremony as had they been of the faith of their hosts. When the short mass was over, Rezánov bethought himself of Coneha's request, and whispering its purport to Father Abella was led to a double iron hoop stuck with tallow dips in various stages of petition. Rezánov lit a candle and fastened it in an empty socket. Then with a whimsical twist of his mouth he lit and adjusted another.

"No doubt she has some fervent wish, like all children," he thought apologetically. "And whether this

will help her to realize it or not, at least it will be interesting to watch her eyes—and mouth—when I tell her. Will she melt, or flash, or receive my offering at her shrine as a matter of course? I'll surprise her to-night in the middle of a dance."

He deposited a gold piece among the candles on the table and followed Father Abella through a side door. A corridor ran behind the long line of rooms designed not only for priests but for the travellers always sure of a welcome at these hospitable Missions. Father Abella shuffled ahead, halted on the threshold of a large room, and ceremoniously invited his guests to enter. Two other priests stood before a table set with wine and delicate confections, their hands concealed in their wide brown sleeves, but their unmatched physiognomies—the one lean and jovial, the other plump and resigned—alight with the same smile of welcome. Father Abella mentioned them as his coadjutor Father Martin Landaeta, and their guest Father José Uria of San José; and then the three, with the scant rites of genuine hospitality, applied themselves to the tickling of palates long unused to ambrosial living. Responding ingenuously to the glow of their home-made wines, they begged Rezánov to accept the Mission, burn it, plunder it, above all, to plan his own day.

"I hope that I am to see every detail of your great work," replied the diplomatic guest of honor. "But at your own leisure. Meanwhile, I beg that you will order one of your Indians to bring in the little presents I venture to offer as a token of my respect. You may have heard that the presents of his Imperial Majesty were refused by the Mikado of Japan. I reserved many of them for possible use in our own possessions, particularly a piece of cloth of gold. This I had intended for our church at New Archangel, but finding the priests there more in need of punishment than reward, I concluded to bring it here and offer it as a manifest of my admiration for what the great Franciscan Order of the Most Holy Church of Rome has accomplished

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in the Californias. Have I been too presumptuous?"

The priests all wore the eager expressions of children.

"Could we not see them first?" asked Father Landaeta of his superior; and Father Abella sent a servant with an order to unload the horse and bring in the presents.

Not a vestige of reserve lingered. Priests and guests sat about the table eating and drinking and chatting as were they old friends reunited, and Rezánov extracted much of the information he desired. The white population—"gente de razon"—of Alta California, the peculiar province of the Franciscans—the Jesuits having been the first to invade Baja California, and with little success—numbered about two thousand, the Christianized Indians twenty thousand. There were nineteen Missions and four Presidial districts—San Diego, close to the border of Baja California, Santa Barbara, Monterey, and San Francisco. Each Mission had an immense grant of land, or rancho—generally fifteen miles square—for the raising of live stock, agricultural necessities, and the grape. At the Presidio of San Francisco there were some seventy men, including invalids; and the number varied little at the other military centres, Rezánov inferred, although there was a natural effort to impress the foreigner with the casual inferiority of the armed force within his ken. Cattle and horses increased so rapidly that every few years there was a wholesale slaughter, although the agricultural yield was enormous. What the Missions were unable to manufacture was sent them from Mexico, and disposed of the small salaries of the priests; the "Pious Fund of California" in the City of Mexico being systematically embezzled. The first Presidio and Mission were founded at San Diego in July of 1769; the last at San Francisco in September and October of 1776.

Rezánov's polite interest in the virgin country was cut short by the entrance of two Indians carrying heavy bundles, which they opened upon the floor without further delay.

The cloth of gold was magnificent, and the padres handled it as rapturously as had their souls and fingers been of the sex symbolized while exalted by the essence of maternity in whose service it would be anointed. Rezánov looked on with an amused sigh, yet conscious of being more comprehending and sympathetic than if he had journeyed straight from Europe to California. It was not the first time he had felt a passing gratitude for his uncomfortable but illuminating sojourn so close to the springs of nature.

The priests were as well pleased with the pieces of fine English cloth; and as their own homespun robes rasped like hair shirts, they silently but uniformly congratulated themselves that the color was brown.

Father Abella turned to Rezánov, his saturnine features relaxed.

"We are deeply grateful to your excellency, and our prayers shall follow you always. Never have we received presents so timely and so magnificent. And be sure we shall not forget the brave officers that have brought you safely to our distant shores, nor the distinguished scholar who guards your excellency's health." He turned to Langsdorff and repeated himself in Latin. The naturalist, whose sharp nose was always lifted as if in protest against oversight and ready to pounce upon and penetrate the least of mysteries, bowed with his hand on his heart, and translated for the benefit of the officers.

"Humph!" said Davidov in Russian. "Much the Chamberlain will care for the prayers of the Catholic Church if he has to go home with his cargo. But he has a fine opportunity here for the display of his diplomatic talents. I fancy they will avail him more than they did at Nagasaki—where I am told he swore more than once when he should have kowtowed and grinned."

"I shouldn't like to see him grin," replied Khostov, as they finally started for the outbuildings. "If he could go as far as that he would be the most terrible man living. Were it not for the fire in him that melts

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the iron just so often he would be crafty and cruel instead of subtle and firm. He is a fortunate man! There were many fairies at his cradle! I have always envied him, and now he is going to win that beautiful Doña Coneha. She will look at none of us."

"We will doubtless meet others as beautiful at the ball to-night," said Davidov philosophically. "You are not in love with a girl who has barely spoken to you, I suppose."

"She had almost given me a rose this morning, when Rezánov, who was flattering the good Doña Ignacia with a moment of his attention, turned too soon. I might have been air. She looked straight through me. Such eyes! Such teeth! Such a form! She is the most enchanting girl I have ever seen. And he will monopolize her without troubling to notice whether we even admire her or not. Pray heaven he does not break her heart."

"He is honorable. One must admit that, if he does fancy his own will was a personal gift from the Almighty. Perhaps she will break his. I never saw a more accomplished flirt."

"I know women," replied the shrewder Khostov. "When men like Rezánov make an effort to please——" He shrugged his shoulders. "Some men are the offspring of Mars and Venus and most of us are not. We can at least be philosophers. Let us hope the dinner will be excellent."

VII

It proved to be the most delicate and savory repast that had excited their appetites this side of Europe. The friars had their consolations, and even Doña Ignacia Argüello was less gastronomic than Father Landaeta. Rezánov, whose epicurianism had survived a year of dried fish and the coarse luxuries of his managers, suddenly saw all life in the light of the humorist, and told so many amusing versions of his adventures in the wilderness, and even of his misadventure with Japan, that the priests choked over their wine, and Langsdorff, who had not a grain of humor, swelled with pride in his chance relationship to a man who seemed able to manipulate every string in the human network.

"He will succeed," he said to Davidov. "He will succeed. I almost hoped he would not, he is so indifferent—I might almost say so hostile—to my own scientific adventures. But when he is in this mood, when those cold eyes brim with laughter and ordinary humanity, I am nothing better than his slave."

Rezánov, in reply to an entreaty from Father Uria to tell them more of his mission and of the strange picture-book country they had never hoped to hear of at first hand, assumed a tone of great frankness and intimacy. "We were, with astounding cleverness, treated from the first like an audience in a new theatre. After we had solemnly been towed by a string of boats to anchor, under the Papen mountains, all Nagasaki appeared to turn out, men, women, and children. Thousands of little boats, decorated with flags by day and colored lanterns by night, and filled with people in gala attire, swarmed about us, gazed at us through telescopes, were so thick on the bay one could have traversed it on

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foot. The imperial sailors were distinguished by their uniforms of a large blue and white check, suggesting the pinafores of a brobdingnagian baby. The barges of the imperial princes were covered with blue and white awnings and towed to the sound of kettledrums and the loud measured cries of the boatmen. At night the thousands of illuminated lanterns, of every color and shade, the waving of fans, the incessant chattering, and the more harmonious noise that rose unceasingly above, made up a scene as brilliant as it was juvenile and absurd. In the daytime it was more interesting, with the background of hills cultivated to their crests in the form of terraces, varied with rice fields, hamlets, groves, and paper villas encircled with little gardens as glowing and various of color as the night lanterns. When, at last, I was graciously permitted to have a residence on a point of land called Megasaki, I was conveyed thither in the pleasure barge of the Prince of Fisi. There was place for sixty oarsmen, but as one of the few tokens of respect I was enabled to record for the comfort of the mighty sovereign whose representative I was, the barge was towed by a long line of boats, decorated with flags, the voices of the rowers rising and falling in measured cadence as they announced to all Japan the honor about to be conferred upon her. I sat on a chair of state in the central compartment of the barge, and quite alone; my suite standing on a raised deck beyond. Before me on a table, marvellously inlaid, were my credentials. I was surrounded by curtains of sky-blue silk and panels of polished lacquer inwrought with the imperial arms in gold. The awning of blue and white silk was lined with a delicate and beautiful tapestry, and the reverse sides of the silken partitions were of canvas painted by the masters of the country. The polished floor was covered by a magnificent carpet woven with alarming dragons whose jaws pointed directly at my chair of state. And such an escort and such a reception, both of ceremony and of curiosity, no Russian had ever boasted before. Flags

waved, kettledrums beat, fans were flung into my very lap to autograph. The bay, the hills, were a blaze of color and a confusion of sound. The barracks were hung with tapestries and gay silks. I, with my arms folded and in full uniform, my features composed to the impassivity of one of their own wooden gods, was the central figure of this magnificent farce; and it may be placed to the everlasting credit of the discipline of courts that not one of my staff smiled. They stood with their arms folded and their eyes on the inlaid devices at their feet.

"When this first act was over and I was locked in for the night and felt myself able to kick my way through the flimsy walls, yet as completely a prisoner as if they had been of stone, I will confess that I fell into a most undiplomatical rage; and when I found myself played with from month to month by a people I scorned as a grotesque mixture of barbarian and mannikin, I was alternately infuriated, and consumed with laughter at the vanity of men and nations."

His voice dropped from its light ironical note, and became harsh and abrupt with reminiscent disgust. "And the end of it all was failure. The superb presents of the Tsar were rejected. These presents: coats of black fox and ermine, vases of fossil ivory and of marble, muskets, pistols, sabers, magnificent lustres, table services of crystal and porcelain, tapestries and carpets, immense mirrors, a clock in the form of an elephant, and set with precious stones, a portrait of the Tsar by Madame le Brun, damasks, furs, velvets, printed cotton, cloths, brocades of gold and silver, microscopes, gold and silver watches, a complete electrical machine—presents in all, of the value of three hundred thousand roubles, were returned with scant ceremony to the *Nadeshda* and I was politely told to leave.

"But the mortification was the least of my worries. The object of the embassy was to establish not only good will and friendship between Russia and Japan, for which we cared little, but commercial intercourse be-

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tween this fertile country and our northeastern and barren possessions. It would have been greatly to the advantage of the Japanese, and God knows it would have meant much to us."

Then Rezánov, having tickled the imaginations and delighted the curiosity of the priests, began to play upon their heartstrings. His own voice vibrated as he related the sufferings of the servants of the Company, and while avoiding the nomenclature and details of their bodily afflictions, gave so thrilling a hint of their terrible condition that his audience gasped with sympathy while experiencing no qualms in their own more fortunate stomachs.

He led their disarmed understandings as far down the vale of tears as he deemed wise, then permitted himself a magnificent burst of spontaneity.

"I must tell you the object of my mission to California, my kind friends!" he cried, "although I beg you will not betray me to the other powers until I think it wise to speak myself. But I must have your sympathy and advice. It has long been my desire to establish relations between Russia and Spain that should be of mutual benefit to the colonies of both in this part of the western hemisphere. I have told you of the horrible condition and needs of my men. They must have a share in the superfluities of this most prodigal land. But I make no appeal to your merey. Trade is not founded on charity. You well know we have much you are in daily need of. There should be a bi-yearly interchange." He paused and looked from one staring face to the other. He had been wise in his appeal. They were deeply gratified at being taken into his confidence and virtually asked to outwit the military authorities they detested.

Rezánov continued.

"I have brought the *Juno* heavy laden, my fathers, and for the deliberate purpose of barter. She is full of Russian and Boston goods. I shall do my utmost to persuade your Governor to give me of his corn and

other farinaceous foods in exchange. It may be against your laws, and I am well aware that for the treaty I must wait, but I beg you in the name of humanity to point out to his excellency a way in which he can at the same time relieve our necessities and placate his conscience."

"We will! We will!" cried Father Abella. "Would that you had come in the disguise of a common sea-captain, for we have hoodwinked the commandantes more than once. But aside from the suspicion and distrust in which Spain holds Russia,—with so distinguished a visitor as your excellency,—it would be impossible to traffic undetected. But there must be a way out. There shall be! And will you excuse me, kindly let us see the cargo. I am sure that we sadly need: cloth, linen, cotton goods, shoes, hats, bottles, glasses, plates, shears, axes, tools of husbandry, saws, sheep-shears, iron wires—have you any of these things, Excellency?"

All and more. Will you come tomorrow?"

"We will! and one way or another they shall be ours and you shall have breadstuffs for your pitiable subjects. We have as much need of Europe as you can have of California, for Mexico is dilatory and often disregards our orders altogether. One way or another—we have your promise, Excellency?"

"I shall not leave California without accomplishing what I came for," said Rezánov.

VIII

CONCHA boxed Rosa's ears twice while being dressed for the ball that evening. It was true that excitement had reigned throughout the Presidio all day, for never had a ball been so hastily planned. Don Luis had demurred when Concha proposed it at breakfast; officially to entertain strangers not yet officially received exceeded his authority. Concha, waxing stubborn with opposition, vowed that she would give the ball herself if he did not. Business immediately afterward took the Commandante ad. in. down to the Battery at Yerba Buena. Before he left he gave orders that the large hall in the barraeks, where balls usually were held, should be locked and the key given up to no one but himself. He returned in the afternoon to find that Concha had outwitted him. The sala of the Commandante's house was very large. The furniture had been removed and the walls hung with flags, those of Spain on three sides, the Russian, borrowed by Santiago from the ship, at the head of the room. Concha laughed gaily as Luis stormed about the sala rasping his spurs on the bare floor.

"Whitewashed walls for guests from St. Petersburg!" she jeered, as Luis menaced the flags. "We have little enough to offer. Besides—what more wise than to flaunt our flag in the face of the Russian bear? Their flag, of course, is a mere idle compliment. Let me tell you two things, Luis mio: this morning I invited the Russians to dance to-night, and told Padre Abella to ask all our neighbors of the Mission besides; and Raffaella Sal helped me to drape every one of those flags. When I told her you might tear them down, she vowed that if you did she would dance all night with the Bostonian."

Luis lifted his shoulders and mustache to express an attitude of contemptuous resignation, but his face darkened, and a moment later he left the room and strolled up the square to the grating of Rafaella Sal.

Concha well knew that the frank gray eyes of the Bostonian—all citizens of the United States were Bostonians in that part of the world, for only Boston skippers had the enterprise to venture so far—were for no one but herself. But his face was bony and freckled, and his figure less in height and vigor than her own. He was rich and well-born, but shy and very modest. Concha Argüello, La Favorita of California, was for some such dashing caballero as Don Antonio Castro of Monterey, or Ignacio Sal, the most adventurous rider of the north. Meanwhile he could look at her and adore her in secret, and Doña Rafaella Sal was very kind and danced as well as himself. He never dreamed that he was being used as a stalking horse to keep alive in the best match in the Californias the jealous desire for exclusive possession that had animated him in 1800 when he had applied through the Viceroy of Mexico for royal consent to his marriage with the Favorita of her year. That was six years ago and never a word had come from Madrid. Luis was faithful, but men were men, and girls grew older every day. So the wise Rafaella was alternately indifferent and alluring, the object of more admiration than a maid could always repel, yet with wells of sentiment that only one man could discover. And the American was patient, and even had he known, would not in the least have minded the use she made of him. He still could look at Concha Argüello.

William Sturgis had sailed in one of his father's ships, now six years ago, from Boston in search of health. The ship in a dense fog had gone on the rocks in the straits between the Farallones and the Bay of San Francisco. He alone, and after long hours of struggle with the wicked currents, not even knowing in what direction land might be, was flung, senseless, on

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the shore below the Fort. For the next month he was an invalid in the house of the Commandante. Fortunately, his papers and money were sewn in an oilskin belt and his father's name was well known in California. Moreover, there never was a more likable youth. His illness interested all the matrons and maids of the Presidio in his fate; when he recovered, his good dancing and unselfishness gave him permanent place in the regard of the women, while his entire absence of beauty, and his ability to hold his own in the mess room, established his position with the men.

In due course word of his plight reached Boston, and a ship was immediately despatched, not only to bring the eastaway home, but with the fine wardrobe necessary to a young gentleman of his station. But the same ship brought word of his father's death—his mother had gone long since—and as there were brothers enamored of the business he hated, he decided to remain in the country that had won his heart and given him health. For some time there was demur on the part of the authorities; Spain welcomed no foreigners in her colonies. But Sturgis swore a mighty oath that he would never despatch a letter uninspected by the Commandante, that he would make no excursions into the heart of the country, that he would neither engage in traffic nor interfere in politics. Then having already won the affections of the Governor, he was permitted to remain, even to rent an acre of land from the Church in the sheltered Mission valley, and build himself a house. Here he raised fruit and vegetables for his own hospitable table, chickens and game cocks. Books and other luxuries came by every ship from Boston; until for a long interval ships came no more. One of these days, when the power of the priests had abated, and the jealousy which would keep all Californians landless but themselves was counterbalanced by a great increase in population, he meant to have a ranch down in the south where the sun shone all the year round and he could ride half the day with his vaqueros after the finest

cattle in the country. He never should marry because he could not marry Concha Argüello, but he could think of her, see her sometimes; and in a land where a man was neither frozen in winter nor grilled in summer, where life could be led in the open, and the tendency was to idle and dream, domestic happiness called on a feebler note than in less equable climes. In his heart he was desperately jealous of Concha's favored cavaliers, but it was a jealousy without hatred, and his kind earnest often humorous eyes were always assuring his lady of an imperishable desire to serve her without reward. Of course Concha treated him with as little consideration as so humble a swain deserved; but in her heart she liked him better than either Castro or Sal, for he talked to her of something besides rodeos and balls, racing and cock-fights; he had taught her English and lent her many books. Moreover, he neither sighed nor languished, nor ever had sung at her grating. But she regarded him merely as an intelligence, a well of refreshment in her stagnant life, never as a man.

"Rosa," she said as she caught her hair into a high golden comb that had been worn in Spain by many a beauty of the house of Moraga, and spiked the knot with two long pins globed at the end with gold, while the maid fastened her slippers and smoothed the pink silk stockings over the arched thin instep above; "what is a lover like? Is it like meeting one of the saints of heaven?"

"No, señorita."

"Like what, then?"

"Like—like nothing but himself, señorita. You would not have him otherwise."

"Oh, stupid one! Hast thou no imagination? Fancy any man being well enough as he is! For instance, there is Don Antonio who is so handsome and fiery, and Don Ignacio, who can sing and dance and ride as no one else in all the Californias, and Don William Sturgis, who is very clever and true. If I could roll them into one—a tamale of corn and chicken and pep-

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pers—there would be a man almost to my liking. But even then—not quite. And one man—what nonsense! I have too much color to-night, Rosa.”

“No, señorita, you have never been so beautiful. When the lover comes and you love him, señorita, you will think him greater than our natural king and lord, and all other men poor Indians.”

“But how shall I know?”

“Your heart will tell you, señorita.”

“My heart? My father and my mother will choose for me a husband whom I shall love as all other women love their husbands—just enough and no more. Then—I suppose—I shall never know?”

“Would you marry at your parents’ bidding, like a child, señorita? I do not think you would.”

Coneha looked at the girl in astonishment, but with a greater astonishment she suddenly realized that she would not. Even her little fingers stiffened in a rush of personality, of passionate resentment against the shackles bound by the ages about the feminine ego. Her individuality, long budding, burst into flower; her eyes gazed far beyond her radiant image in the mirror with a look of terrified but dauntless insight; then moved slowly to the girl that sat weeping on the floor.

“I know not what thy sin was,” she said musingly. “But I have heard it said thou didst obey no law but thine own will—and his. Why should the punishment have been so terrible? Thou hast sworn to me thou didst not help to murder the woman.”

“I cannot tell you, señorita. You will never know anything of sin; but of love—yes, I think you will know that, and before very long.”

“Before long?” Coneha’s lips parted and the nervous color she had depreicated left her cheeks. “What meanest thou, Rosa?” Her voice rose hoarsely.

And the Indian, with the insight of her own tragedy, replied: “The Russian has come for you, señorita. You will go with him, far away to the north and the snow. These others never could win your heart; but this man

who looks like a king, and as if many women had loved him, and he had cared little—— Oh, señorita, Carlos was only a poor Indian, but the men that women love all have something that makes them brothers—the great Russian and the poor man who goes mad for a moment and kills one woman that he may live with another forever. The great Russian is free, but he is the same, señorita—he too could kill for love, and such are the men we women die for!”

Concha, ambitious and romantic, eager for the brilliant life the advent of this Russian nobleman seemed to herald, had assured Santiago that he would love her; but they had been the empty words of the Favorita of many conquests; of love and passion she had known, suspected, nothing. As she watched Rosa, huddled and convulsed, little pointed arrows flew into her brain. Girls in those old Spanish days went to the altar with a serene faith in miracles, and it was a matter of honor among those that preceded their friends to abet the parents in a custom which assuredly did not err on the side of ugliness. Concha had a larger vocabulary than other Californians of her sex, for she had read many books, and if never a novel, she knew something of poetry. Sturgis had filled the sala with the sonorous roll of his favorite masters and it had pleased her ear; but the language of passion had been so many beautiful words, neither vibrating nor lingering in her consciousness. But the rude expression of the miserable woman at her feet, whose sobs grew more uncontrollable every moment, made it forever impossible that she should prattle again as she had to Santiago and Rezánov in the last day and night; and although she felt as if straining her eyes in the dark, her cheeks burned once more, and she rose uneasily and walked to the window.

She returned in a moment and stood over Rosa, but her voice when she spoke had lost its hoarseness and was cold and irritated.

“Control thyself,” she said. “And go and bathe thine eyes. Wouldst look like a tomato when it is time

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to pass the dulces and wines? And think no more of thy lover until he can come out of prison and marry thee." She drew herself away as the woman attempted to clutch her skirts. "Go," she said. "The musicians are tuning."

IX

"THE sash, Excellency?" Jón longed to see his master in full regalia once more, and after all, was not this an embassy of a sort? But Rezánov, who already regarded his reflection with some humor, shook his head.

"I'll go as far as decency permits, for no one is so impressed by external magnificence as the Spaniard. But full dress uniform and orders are enough; an ambassador's sash and they might suspect I took them for the children they are. Children are not always fools. My stock is too tight. Remember that I am to dance, and am too tall for most women's pretty little ears. And I doubt if an ear is less thirsty for being so provocatively screened."

Jón, a "prince" whose family had fallen upon evil days long since, but whose thin clever fingers were no mean inheritance, unwound and readjusted the folds of soft batiste, that most becoming neck vesture man has ever worn. He fain would have pressed the matter of the sash, but Rezánov, most indulgent of masters to this devoted servant, was never patient of insistence. Jón also regretted the powdered wig and queue, which he privately thought more befitting a fine gentleman than his own hair, even though the latter were thick and bright. He said tentatively:

"I notice these Californians still wear the hair long; and with their gay ribbons and showy hats look much better no doubt than if they followed a fashion of which it would seem they had not heard—and perhaps do not admire. I ventured to pack two of your excellency's wigs when we were leaving St. Petersburg——"

"Good heavens, no!" cried Rezánov, rising to his feet and casting a last impatient glance at the mirror.

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"When a man has escaped from a furnace does he run back of his own record? My brain would cook under a wig in this climate, and I need all my wits—for more reasons than one." And he went up on deck.

There, while awaiting his horses and escort he had another glimpse of the happy Arcadian life of the Californians. Over the sand hills through which he had floundered twice that day rode young men in gala attire, a maiden, her attire as brilliant as the sunset along the western summits, on the saddle before them. These saddles were heavy with silver, the blanket beneath was embroidered with both silver and gold. Gay light laughter floated out on the cool evening breeze to the little ship in the harbor.

"It has been a good day," thought Rezánov, lowering his glass. "It is like her to arrange so charming a finale."

When he arrived at the Presidio the guitars were tinkling and the sala was full of eager and somber faces. The Californians had come early, determined to witness the arrival of the Russians. Very pretty most of the girls were, and by no means a bevy of brunettes. There was hair of every shade of brown, looped over the ears, drawn high and confined by the high comb and the long pins; and Rafaella Sal, with her red hair and gray eyes, was still celebrated as a beauty, although no longer in her first youth—she was twenty-two, and should have been a matron and mother long since! But she looked very handsome and coquettish in her daring yellow frock that no other red head would have dared to wear, and she displayed three ropes of Baja California pearls, one strand being the common possession. The matrons, young and old, wore heavy satins or brocades, either red or yellow, but the maids were in flowered silks, sometimes with coquettish little jacket, generally with long pointed bodice and full flowing skirt. Concha's frock was made in this fashion, but quite different otherwise; an aunt in the City of Mexico being mindful at times of the cravings of relatives in exile.

It was of a soft shimmering white stuff covered with gold spangles and cut to reveal her young neck and arms. She stood at the head of the room with her mother as Rezánov entered, and he noticed for the first time how tall she was. She held herself proudly; mischievous twinkle, nor child-like trust, nor flashing coquetry possessed her eyes; these, even more star-like than usual, nevertheless looked out upon her guests with a dignified composure. Her lips, her skin, were luminous. In this well-cut evening gown she saw that her figure was superb; and that she could command stateliness as well as vivacity moved her toward a pedestal in his regard that had been occupied by few and never for long.

Rezánov, in his splendid uniform and blazing orders, filled the sala with his presence as he walked past the rows of bright critical eyes toward his hostesses. The young lips of the maids parted with delight and the men frowned. For the first time William Sturgis felt the sickness of jealousy instead of its not unagreeable pain. Davidov and Khostov, both handsome and well-bred young men, were also in full naval uniform, and by no means ignored; while Langsdorff, in the severe black of the scholar, was an admirable foil.

Rezánov, wondering at the subtle change in Coneha, bowed ceremoniously and murmured: "You will give me the first dance, señorita?"

"Certainly, Excellency. Are you not the guest of honor?"

She motioned to the Indian musicians, fiddles and guitars fairly leaped to position, and in a moment Rezánov enjoyed the novel delusion of encircling a girl's floating wraith.

"We can waltz, you see! Are you not surprised?"

"It is but one accomplishment the more. I feared a preference for your native dances, but ventured to hope you would teach me."

"They are easy to learn. You will watch us dance the contra-danza after this."

"With whom do you dance it?"

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Her black eyelashes were very thick; he barely caught the glance she shot him.

"The Russian bear growls," she said lightly. "Did you expect to dance every dance with me?"

"I came for no other purpose."

"You would have several duels to fight to-morrow."

"I have no objection."

"You have fought others, then?" Her voice was the softer with the effort to turn its edge.

"No more than most men, I suppose. May I ask how many have been fought for you?"

"My memory is no better than yours. Why should I burden it with trifles?"

"True. It doubtless is charged with matters far more serious than the desires of mere men. Tell me, señorita, what is your dearest wish?" He had bent his head and fixed his powerful gaze on her stubborn lashes. As he hoped, she raised startled eyes in which an angry glitter dawned.

"My dearest wish? If I had one should I tell you? Why do you ask me such a question?"

"Because I lit a candle at the Mission to-day that you might realize it," he answered smiling.

To his surprise he saw a flash of terror in her eyes before she dropped them, and felt her shiver. But she answered coldly:

"You have wasted a candle, señor. I have never had a wish that was not instantly gratified. But I thank you for the kind thought. Will you finish this waltz with my friend, and the fiancée of Luis, Rafaella Sal? She has quarrelled with Luis, I see; Don Weeliam is dancing with Carolina Ximéno, and she cares to waltz with no one else. Pardon me if I say that no one has ever waltzed as well as your excellency, and I must not be selfish."

"I will release you if you are tired, but otherwise I shall do myself the honor to waltz with your friend later."

"I must look after my other guests," she said coldly;

and he was led with what grace he could summon to the fair but sulky Rafaella.

"How am I to help flirting with that girl?" he thought as he mechanically guided another light and graceful partner through the crowded room. "If she were one girl I might resist. But since eleven o'clock yesterday morning she has been three. And if she was twenty yesterday, twelve this morning, she is twenty-eight to-night, and this might be a court ball in Madrid. I shall leave the day after I bring the Governor to terms."

He sat beside Doña Ignacia during the contra-danza and found the scene remarkably brilliant and animated considering the primitive conditions. In addition to the bright flags on the wall and the vivid colors of the women, the officers of the Presidio and forts wore full dress uniform, either white coats with red velvet vest, red pantaloons and sash, or white trousers and scarlet coat and waistcoat faced with green. The young men from the Mission wore small clothes of a black silk, fastened at the knee with silver buckles, and white silk stockings; two gentlemen from Monterey wore the evening costume of the capital, dove-colored small clothes, with white silk waistcoat and stockings, and much fine lawn and lace. The room was well lighted by many wicks stuck in lumps of tallow. The Indian musicians, soldiers recruited from a superior tribe in the Santa Clara valley, were clad almost entirely in scarlet, and danced sometimes as they played; and Indian girls, in short red skirts and snow-white smocks open at the throat, their long hair decorated with flowers and ribbons, already passed about wine and dulces. The windows were open. The sweet night air blew in

The contra-danza was not unlike the square dances of England except that it was far more graceful, and the men rivalled the women in their supple glidings and bendings, doublings and swayings. Concha danced with Ignacio Sal, Rafaella with William Sturgis; their pliant grace, as facile as grain rippling before the wind, would

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have put the best ballet in Europe to the blush. Concha's skirts swept Rezánov's feet, her little slippers twinkled before his admiring eyes, and he lost in sinuous turn or undulation of her beautiful figure; but she never vouchsafed him a glance.

When the dance finished his host introduced him to the prettiest of the girls and he paid them as many compliments as their heads would stand. He even took some trouble to talk to them, if only to fathom the sources of their unlikeness to Concha Argüello. He concluded that the gulf that separated her from these charming vivacious shallow young girls was not dug by education alone. Individualities were rare enough in Europe; out here, in earthly, but sparsely settled paradises, they must be rarer still; but that one had wandered into the lovely shell of Concha Argüello he no longer doubted. The fact that it had developed haphazardly, with little or no help from her sentience, and was still fluid and uncertain, but multiplied her in interest and charm. The women to whom he was accustomed knew themselves, consequently were no riddle to a man of his experience, but here he had an odd sense of having entered into a compact in the dark with a girl who might one day symbolize some high and impassioned ideal he had cherished in the days before ideals had been cast aside with the negative virtues that bred them.

As he coolly studied the good looks of the young caballeros and the plain intellectual face and slight little figure of the Bostonian, noted the utter indifference with which they were treated by the Favorita of Presidio and Mission, he felt a sudden rush of arrogance, a youthful tingling of nerves, the same prophetic sense of imminent happiness and power that his first contact with the light electrical air and the beauty of the country had induced. After all, he was but forty-two. Life on the whole had been very kind to him. And, although he did not realize it as yet, his frame, blighted by the rigors of the past three years, was already sensible to a renewal of juice and sap. He admitted that he was more

interested than he had been for many years, and that if he was not in love, he tingled with a very natural masculine desire for an adventure with a pretty girl.

But he was by no means a weak man, and his mind counted the cost even while his imagination hummed. He had almost decided to bid Doña Ignacia an abrupt good-night, pleading fatigue, which his pallor indorsed, when the door of the dining-room was thrown open to the liveliest of fiddling, and a white hand with a singular suggestion of tenacity both in appearance and clasp took possession of his arm.

"My mother has gone to Gertrudis Rudisinda, who is crying," said Concha. "It is my pleasure to lead your excellency in to supper."

They sat side by side at the head of the long table almost covered by the massive service of silver and loaded with evidences of Doña Ignacia's generosity and skill; chickens in red rice and gravy, oysters, tamales, dulees, pastries, fruits and pleasant drinks. Luis, with Rafaela Sal dimpling and sparkling at his side, and now quite resigned to the semi-official nature of the ball, rose and drank the health of the distinguished guest in long and flowery phrases. Rezánov responded in a far but no less felicitous vein, and concluded by remarking that the only rift in the lute of his present enchanting experience was the fear that whereas he had nearly died of starvation several times during the past three years, he was now threatened with a far more ignominious end, so delicious and irresistible were the temptations that beset the wayfarer in this most hospitable land. Both speeches were gaily applauded, the conversation became animated and general, and Concha dropped her voice to the attentive ear beside her.

"You were very successful to-day at the Mission, Excellency."

"May I ask how you know?"

"I never saw anything so serenely—arrogantly, perhaps would be a truer description—triumphant as your bearing when you walked down our humble sala to-

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night. You looked like Cæsar returned from Gaul; but I suppose that all great conquests are merely the sum of many small ones."

"I do not regard the friendship of so shrewd a man as Father Abella a trifling conquest. And according to yourself, dear señorita, it is essential to the success of a mission upon which many lives and my own honor depend."

"Is it really so serious?" she asked with a faint sneer.

He drew himself up stiffly and his light eyes glowed with anger. "It is a subject I never should have thought of introducing at a festivity like this," he said suavely. "May I be permitted to compliment you, señorita, upon your marvellous grace in the contradanza? It quite turned my head, and I am delighted to hear that you will dance alone after supper."

Her face had flushed hotly. She dropped her eyes and her voice trembled as she replied: "You humiliate me, señor, and I deserve it. I—my poor Rosa told me something of her great tragedy while dressing me, and for the moment other things seemed unimportant. What is hunger and court favor beside a broken heart and a desolate life? But that of course is the attitude of an ignorant girl." She raised her eyes. They were soft, and her voice was softer. "I beg that you will forgive me, señor. And be sure that I take an even deeper interest in your great mission than yesterday. I have thought much about it, and while I have told my mother nothing, I have expressed certain peevish hopes that a ship would not come all the way from Sitka without taking a hint more than one Boston skipper must have given, and brought us many of the things we need. She is quite excited over the prospect of a new shawl for herself, and of sending several as presents to the south; besides many other things: cotton, shoes, kitchen utensils. Have you any of these things, Excellency?"

Rezánov stared at her face, barely tinted with color, dully wondering why it should be so different from the

one roguish, pathetically innocent, that had haunted him all day. He asked abruptly:

"Which is the friend whose little ones you envy? You have made me wish to see them and her."

"That is Elena—beside Gervasio." She indicated a young woman with soft patient brown eyes, the dignity of her race and the sweetness of young motherhood, who would have looked little older than herself had it not been for an already shapeless figure. "I can take you to-morrow to see them if you wish."

She had cast down her eyes and her face was white. Still he groped on.

"Pardon me if I say that I am surprised your parents should permit such a woman as this Rosa to attend you. Why should your happy life be disturbed by the lamentations of an abandoned creature—who can do you no good, and possibly much harm?"

Still Concha did not raise her eyes. "I do not think poor Rosa would do anyone harm. But perhaps it were as well she went elsewhere. We have had her long enough. I have taken a dislike to her. I reproach myself bitterly, but I cannot help it. I should like never to see her again."

"What has she told you?" Concha glanced up swiftly. His eyes were blazing. She felt quite certain that he rolled a Russian oath under his tongue, and she made a slight involuntary motion toward him, her lips trembling apart.

"Nothing," she murmured. "I do not know—I do not know. But I no longer wish her near me. She—life is very strange and terrible, señor. You know it well—I, so little."

Rezánov felt his breath short and his hands cold. For a moment he made no reply. Then he smiled charmingly and said in the conventional tone that was ever at his command: "Of course you know little of life in this Arcadia. One who hopes to be numbered among the best of your friends prays that you never may. Yes, señorita, life is strange—strangely common-

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place and disillusionizing—but sometimes picturesque. Believe me when I say that nothing stranger has ever befallen me than to find out here on the lonely brink of a continent nearly twenty thousand versts from Europe, a girl of sixteen with the grand manner, and an intellect without the detestable idiosyncrasies of the fashionable *bas bleus* I have hitherto had the misfortune to encounter."

She was tapping the table slowly with her fork, and he noted that her soft childish mouth was set. "No doubt you are quite right to put me off," she said finally, and in a voice as even as his own. "And my intellect would do me little good if it did not teach me to ignore mysteries I can never hope to fathom. There is no such thing as life in your sense in this forgotten corner of the world, nor ever will be in my time. If you come back and visit us twenty years hence you will find me fat and worn like Elena, and busy every minute like my mother—unless, indeed, I marry Don Weeliam Sturgis and become a great lady in Boston. It would not be so mean a fate."

Rezanov darted a look of angry contempt at the pale young man who was eating little and miserably watching the handsome pair at the head of the table. "You will not marry him!" he said briefly.

"I could do far worse." Coneha's lashes framed an adorable glance that sent the blood to the hair of the sensitive youth. "You have no idea how clever and good he is. And—*Madre de Dios!*—I am so tired of California."

"But you are a part of it—the very symbol of its future, it seems to me. I wish I had a sculptor in my suite. I should make him model you, label the statue 'California,' and erect it on the peak of that big island out there."

"That is very poetical, but after all you are only saying that I am a pretty savage with an education that will be more common in the next generation. It is little consolation for an existence where the most ex-

citing event in a lifetime is the arrival of a foreign ship or the inauguration of a governor." And once more she smiled at Sturgis. He raised his glass impulsively, and she hers in gay response. A moment later she gave the signal to leave the table. Rezánov followed her back to the sala chewing the cud of many reflections.

X

CONCHA had eaten no supper. As she entered the sala she clapped her hands, the guests ranged themselves against the wall, the musicians, livelier than ever, flew to their instruments; with the drifting swaying movement she could assume at will, she went slowly, absently, to the middle of the room. Then she let her head drop backward, as if with the weight of her hair, and Rezánov, vaguely angry, expected one of those appeals to the senses for which Spanish women of another sort were notorious. But Concha, after tapping the floor alternately with the points and the wooden heels of her slippers, for a few moments, suddenly made an imperious gesture to Ignacio Sal. He sprang to her side, took her hand, and once more there was the same monotonous tapping of toes and heels. Then they whirled apart, bent their lithe backs until their brows almost touched the floor in a salute of mock admiration, and danced to and from each other, coquetry in the very tilt of her eyebrows, the bare semblance of masculine indulgence on his eager passionate face. Suddenly to the surprise of all, she snapped her fingers directly under his nose, waved her hand, turned her back, and made a peremptory gesture to that other enamoured young swain, Captain Antonio Castro of Monterey. Don Ignacio, surprised and discomfited, retired amidst the jeers of his friends, and Concha, with her most vivacious and gracious manner, met Castro halfway, and, taking his hand, danced up and down the sala, slowly and with many improvisations. Then, as they returned to the center of the room and stepped lightly apart before joining in a gay whirl, she snapped her fingers under his nose, made a gesture of dismissal over her shoulder,

and fluttered an uplifted hand in the direction of Sturgis. Again there was delighted laughter, again a discomforted knight and a triumphant partner.

"Concha always gives us something we do not expect," said Santiago to Rezánov, whose eyes were twinkling. "The other girls dance El Son and La Jota very gracefully—yes. But Conchita dances with her head, and the musicians and the partner, when she takes one, have all they can do to follow. She will choose you, next, señor."

Rezánov turned cold, and measured the distance to the door. "I hope not!" he said. "I should hate nothing so much as to make an exhibition of myself. The dances I know—that is all very well—but to improvise—for the love of heaven help me to get out!"

But Santiago, who was watching his sister intently, replied: "Wait a moment, Excellency. I do not think she will choose another. I know by her feet that she intends to dance El Son—in her own way, of course—after all."

Concha circled about the room twice with Sturgis, lifted him to the seventh heaven of expectancy, dismissed him as abruptly as the others. Lifting her chin with an expression of supreme disdain for all his sex, she stood a moment, swaying, her arms hanging at her sides.

"I am glad she will not dance with William," muttered Santiago. "I love him—yes; but the Spanish dance is not for the Bostonian."

Rezánov awaited her performance with an interest that caused him some cynical amusement. But in a moment he had surrendered to her once more as a creature of inexhaustible surprise. The musicians watching her began to play more slowly. Concha, her arms still supine, her head lifted, her eyes half veiled, began to dance in a stately and measured fashion that seemed to powder her hair and dissolve the partitions before an endless vista of rooms. Rezánov had a sudden vision of the Hall of the Ambassadors in the royal palace at

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Madrid, where, when a young man on his travels, he had attended a state ball. There he had seen the most dignified beauties of Europe dance at the most formal of its courts. But Coneha created the illusion of having stepped down from the throne in some bygone fashion to dance alone for her subjects and adorers.

She raised her arms, barely budding at the top, with a gesture that was not only the poetry of grace but as though bestowing some royal favor; when she curved and swayed her body, again it was with the lofty sweetness of one too highly placed to descend to mere seductiveness. She glided up and down, back and forth, with a dreamy revealing motion as if assisting to shape some vague impassioned image in the brain of a poet. She lifted her little feet in a manner that transformed boards into clouds. There were moments when she seemed actually to soar.

"She is a little genius!" thought Rezánov enthusiastically. "Anything could be made of a woman like that."

It was not her dancing alone that interested him, but its effect on her audience. The young men had begun with audible expressions of approval. They were now shouting and stamping and clapping. Suddenly, as once more she danced back to the very center of the room, her bosom heaving, her eyes like stars, her red lips parted, Don Ignacio, long since recovered from his spleen, invaded his pocket and flung a handful of silver at her feet. It was a signal. Gold and silver coins, chains, watches, jewels, bonned over the floor, to be laughingly ignored. Rezánov looked on in amazement, wondering if this were a part of the performance and if he should follow suit. But after a glance at the faces of the young men, lost to everything but their passionate admiration for the unique and beautiful dancing of their Favorite, and when Sturgis, after wildly searching in his pockets, tore a large pearl from the lace of his stock, he doubted no longer—nor hesitated. Fastened by a blue ribbon to the fourth button of his closely

fitting coat was a golden key, the outward symbol of his rank at court. He detached it, then made a sudden gesture that caught her attention. For a moment their eyes met. He tossed her the bauble, and mechanically she lifted her hand and caught it. Then she laughed confusedly, shrugged her shoulders, bowed graciously to her audience, and signalled to the musicians to stop. Rezánov was at her side in a moment.

"You must be tired," he said. "I insist that you come out on the veranda and rest."

"Very well," she said indifferently; "it is quite time we all went out to the air. Santiago mio, wilt thou bring my reboso—the white one?"

Santiago, more flushed than his sister at her triumphs, fetched the long strip of silk, and Rezánov detached her from her eager court and led her without. Elena Castro followed closely, yet with a cavalier of her own that her friend might talk freely with this interesting stranger. The night air was cool and stimulating. The hills were black under the sparks of white fire in the high arch of the California sky. In the Presidio square were long blue shadows that might have been reflections of the smoldering blue beyond the stars. Rezánov and Coneha sat on the railing at the end of the "corridor."

"It is a custom—all that very material admiration?" he asked.

"A very old one, but not too often followed. Otherwise we should not prize it. But when some Favorita outdoes herself then she receives the greatest reward that man can think of—gold and silver and jewels. We do not dare to return the tributes in common fashion, but they have a way of appearing where they belong as soon as their owners are supposed to have forgotten the incident. As you are not a Californian, señor, I take the liberty of returning this without any foolish subterfuge." She handed him his contribution. "I thank you all the same. It was a spontaneous act, and I am very proud."

He accepted the key awkwardly, not daring to press

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it upon her, with the obvious banalities. But he felt a sudden desire to give her something, and, nothing better offering, he gathered half a dozen roses and laid them on her lap.

"I was disappointed that you did not wear your roses to-night," he said. "I associate them with you in my thoughts. Will you put one in your hair?"

She found a place for two and thrust another in the neck of her gown. The rest she held closely in her hands. Then he noticed that she was very white, and again she shivered.

"You are cold and tired," he murmured, his eyes melting to hers. "It was entrancing, but I hope never to see you give so much of yourself to others again." His hand in arranging the reboso touched hers. It lingered, and she stared up at him, helplessly, her eyes wide, her lips parted. She reminded him of a rabbit caught in a trap, and he had a sudden and violent revulsion of feeling. He rose and offered his arm. "I should be a brute if I kept you talking out here. Slip off and go to bed. I shall start the guests, for I am very tired myself."

XI

HE did not talk with her again for several days. He called in state, but remained only a few moments. His officers went to several impromptu dances at the Presidio and Mission, but he pleaded fatigue, natural in the damaged state of his constitution, and left the ship only for a gallop over the hills or down the coast with Luis Argüello.

But he had never felt better. At the end of a week his pallor had gone, his skin was tanned and fresh. Even his wretched crew were different men. They were given much leave on shore, and already might be seen escorting the serving-women over the hills in the late afternoon. Rezánov gave them a long rope, although he knew they must be germinating with a mutinous distaste of the Russian north; he kept a strict watch over them and would have given a deserter his due without an instant's pause.

The estafette that had gone with Luis' letters to Monterey had taken one from Rezánov as well, asking permission to pay a visit of ceremony to the Governor. Five days later the plenipotentiary received a polite welcome to California, and protest against another long journey; the humble servant of the King of Spain would himself go to San Francisco at once and offer the hospitality of California to the illustrious representative of the Emperor of all the Russias.

Rezánov was not only annoyed at the Governor's evident determination that he should see as little as possible of the insignificant military equipment of California, but at the delay to his own plans for exploration. He knew that Luis would dare take him upon no expedition into the heart of the country without the consent of the

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Governor, and he began to doubt this consent would be given. But he was determined to see the bay, at least, and he no sooner read the diplomatic epistle from Monterey than he decided to accomplish this part of his purpose before the arrival of the Governor or Don José. He knew the material he had to deal with at the moment, but nothing of that already, no doubt, on their way to the north.

Early in the morning after the return of the courier he wrote an informal note to Doña Ignacia, asking her to give him the honor of entertaining her for a day on the *Juno*, and to bring all the young people she would. As the weather was so fine, he hoped to see them in time for chocolate at nine o'clock. He knew that Luis, who was pressingly included in the invitation, had left at daybreak for his father's rancho some thirty miles to the south.

There was a flutter at the Presidio when the invitation of the Chamberlain was made known. The compliment was not unexpected, but there had been a lively speculation as to what form the Russian's return of hospitality would take. Concha, whose tides had thundered and ebbed many times since the night of her party, submerging the happy inconsequence of her sixteen years, but leaving her unshaken spirit with wide clarified vision, felt young to-day from sheer reaction. She would listen to no protest from her prudent mother, and smothered her with kisses and a torrent of words.

"But, my Conchita," gasped Doña Ignacia, "I have much to do. Thy father and his excellency come in two days. And perhaps they would not approve—before they are here!—to go on the foreign ship! If Luis were not gone! Ay yi! Ay yi!"

"We go, we go, madre mia! And his excellency will give you a shawl. I feel it! I know it! And if we go now we disobey no law. Have they ever said we could not visit a foreign ship when they were not here? We are light-headed, irresponsible women. And if they should not not let us go! If the Governor and the Rus-

sian should disagree! Now we have the opportunity for such a day as we never have had before. We should be imbeciles. We go, madre mia, we go!"

So it proved. At a few minutes before nine the Señora Argüello, clad in her best black silk skirt and jacket, a red shawl embroidered with yellow draped over her bust with unconquerable grace, and a black reboso folded about her fine proud head, rode down to the beach with Ana Paula on the aquera behind and Gertrudis Rudisinda on her arm. The boys howled on the corridor, but the good señora felt that she could not too liberally construe the kind invitation of a chamberlain of the Russian Court.

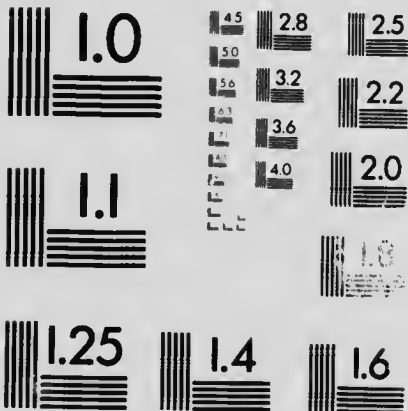
Behind her rode Coneha, in white with a pink reboso; Rafaella Sal, Carolina Ximéno, Herminia Lopez, Delfina Rivera, the only other girls at the Presidio old enough to grace such an occasion; Sturgis, who happened to have spent the night at the Presidio, Gervasio, Santiago and Lieutenant Rivera. Castro had returned to Monterey, Sal was officer of the day, and the other young men had sulkily declined to be the guests of a man who looked as haughty as the Tsar himself and betrayed no disposition to recognize in Spain the first nation of Europe. But no one missed them. The girls, in their flowered muslins and bright rebosos, the men in gay serapes and embroidered botas, looked a fine mass of color as they galloped down to the beach and laughed and chattered as youth must on so glorious a morning. Even Sturgis, always careful to be as nearly one with these people as his different appearance and temperament would permit, wore clothes of green linen, a ruffled shirt, deer-skin botas and sombrero.

Three of the ship's canoes awaited the guests, and as not one of the women had ever set foot in a boat, there was a chorus of shrieks. Doña Ignacia murmured an audible prayer, and clutched Gertrudis Rudisinda to her breast.

"Madre de Dios! The water! I cannot!" she muttered. But Santiago took her firmly by one elbow,



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Sturgis by the other, Davidov caught up the children with a reassuring laugh, and in a moment she was trembling in the middle of the canoe. Coneha had already leaped into the second and waved a careless little salutation to the *Juno*. Her eyes sparkled. Her nostrils fluttered. She felt indifferent to everything but the certain pleasure of the day. Rezánov was sure to be charming. What mattered the morrow, and possible nights of doubt, despair, hatred of life and wondering self-contempt?

Rezánov awaited the canoes in the prow of the ship. He wore undress uniform and a cap instead of the cocked hat of ceremony which had excited their awe. He too tingled with a sense of youthful gaiety and adventure. As he helped his guests up the side of the vessel, and listened to the delighted laughter of the girls, saw the dancing eyes of even the haughty and reserved Santiago, he also dismissed the morrow from his thoughts.

As Doña Ignacia was hauled to the deck, uttering embarrassed apologies for bringing the two little girls, Rezánov protested that he adored children, patted their heads, and told off a young sailor to amuse them.

Four tables on the deck were set with coffee, chocolate, Russian tea, and strange sweets that the cook had fashioned from ingredients to which his skilful fingers had long been strangers.

Doña Ignacia sat beside the host, and when she had tried both the tea and the coffee and had demanded the recipe of the sweets, he said casually: "After breakfast I shall ask you to go down to the cabin for a few moments. I bought the cargo with the *Juno*, and find there are several articles which I shall beg as a great favor to present to my kindest of hostesses and the young girls she has been good enough to bring to my ship. Shawls and ells of cotton and all that sort of thing are of no use to a bachelor, and I hope you will rid me of some of them."

Doña Ignacia lost all interest in the breakfast, and presently, murmuring an excuse, was escorted by Langs-

droff down to the cabin. When the light repast was over, Rezánov made a signal to several sailors who awaited commands, and they sprang to the anchor and sails.

"We are going to have a cruise," announced the host to his guests. "The bay is very smooth, there is a fine breeze, we shall neither be becalmed nor otherwise the sport of inclement waters. I know that most of you have never seen this beautiful bay and that you will enjoy its scenery as much as I shall."

He moved to Concha's side and dropped his voice. "This is for you, señorita," he said. "You want change, variety, and I have planned to give you all that I can in one day. I expect you to be happy."

"I shall be," she said dryly, "if only in watching a diplomat get his way. You will see every corner of our bay, and I shall have the delightful sensation of doing something naughty for which I cannot be held responsible."

He laughed. "I am quite willing that you should understand me," he said. "But it is true that I thought as much of you as of myself."

In a few moments the ship was under way. Santiago and Sturgis had gone down to the cabin to reassure Doña Ignacia, who uttered a loud cry as the *Juno* gave a preliminary lurch. Gervasio and Rivera had opened their eyes as Rezánov abruptly unfolded his plan, but dropped them sleepily before the delight of the girls. After all, it was none of their affair, and what was a bay? If they requested him, as a point of honor, to refrain from examining the battery of Yerba Buena with his glass, their consciences would be as light as their hearts.

As Rezánov stood alone with Concha in the prow of the ship and alternately cast softened eyes on her intense rapt face, and shrewd glances on the ramifications of the bay, he congratulated himself upon his precipitate action and the collusion of nature. They were sailing east, and would turn to the north in a moment. The

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mountain range bent abruptly at the entrance to the bay, encircling the immense sheet of water in a chain of every altitude and form: a long hard undulating line against the bright blue sky; smooth and dimpled slopes, as round as cones, bare but for the green of their grasses; lofty ridges tapering to hills in the curve at the north but with blue peaks multiplying beyond. There were dense forests in deep cañons on the mountainside, bare and jagged heights, the graceful sweep of valleys, promontories leaping out from the mainland like mammoth crocodiles guarding the bay. The view of the main waters was broken by the largest of the islands, but far away were the hills of the east and the soft blue peaks behind. And over all, hills and valley and cañon and mountain, was a bright opalescent mist. Green, pink, and other pale colors gleamed as behind a thin layer of crystal. Where the sun shone through a low white cloud upon a distant slope there might have been a great globe of iridescent glass illuminated within. The water was a light soft filmy yet translucent blue. Concha gazed with parted lips.

"I never knew before how wonderful it was," she murmured. "I have been taught to believe that only the south is beautiful, and when we had to come here again from Santa Barbara it was exile. But now I am glad I was born in the north."

"I have watched the lights on these hills and islands, and what I could see of the fine lines of the mountains, ever since I came, and were there but villas and castles, these waters would be far more beautiful than the Lake of Como or the Bay of Naples. But I am glad to see trees again. From our anchorage I had but a bare glimpse of two or three. They seem to hide from the western winds. Are they so strong, then?"

"We have terrible winds, señor. I do not wonder the trees crouch to the east. But I must tell you our names." She pointed to the largest of the islands, a great bare mass that looked as had it been, when viscid flung out in long folds from a central peak, concaving here and

there with its own weight. Its southern point was on a line with a point of mainland far to the west, and its northern, from their vantage looking to be but a continuation of the curve of the mainland, finished an arc of almost perfect proportions, whose deep curve was a tumbled mass of hills and one great mountain. "That is Nuestra Señora de los Angeles, and it opens a triple jaw, Luis has told me, at Point Tiburon—you will soon see the straits between. The big rock behind us is Alcatraz, and farther away still is Yerba Buena—that looks like a camel on its knees."

But Rezánov was examining the scene before him. The lines of this bay within a bay were superb, and in its wide embrace, slanting from Point Tiburon toward an inner point two miles opposite was another island, as steep as Aleatraz, but long and waving of outline, with a glimpse of trees on its crest. Rezánov, while he lost nothing of the picturesque beauty surrounding him, was more deeply interested in noting the many foundations, sheltered and solid, for fortifications that would hold these rich lands against the fleets of the world. Never had he seen so many strategic advantages on one sheet of water. The islands farther south he had examined through his glass from the deck of the *Juno* until he knew every convolution they turned to the west.

Coneha was directing his attention to the tremendous angular peak rising above the tumbled hills. "That is Mount Tamalpais—the mountain of peace. It was named by the Indians, not by us. Sometimes it is like a great purple shadow, and at others the clouds fight about it like the ghosts of big sea-gulls." They were sailing past the rounded end of the western inner point of the little bay. It was almost detached from the bare ridge behind and half covered with oaks and willow trees. "That is Point Sausalito. I have often looked at it through the glass and longed for a merienda in the deep shade." She turned to Rezánov with lips apart. "Could we not—oh, señor!—have our dinner on shore?"

"It is only for you to select the spot. We can sail

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many miles before it is time for dinner, and you may find a place even more to your liking. I fancy we cannot go far here. It looks swampy and shallow. Nothing could be less romantic than to stick in the mud."

"May I ask," said Coneha demurely, "how you dare to run the risks of an unknown sheet of water? I have heard it said that there is more than one rock and shoal in this bay."

"I am not as rash as I may appear," replied Rezánov dryly, but smiling. "In 1789 there was a chart of this bay, taken from a Spanish MSS., published in London; and I bought it there when I ran up from the *Nadeshda*—anchored at Falmouth—three years ago. Davidov, who, you may observe, is steering, oblivious to the charms of even Doña Carolina, knows every sounding by heart."

"Oh!" Coneha shrugged her shoulders. "The Governor, too, is very clever. It will be a drawn battle. Perhaps I shall remain neutral after all. It would be more amusing." The ship was turning, and she waved her hand to the island between the deep arc of the hilly coast. "I have heard so much of the beauty of that island," she said, "that I have called it La Bellissima, but I never hoped to see anything but the back of its head, from which the wind has blown all the hair. And now I shall. How kind of you, señor!"

"How easily you are made happy!" he said, with a sigh. "You look like a child."

"To day I shall be one; and you the kind fairy godfather," she added, with some malice. "How old are you, señor?"

"Forty-two."

"That is twenty-six years older than myself. But your excellency might pass for thirty-five," she added politely. "We have all said it. And now that you are not so pale you will soon look younger—and even more triumphant than when you came."

"I have never felt so triumphant as on this morning, dear señorita. I had not hoped to give you so much pleasure."

Her cheeks were as pink as her reboso, her great black eyes were dancing. Her hands strained at the railing. "I shall see La Bellissima! La Bellissima!" she cried.

They rounded the low broken point of the island, sailed through the racing currents between the lower end of La Bellissima and "Our Lady of the Angels," more slowly past what looked to be a perpendicular forest. From water to crest the gulches and converging spurs of this hillside in the sea were a dense mass of oaks, bays, underbrush; here and there a tall slender tree with a bark like red kid and a flirting polished leaf, at which Concha clapped her hands as at sight of an old friend and called "El Madroño." It was a primeval bit of nature, but sweet and silent and peaceful; there was no suggestion either of gloom or of discourteous beast.

"We shall have our dinner here, Excellency. There on that little beach; and afterward we shall climb to the top. See, there are trails! The Indians have been here."

They stood out through the straits between Point Tiburon and the Isle of the Angels, where the tide ran fast. Then, for the first time, was Rezánov able to form a definite idea of the size and shape of this great natural harbor. To the south it extended beyond the peninsula in an unbroken sheet for some forty English miles. Ten miles to the north there was a gateway between the lower hills which Luis had alluded to as leading into the bay of Saint Pablo, another large body of tidewater, but inferior in depth and beauty to the Bay of San Francisco.

The mist had dissolved. The greens were vivid where the sun shone on island and hill. The woods of Bellissima, the groves of Point Sausalito, the forests in the northern cañons, deepened to purple like that of the great bare sweep of Tamalpais. Only the farther peaks remained a pale misty blue, and were of an indescribable floating delicacy.

Concha pointed to the eastern double cone. "That is Monte del Diablo. Once they say it spouted fire, but

that was long ago, and all our volcanoes are dead. But perhaps not so long ago. The Indians tell the strange story that their grandfathers remembered when this bay was a valley covered with oak trees, and the rivers of the north flowed through and emptied into Lake Merced and a rift by the Fort. Then came a tremendous earthquake and rent the mountains apart where you came through—we call it the Mouth of the Gulf of the Farallones—the valley sank, the sea flowed in, only these hills that are islands now keeping their heads above the flood. Perhaps it is true, for Drake was close to this bay for a long while and never saw it, and it would have given him a better shelter than the little harbor he found a few miles higher on the coast. I believe it was not here. Madre de Dios, I hope California shakes no more. She would—is it not true, Excellency?—be the most perfect country in all the world did she not have the devil in her.”

“Are you afraid of earthquakes?” asked Rezánov, who once more had transferred his comprehensive gaze from battery sites to her face.

“I cross myself. It is like feeling your grave turn over. But I fancy the poor old earth is like the people on her; she gets tired of being good and is all the naughtier for having been sober too long. Don Vincente Rivera is an example; he is cold, haughty, solemn, stern to others and himself, as you see him; but once in a while—Madre de Dios! The Presidio does not sleep for three nights!”

Rezánov laughed heartily, then turned abruptly away. “Come,” he said. “I had almost forgotten. Will you ask the others to go to the cabin, while I give orders that dinner shall be served on your island?”

In the cabin, Coneha forgot him for a few moments. Her mother, her eyes dwelling fondly upon several shawls she hoped were intended for herself alone, was hushing the baby to sleep in the deep chair of his excellency. Ana Paula was playing with an Alaskan doll she had appropriated without ceremony. Rezánov came

in when his guests were assembled, and he had a gift for each; curious objects of Alaskan workmanship for the men, miniature totem poles and fur-bordered moccasins; but silk and cotton, linen, shawls, and fine handkerchiefs for señora and maiden.

"They are trifles," he said, in response to an enthusiastic chorus. "The cargo I was obliged to take over was a very large one. You must not protest. I shall never miss these things." And he knew that he had sown the seeds of a rapacity similar to that implanted in the worthy bosoms of the priests when they had paid him their promised visit. If the Governor were insensible to diplomacy he would have pressure brought to bear upon his official integrity from more quarters than one.

"There are also many of the presents rejected by the Mikado, somewhere," he added carelessly. "But I could not find them. They must have found their way to the bottom of the hold during one of the storms we encountered on our way from Sitka."

He certainly looked the fairy godfather, and quite impartial as he distributed his offerings with a chosen word to each; his memory for little characteristics was as remarkable as for names and faces. He had taken off his cap on deck, and the breeze had ruffled his thick fair hair, brought the blood to his thin cheeks. The lines of his face, cut by privation and anxiety and illness, had almost disappeared with the renewed elasticity of the flesh, and his blue eyes were wide open, and sparkling in sympathy with the pleasure of his guests and the success of his own strategy. These few insignificant Spaniards dislodged, a half-dozen forts in this harbor, and the combined navies of the world might be defied; while a great chain of hungry settlements fattened and prospered exceedingly on the beneficence of the most fertile land in all the Americas.

XII

THE eastern mountains looked very close from the crest of La Bellissima and of a singular transparency and variety of hue. It was as if the white masses of cloud sailing low overhead flung down great splashes of color from prismatic stores stolen from the sun. There was a vivid pale green on the long sweep of a rounding slope, deep violet and pale purple in dimple and hollow, red showing through green on a tongue of land running down from the north; and on the lower ridges and little islands, pale and dark blue, and the most exquisite fields of lavender. This last tint was reflected in the water immediately below the bridge, and farther out there were lakelets of pale green, as if the islands, too, had the power to mirror themselves when the sea itself was glass.

Santiago, Davidov, Carolina Ximéno, Delfina Rivera, Concha and Rezánov, had climbed to the ridge. The other young people had given out halfway up the steep and tangled ascent and returned to the beach. Doña Ignacia immediately after dinner had frankly asked her host for the hospitality of his stateroom. She and her little ones must have their siesta, and the good lady was convinced that so high and mighty a personage as the Russian Chamberlain was all the chaperon the proprieties demanded.

Four of the party strayed along the crest in search of the first wild pansies. Rezánov and Concha looked under the sloping roof of brittle leaves into dim falling vistas, arches, arbors, caverns, a forest in miniature with natural terraces breaking the precipitous wall of the island.

"I should like to live here," said Concha definitely.

"It would make a fine estate for summer life—or

for a honeymoon." He smiled down upon his companion, who stood very tall and straight and proud beside him. "If you conclude to marry your little Bostonian no doubt he will buy it for you," he said.

If he had hoped to see a look of blank dismay after his hours of devotion he was disappointed. She made a little face.

"I do not think I could stand a desert island with the good Weeliam. For that I should prefer one of my own sort—Ignacio, or Fernando. Better still, I could come here and be a hermit."

"A hermit?"

"In some ways that would suit me very well. All human beings become tiresome, I find. I shall have a little hut just below the crest where I can look from my window right into the woods that are so quiet and green and beautiful. That is a thought that has always fascinated me. And when I walk on the crest I can see all the beauty of mountain and bay. What more could I want? What more have you in your world when you know it too well, señor?"

"Nothing; but you might tire, too, of this."

"What of it? It would be the gentle sad ennui of peace, not of disillusion. I think you have suffered much disillusion, señor. How I wish you would tell me all you know of it!"

"God forbid. And do not remind me of ennui and disillusion. I have forgotten both in California. Perhaps, after all, I shall not return to St. Petersburg. There is a vast world here——"

"But it is not Russia's to rule, Excellency," she interrupted softly.

He did not color nor start, but met her eyes with his deep amused glance. "I, too, can dream, señorita. Of a great and wonderful kingdom—that never will exist, perhaps. I have always been called a dreamer, but the habit has grown since I came to this lovely unreal land of yours."

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"Have you the intention to take it from us, Excellency?" she asked quietly.

"Would you betray me if you thought I had?"

Her eyes responded for a moment to the magnetism of his, and then she drew herself up.

"No, señor, I could not betray a man who had been our guest, and Spain needs no assistance from a weak girl to hold her own against Russia."

"Well said! I kiss your hands, as they say in Vienna. But we must sail again. I told them to be ready at three o'clock."

Dalliance with the most alluring girl he had ever known was all very well, but the day's work was not yet done. When they returned to the ship he deliberately engaged all the Spaniards in a game of cards, ordered cigarettes and a bowl of punch for their refreshment, and then the *Juno* steered south.

They sailed swiftly past Nuestra Señorita de los Angeles and the eastern side of Aleatraz, Rezánov sweeping every inch with his glass; more slowly past the peninsula where it came down in a succession of rough hills almost in a straight line from the Presidio, ascending to a high outpost of solid rock, whence it turned abruptly to the south in a waving line of steep irregular cliffs, harsh, barren, intersected with gullies. Then the land became suddenly as flat as the sea, save for the shifting dunes, the desert porch of the great fertile valley hidden from the water by the waves of sand, but indicated by its rampart of mountains. The shallow water curved abruptly inward between the rocky mass on the right and a gentler incline and point two miles below. At its head was the "Battery of Yerba Buena," facing the island from which it took its name. Rezánov scrupulously kept his word and did not raise his glass, but one contemptuous glance satisfied his curiosity. His eye rolled over the steep hills that were designed to bristle with forts, and, as sometimes happened, when he spoke again to Coneha, whom he kept close to his side, for

the other girls bored him, his words did not express the workings of his mind.

"Athens has no finer site than this," he said. "I should like to see a white marble city on these hills, and on that plain, when all the sand dunes are leveled. Not in our time, perhaps! But, as I told you, I have surrendered myself to the habit of dreaming."

Concha shrugged her shoulders and made no reply at the moment. As they sailed toward the east before turning south again, she pointed across the great silvery sheet of water melting into the misty southern horizon, to a high ridge of mountains that looked to be a continuation of the San Bruno range behind the Mission, but slanting farther west with the coast line.

"Those are behind our rancho, señor—Rancho El Pilar, or Las Pulgas, as some prefer. Perhaps my father will take you there. I hope so, for we love to go, and may not too often; my father is very busy here. He is one of the few that has received a large grant of land, and it is because the clergy love him so much they oppose his wish in nothing. Do you see those sharp points against the sky? They are the tops of lofty trees, like the masts of giant ships, and with many rigid arms spiked like the pines. You saw a few of them in the hollow below Tamalpais, but up on those mountains there are miles and miles of mighty forests. No white man has ever penetrated them, nor ever will, perhaps. We have no use for them, and even if you made this your kingdom, señor, I suppose not many would come with you. Far, far down where the water stops are the Mission of Santa Clara and the pueblo of San José; but I have heard you cannot approach within many miles of the land in a boat."

When they had sailed south for a few moments the boat came about abruptly. Concha laughed. "I had forgotten the chart. I rather hoped you would run on a shoal."

But as they approached the cove of Yerba Buena again she caught his arm suddenly, unconscious of the

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act, and the little dancing lights of humor in her eyes went out. "Your white city, señor! Ay, Dios! what a city of dreams that can never come true!"

The soft white fog that sometimes, even at this season, came in from the sea, was rolling over the hills between the Battery and the Presidio, wreathing about the rocky heights and slopes. It broke into domes and eupolas, spires and minarets. Great waves rolled over the sand dunes and beat upon the cliffs with the phantoms clinging to its sides. Then the sun struggled through; for a moment the ghostly city was iridescent with a thousand colors. The sun conquered, the mist shimmered into sunlight, and once more the hills were gray and bare.

Rezánov laughed, but his eyes glowed down upon her. "I am not sure it was there," he said. "I have an idea your imagination and touch acted as a sort of enchanter's wand. The others evidently saw nothing."

"The others saw only fog and shivered. But it was there, señor! We have had a vision. A Russian city! Ay, yi!"

But Rezánov had forgotten the city. Her reboso had fallen and a strand of her hair blew across his face. His lips caught it and his eyes burned. They rounded a headland and the world looked green and young.

"Coneha!" he whispered.

Her eyes flashed and melted, she lifted her chin; then burst into a merry ripple of laughter.

"Señor!" she said, "if you make love to me, I shall have to compare you with many others, and I might not like the Russian fashion. You are much better as you are—very grand seigneur, iron-handed and absolute, haughty and arrogant, but the most charming person in the world, with ends to gain, even from such humble folk as a handful of stranded Californians. But to sigh! to languish with the eye! to sing at the grating! I fear that the lightest headed of the caballeros you despise could transcend you in all."

"Very likely! I have not the least intention of sigh-

ing or languishing or singing at gratings. But if we were alone I certainly should kiss you."

But her eyes did not melt again at the vision. She flushed hotly with annoyance. "I am a child to you! Were it not that I have read a few books, you would find me but a year older than Ana Paula. Well! Regard me as a child and do not attempt to flirt with me again. Shall it be so?"

"As you wish!" Rezánov looked at her half in resentment, half wistfully, then shrugged his shoulders, and called to Davidov to steer for the anchorage. She was quite right; and on the whole he was grateful to her.

XIII

"CONCHA," said Sturgis abruptly, "will you marry me?"

Concha, who was sitting in the shade of the rose vines on the corridor making a dress for Gertrudis Rudisinda, ran the needle into her finger.

"Madre de Dios!" she cried angrily. "Who would have expected such foolish words from you? and now I have pricked my finger and stained the little frock. It will have to be washed before worn, and is never so pretty after."

"I am sorry," said Sturgis humbly. "But it seems to me that if a man wishes to marry a maid he should ask her in a straightforward manner, with no preliminary of sighs and hints and serenades—and all sorts of insincere stage play."

"He should at least address her parents first."

"True. I was wholly the American for the moment. May I speak to Don José and Doña Ignacia, Concha?"

"How can I prevent? No, I will not coquet with you, William. But I am angry that you have thought of such nonsense. Such friends we were! We have talked and read together by the hour, and my parents have thought no more of it than it had been Santiago. There! You have a new book in your pocket. Why did you not read it to me instead of making love? Let me see it."

"I brought it to read later if you wished, but I came to ask you to marry me and to receive your answer. I never expected to ask you—but—lately—things have changed—life seems, somehow, more real. The thought of losing you has suddenly become terrible."

"You have been drinking Russian tea," said Concha,

stitching quietly but flashing him a glance of amusement, not wholly without malice.

"It is true," he replied. "I suppose I never really believed you would marry Raimundo or Ignacio or any of the caballeros. They think and talk of nothing but horse-racing, gambling, cock-fighting, love and cigaritos. I thought of you always here, where at least I could look at you or read with you. But one must admit that this Russian is no ordinary man. I hate him, yet like him more than any I have ever met. Last night I stayed to punch with him, and we talked English for an hour. That is to say, he did; I could have listened to him till morning. Langsdorff says that he has the greatest possible command of his native tongue, but he speaks English well enough. I wish I could despise him, but I do not believe I even hate him."

"Well?" demanded Concha. She kept her eyes on her work (and the delight that rose in her breast from her voice).

"Well?"

"Why should you hate him?"

"Do you ask me that, Concha, when he makes a fence of himself about you, and his fine eyes—practised is nearer the mark—look at no one else?"

"But why should that cause you jealousy? He is a man of the world, accustomed to make himself agreeable, and I am the daughter of the Commandante."

"He is more in love with you than he knows."

"Do you think so, Weeliam?" Still her voice was innocent and even, although the color rose above the inner commotion. "But even so, what of it? Have not many loved me? Am I to be won by the first stranger?"

"I do not know."

The tumult in Concha turned to wrath, and she lifted flashing eyes to his moody face. "Do you presume to say you are jealous because you think I love him—a stranger I have known but a week—who looks upon me as a child—who has never—never thought——" But her dignity, flying to the rescue, assumed control. Her

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upper lip curled, her body stiffened for a moment, and she went on with her stitching. "You deserve I should rap your silly little skull with my thimble. You are no better than Ignacio and Fernando. Such scenes as I have had with them! They wanted to fight the Russian! How he would laugh at them! I have threatened they shall both be sent to San Diego if there is any more nonsense." Then curiosity overcame her. "You never had the least, least reason to think I would marry you, and now, according to your own words, you think you have less. Then why, pray, did you address me?"

"Because I am a man, I suppose. I could not sit tamely down and see you go."

She looked at him with a slight access of interest. A man? Perhaps he was, after all. And his well-bred bony face looked very determined, albeit the eyes were wistful. Suddenly she felt sorry for him; and she had never experienced a pang of sympathy for a suitor before. She leaned forward and patted his hand.

"I cannot marry you, dear Weeliam," she said, and never had he seen her so sweet and adorable, although he noted with a pang that her mouth was already drawn with a firmer line. "But what matter? I shall never marry at all. For many years—forty, fifty perhaps—I shall sit here on the veranda, and you shall read to me."

And then she shivered violently. But she set her mouth until it was almost straight, and picked up the little dress. "Not that, perhaps," she said quietly in a moment. "I sometimes think I should like to be a nun, that, after all, it is my vocation. Not a cloistered one, for that is but a selfish life. But to teach, to do good, to forget myself. There are no convents in California, but I could join the Third Order of the Franciscans, and wear the gray habit, and be set aside by the world as one that only lived to make it a little better. To forget oneself! That, after all, may be the secret of happiness. I envy none of my friends that are married. They have the dear children, it is true. But the children grow

up and go away, and then one is fat and eats many dulces and the siesta grows longer and longer and the face very brown. That is life in California. I should prefer to work and pray, and"—with a flash of insight that made her drop her work again and stare through the rose-vines—"to dream always of some beautiful thing that youth promised but never gave, and that given might have ended in dull routine and a brain so choked with little things that memory too held nothing else."

"But, Concha," cried Sturgis eagerly, "I could give you far better than that. I could take you away from here—to Boston, to Europe. You should see—live your life—in the great cities you have dreamed of—that you hardly believe in—were made to enjoy. I have told you of the theater, the opera—you should go to the finest in the world. You should wear the most beautiful gowns and jewels, go to courts, see the great works of art—I am not trying to bribe you," he stammered, flushing miserably. "God forbid that I should stoop to anything as mean as that. But it all rushed upon me suddenly that I could give you so much that you were made for, with this worthless money of mine. And what happiness to be in Europe with you—what—what——"

His voice trembled and broke, and he dared not look at her. Again she stared through the vines. A splendid and thrilling panorama rose beyond them, her bosom heaved, her lips parted. She saw herself in it, and not alone. And not, alas, with the honest youth whose words had inspired it. In a moment she shook her head and turned her kind eyes on the flushed averted face of her suitor.

"I shall never see Europe," she said gently, "and I shall never marry."

"Not if this Russian asks you?" cried Sturgis, in his jealous misery.

But Concha's anger did not rise again. "He has no intention of asking a little California girl to share the honors of one of the most brilliant careers in Europe," she said calmly. "Set your mind at rest. He has paid

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me no more attention than is due my position as the daughter of the Commandante, and perhaps of La Favorita. If I flirt a little and he flirts in response, that is nothing. Is he not then a man? But he will forget me in a month. The world, his world, is full of pretty girls."

"A week ago you would not have said that," said Sturgis shrewdly. "There has been nothing in your life to make you so humble."

"I cannot explain, but he seems to have brought the great world with him. I know, I understand so many things that I had not dreamed of a week ago. A week! Madre de Dios!"

And Sturgis, who after all was a gallant gentleman, made no comment.

XIV

GOVERNOR ARRILLAGA, Commandante Argüello, and Chamberlain Rezánov sat in the familiar sala at the Presidio content in body after a culinary achievement worthy of Padre Landaeta, but perturbed and alert of mind. Upon the arrival of the two Californian dignitaries in the morning, Rezánov had sent Davidov and Langsdorff on shore to assure them of his gratitude and deep appreciation of the hospitality shown himself, his officers and men. The Governor had replied with a fulsome apology for not repairing at once to the *Juno* to welcome his distinguished guest in person, and, pleading his age and the one hundred and seventy-five English miles he had ridden from Monterey, begged him as a younger man to waive informality, and dine at the house of the Commandante that very day. Rezánov had complied as a matter of course, and now he was alone with the men who held his fate in their hands. The dark worn rugged face of Don José, who had been skillfully prepared by his oldest daughter to think well of the Russian, beamed with good-will and interest, in spite of lingering doubts; but the lank wiry figure of the Governor, who was as dignified as only a blond Spaniard can be, was fairly rigid with the severe formality he reserved for occasions of ceremony—being a gentleman who loved good company and cheer—and his sharp gray eyes were almost shut in the effort to penetrate the designs of this deputy, this symbol, this index in cipher, of a dreaded race. Rezánov smoked calmly, made himself comfortable on the slippery horse-hair chair, though with no loss of dignity, and beat about the bush with the others until the Governor betrayed himself at last by a chance remark:

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"What you say of the neighborly instincts of the Russian colonists for the Spanish on this coast interests me deeply, Excellency, but if Russia is at war with Spain——"

"Russia is not at war with Spain," said Rezánov, with a flash of amusement in his half-closed eyes. "Napoleon Bonaparte is encamped about halfway between the two countries. They could not get at each other if they wished. While that man is at large, Europe will be at war with him, no two nations with each other."

"Ah!" exclaimed Arrillaga. "That is a manner of reasoning that had not occurred to me."

The Commandante had spat at the mention of the usurper's name and muttered "Chinchosa!" and Rezánov, recalling his first conversation with Concha, looked into the honest eyes of the monarchist with a direct and hearty sympathy.

"No better epithet for him," he said. "And the sooner Europe combines to get rid of him the better. But until it does, count upon a common grievance to unite your country and mine."

"Good!" muttered the Governor. "Good! I am glad that nightmare has lifted its bat's wings from our poor California. Captain O'Cain's raid two years ago made me apprehensive, for he took away some eleven hundred of our otter skins and his hunters were Aleutians—subjects of the Tsar. A negro that deserted gave the information that they were furnished the Bostonian by the chief manager of your Company—Baránhov—whose reputation we know well enough!—for the deliberate purpose of raiding our coast."

Rezánov shrugged his shoulders and replied indifferently: "I will ask Baránhov when I return to Sitka, and write you the particulars. It is more likely that the Aleutians were deserters. This O'Cain would not be the first shrewd Bostonian to tempt them, for they are admirable hunters and ready for any change. They make a greater demand upon the Company for variety of diet than we are always prepared to meet, so many

are the difficulties of transportation across Siberia. When, therefore, the time arrived that I could continue my voyage, I determined to come here and see if some arrangement could not be made for a bi-yearly exchange of commodities. We need farinaceous stuffs of every sort. I will not pay so poor a compliment to your knowledge of the northern settlements as to enlarge upon the advantages California would reap from such a treaty."

The Governor, who had permitted himself to touch the back of his chair after the dispersal of the war cloud, stiffened again. "Ah!" he said. "Ah!" He looked significantly at the Commandante, who nodded. "You come on a semi-official mission, after all, then?"

"It is entirely my own idea," said Rezánov carelessly. "The young Tsar is too much occupied with Bonaparte to give more than a passing thought to his colonies. But I have a free hand. Can I arrange the preliminaries of a treaty, I have only to return to St. Petersburg to receive his signature and highest approval. It would be a great feather in my cap, I can assure your excellencies," he added, with a quick human glance and a sudden curve of his somewhat cynical mouth.

"Um!" said the Governor. "Um!"

But Argüello's stern face had further relaxed. After all, he was but eleven years older than the Russian, and, although early struggles and heavy responsibilities and many disappointments had deprived life of much of its early savor, what was left of youth in him responded to the ambition he divined in this interesting stranger. Moreover, the idea of a friendly bond with another race on the lonely coast of the Pacific appealed to him irresistibly. He turned eagerly to the Governor.

"It is a fine idea, Excellency. We need much that they have, and it pleases me to think we should be able to supply the wants of others. Fancy anyone wanting aught of California, except hides, to be sure. I did not think our existence was known save to an occasional British or Boston skipper. It is true we are here only

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to Christianize savages, but even they have need of much that cannot be manufactured in this God-forsaken land. And we ourselves could be more comfortable—God in heaven, yes! It is well to think it over, Excellency. Who knows?—we might have a trip to the north once in a while. Life is more excellent with something to look forward to.”

“You should have a royal welcome. Baránhov is the most hospitable man in Russia, and I might have the happiness to be there myself. I see, by the way, that you have not engaged in shipbuilding. I need not say that we should supply the ships of commerce, with no diminution of your profits. We build at Okhotsk, Petropaulovski, Kadiak, and Sitka. Moreover, as the Bostonians visit us frequently, and as your laws prohibit you from trading with them, we would see that you always got such of their commodities as you needed. They come to us for furs, and generally bring much for which we have no use. Captain D’Wolf, from whom I bought the *Juno*, had a cargo I was forced to take over. I unloaded what was needed at Sitka, but as there was no boat going for some months to the other islands, I brought the rest with me, and you are welcome to it, if in exchange you will ballast the *Juno* with samples of your agricultural products; while the treaty is pending, I can experiment in our colonies and make sure which are the most adaptable to the market.”

“Um!” said the Governor. “Um!”

Rezánov did not remove his cool direct gaze from the snapping eyes opposite.

“I have not the least objection to making a trade that would fill my promusehleniki with joy; but that was by no means the first object of my voyage; which was partly inspired by a desire to see as much of this globe as a man may in one short life, partly to arrange a treaty that would be of incalculable benefit to both colonies and greatly redound to my own glory. I make no pretence of being disinterested. I look forward to a career of

ever increasing influence and power in St. Petersburg, and I wish to take back as many credits as possible."

"I understand, I understand!" The Governor rested his lame back once more. "Your ambition is the more laudable, Excellency, since you have achieved so much already. I am not one to balk the honest ambition of any man, particularly when he does me the honor to take me into his confidence. I like this suggested measure. I like it much. I believe it would redound to our mutual benefit and reputation. Is it not so, José?"

The Commandante nodded vigorously. "I am sure of it! I am sure of it! I like it—much."

"I will write at once to the viceroy of Mexico and ask that he lay the matter before his Cabinet and King. Without that high authority we can do nothing. But I see no reason to doubt the issue when we, who know the wants and needs of California, approve and desire. We are doomed to failure in this unwieldy land of worthless savages, but it is the business of the wretched servants of a glorious monarch to do the best they can."

Rezánov had an inspiration. "You might remind the viceroy that Spain and the United States of America have been on the verge of war for years and suggest the benefit of an alliance with Russia in the case of the new country taking advantage of the situation in Europe to extend its western boundaries—"

Arrillaga had bounced to his feet, his eyes injected and blazing. "Those damned Spaniards!" he shouted. "I distrusted them years ago. They have too much calculation in their bluntness. They cheated us, sold us short, traded under my very nose, stole our otters, until I ordered them never to drop an anchor in California waters again. If their ridiculous upstart government dares to cast its eyes on California we shall know how to meet them—the sooner they march on Mexico and lose their conceit the better. How they do brag! Faugh! It is sickening. I shall remember all you say, Excellency, and thank you for the hint."

Rezánov rose, and the Commandante solemnly kissed

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him on either cheek. "Governor Arrillaga is my guest, Excellency," he said. "I beg that you will dine with us daily—unofficially—that you will regard California as your own kingdom, and come and go at your pleasure. And my daughter begs me to remind you and your young officers that there will be informal dancing every night."

"So far so good," thought Rezánov, as he mounted his horse to return to the *Juno*. "But what of my cargo? I fancy there will be more difficulty in that quarter."

XV

THE Chamberlain was in a towering bad humor. As he made his appearance at least two hours earlier than he was expected, he found the decks of the *Juno* covered with the skins of sea-dogs, foxes, and birds. He had heard Langsdorff go to his cabin later than usual the night before, and that his pet aversion was the cause of a fresh grievance, but hastened the eruption of his smoldering resentment toward life in general.

"What does this mean?" he roared to the sailor on watch. "Clear them off—overboard, every one of them. What are you staring at?"

The sailor, who was a "Bostonian," an inheritance with the ship, opened his mouth in favor of the unfortunate professor, but like his mates, he stood in much awe of a master whose indulgence demanded implicit obedience in return. Without further ado, he flung the skins into the sea.

Rezánov, to do him justice, would not have acted otherwise had he risen in the best of tempers. He had inflicted himself with the society of the learned doctor that he might always have a physician and surgeon at hand, as well as an interpreter where Latin was the one door of communication. He should pay him handsomely, make him a present in addition to the sum agreed upon, but he had not the least intention of giving up any of the *Juno's* precious space to the vagaries of a scientist, nor to submit to the pollution of her atmosphere. Langsdorff was his creature, and the sooner he realized the fact the better.

"Remember," he said to the sailor, "no more of this, or it will be the worse for you—What is this?" He laid down upon a pile of ducks, gulls, pelicans, and other

aquatic birds. Are these the cook's or the professor's?"

"The professor's, Excellency."

"Overboard." And the birds followed the skins.

Rezánov turned to confront the white and trembling Langsdorff. The naturalist was enfolded in a gorgeous Japanese dressing-gown, purple brocade embroidered with gold, that he had surreptitiously bought in the harbor of Nagasaki. To Rezánov it was like a red rag to a bull; but the professor was oblivious at the moment of the tactless garment. His eyes were glaring and the extended tip of his nose worked like a knife trying to leap from its sheath. But although he occasionally ventured upon a retort when goaded too far in conversation, he was able to curb his just indignation when the Chamberlain was in a bad temper. In that vague gray under winking stars in their last watch, Rezánov seemed to tower six feet above him.

"Excellency," he murmured.

"Well?"

"My—my specimens."

"Your what?"

"The cause of science is very dear to me, Excellency."

"So it is to me—in its proper place. Were those skins yours?" His voice became very suave. "I am sorry you should have fatigued yourself for nothing, but I am forced to remind you that this is not an expedition undertaken for the promotion of natural history. I am not violating my part in the contract, I believe. Upon our arrival at Sitka you are at liberty to remain as my guest and make use of the first boat that sails for this colony; but for the present I beg that you will limit yourself to the requirements of your position on my staff."

He turned his back and ordered a canoe to be lowered. Since the arrival of the Governor and Commandante, now three days ago, all restrictions on his liberty had been removed, and the phrases of hospitality were a trifle less meaningless. He had been asked to give his word to keep away from the fortifications, and as he

knew quite as much of the military resources of the country as he desired, he had merely suppressed a smile and given his promise.

This morning he wanted nothing but a walk. He had slept badly, the blood was in his head, his nerves were on edge. He went rapidly along the beach and over the steep hills that led to the northeastern point of the peninsula. But he had taken the walk before and did not turn his head to look at the great natural amphitheater formed by the inner slopes of those barren heights, so uninteresting of outline from the water. Once when Luis had left him to go down with an order to the Battery of Yerba Buena, he had examined it critically and concluded that never had there been so fine a site for a great city. Nor a more beautiful, with the broken line of the San Bruno mountains in the distance and a glimpse of the Mission valley just beyond this vast colosseum, whose steep imposing lines were destined by nature to be set with palaces and bazaars, minarets and towers and churches, with a thousand gilded domes and slender crosses glittering in the crystal air and sun-flood. If not another Moscow, then an Irkutsk in his day, at least.

But he did not give the chosen site of his city a glance to-day, although in this gray air before dawn when mystery and imagination most closely embrace, he might at another time have forgotten himself in one of those fits of dreaming that slipped him out of touch with realities, and sometimes precipitated action in a manner highly gratifying to his enemies.

But much as he loved Russia, there were times when he loved his own way more, and since the arrival of Governor Arrillaga he was beginning to feel as he had felt in the harbor of Nagasaki. Not a word since that first interview had been said of his cargo; nor even of the treaty, although nothing could have been more natural than the discussion of details. Whenever he had delicately broached either subject, he had been met with a polite indifference, that had little in common with the

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cordiality otherwise shown him. He foresaw that he might be obliged to reveal the more pressing object of his visit without further diplomacy, and the thought irritated him beyond endurance.

Whether Concha were giving him her promised aid he had no means of discovering, and herein lay another cause of his general vexation. He had dined every day at the Commandante's, danced there every night. Concha had been vivacious, friendly—impersonal. Not so much as a coquettish lift of the brow betrayed that the distinguished stranger eclipsed the caballeros for the moment; nor a whispered word that he retained the friendship she had offered him on the day of their meeting. He had not, indeed, had a word with her alone. But his interest and admiration had deepened. It was evident that her father and the Governor adored her, would deny her little. Her attitude to them was alternately that of the petted child and the chosen companion. As her mother was indisposed, she occupied her place at the table, presiding with dignity, guiding the conversation, revealing the rare gift of making everyone appear at his best. In the evening she had sometimes danced alone for a few moments, but more often with her Russian guests, and readily learning the English country dances they were anxious to teach. Bezánov would have found the gay informality of these evenings delightful had his mind been at ease about his Sitkans, and Concha a trifle more personal. He had begun by suspecting that she was maneuvering for his scalp, but he was forced to acquit her; for not only did she show no provocative favor to another, but she seemed to have gained in dignity and pride since his arrival, actually to have kissed her hand in farewell to the childhood he had been so slow in divining; grown—he felt rather than analyzed—above the pettiness of coquetry. Once more she had stirred the dormant ideals of his early manhood; there were moments when she floated before his inner vision as the embodiment of the world's beauty. Nor ever had there been a woman born more elaborately

equipped for the position of a public man's mate; nor more ingenerate, perhaps, with the power to turn earth into heaven.

He had wondered humorously if he were fallen in love, but, although he retained little faith in the activities of the heart after youth, he was beginning seriously to consider the expedience of marrying Concha Argüello. He had not intended to marry again, and it was this old and passionate love of personal freedom that alone held him back, for nothing would be so advantageous to the Russian colonies in their present crisis as a strong individual alliance with California. Concha Argüello was the famous daughter of its first subject, and with the powerful friends she would bring to her husband, the consummation of ends dearer to his heart than aught on earth would be a matter of months instead of years. And he thrilled with pride as he thought of Concha in St. Petersburg. Two years of court life and she would be one of the greatest ladies in Europe. That he could win her he believed, and without undue vanity. He had much to offer: an ambitious clever girl conscious of her superiority to the men of this province of Spain, and chafing at the prospect of a lifetime in a bountiful desert. His only hesitation lay in his own doubt if she were worth the loss of his freedom, and all that word involved to a man of his position and adventurous spirit.

He shrugged his shoulders at this argument; he had walked off some of his ill-humor, and reverted willingly to a theme that alone had given him satisfaction during the past few days. At the same time he made a motion as if flinging aside an old burden.

"It is time for such nonsense to end," he thought contemptuously. "And in truth these three years have wrought such changes in me I doubt I should have patience for an hour of the old trifling. My greatest need from this time on, I fancy, is work. I could never be idle a month again. And when a man is in love with work—and power—and has passed forty—does he want a constant companion? That is the point. At my time

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of life power exercises the most irresistible and lasting of all fascinations. A man that wins it has little left for a woman."

He had reached the summit of the rocky outpost, the highest of the hills where the peninsula turned abruptly to the south, and, scrupulously refraining from a downward glance at the Battery of Yerba Buena, stood looking out over the bay to the eastern mountains: dark, almost formless, wrapped in the intense and menacing mystery of that last hour before dawn.

"Señor!" called a low cautious voice.

Rezánov stepped hastily back from the point of the bluff and glanced about in wonder, his pulses suddenly astir. But he could see no one.

"Señor!"

This time the direction was unmistakable, and he went to the edge of the plateau facing the south and looked over. Halfway down a shallow and almost perpendicular gully, he saw a girl forcing a mustang up the harsh loose path. The girl's white and oval face looked from the folds of a black reboso like the moon emerging from clouds, and its young beauty was out of place in that wild and forbidding setting. She reined in her horse as she caught his eye and beckoned superfluously; then guided her mustang to a little ledge where he could plant his feet firmly, permitting her to reassume her usual pride of carriage and averting the danger of a sudden scramble or need of assistance.

As Rezánov reached her side, she gave him a grave and friendly smile, but no opportunity to kiss her hand.

"I have followed your excellency," she said. "I saw you leave the *Juno*, and as I am often up at this hour, and as no one else ever is, my father ignores the fact that I sometimes ride alone. I have never come as far as this before, but there is something I wish to say to you, and there is no opportunity at home. I asked Santiago to find me one last night, but he was in a bad temper and would not. Men! However—I suppose you have heard nothing of the cargo?"

"I have not," said Rezánov grimly, although acutely sensible that the subject suited neither his mood nor the hour.

"But the Governor has! Madre de Dios! all the women of the Presidio and the Mission have pestered him. They are sick with jealousy at the shawls you gave us that day—those that did not go to the ship. How clever of your excellency to give us just enough for ourselves and nothing for our friends! And those that went want more and more. They have called upon him—one, two, four, and alone. They have wept and scolded and pleaded. I did not know until yesterday that your commissary had also shown the things to the priests from San José—Father José Uriá and Father Pedro de la Cueva. They and the priests of San Francisco have argued with the Governor not once but three times. Dios! how his poor excellency swore yesterday. He threatened to return at once to Monterey. I flew into a great rage and threatened in turn to follow with all the other girls and all the priests—vowed he should not have one moment of peace until that cargo was ours."

"Well?" asked Rezánov sharply, in spite of his amusement.

Concha shook her head. "When he does not swear, he answers only: 'Buy if you have the money. I have never broken a law of Spain, and I shall not begin in my old age.' He knows well that we have no money to send out of New Spain; but I have conceived a plan, señor. It is for you, not for me, to suggest it. You will never betray that I have been your friend, Excellency?"

"I will swear it if you wish," said Rezánov frigidly.

"Pardon, señor. If I thought you could I should not be here. One often says such things. This is the plan: You shall suggest that we buy your wares, and that you buy again with our money. The dear Governor only wants to save his conscience an ache, for we have driven him nearly distracted. I am sure he will consent, for you will know how to put it to him very diplomatically."

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"But if he refused to understand, or his conscience remained obdurate? I should then have neither cargo nor ballast."

"He would never trick a guest, nor would he let the money go out of the country. And he knows well how much we need your cargo and longs to be able to state in his reports that he sold you a hold full of breadstuffs. Moreover, I think the time has come to tell him of the distress at Sitka. He is very soft-hearted and is now in that distracted state of mind when only one more argument is required. I hope I have given you good advice, Excellency. It is the best I can think of. I have given it much thought, and the terrible state of those miserable creatures has kept me awake many nights. I must return now. Will your excellency kindly remain here until I am well on my way?—and then return by the beach? I shall go as I came, through the valley. Neither of us can be seen from the Battery."

"I will obey all your instructions," said Rezánov. But he did not move, nor could the mustang. Coneha smiled and pointed to the other side of the cleft, which was about as wide as a narrow street.

"Pardon, señor, I cannot turn."

For a moment Rezánov stared at her, through her. Then his heavy eyes opened and flashed. It seemed to him that for the first time he saw how beautiful, how desirable she was, set in that gray volcanic rock with the heavens gray above her, and the stars fading out. It was not the bower he would have imagined for the wooing of a mate, but neither moonlight nor the romantic glades of La Bellissima could have awakened in him a passion so sudden and final. Her face between the black folds turned whiter and she shrank back against the jagged wall; and when his eyes flashed again with a wild eager hope she involuntarily crossed herself. He threw himself against the horse and snatched her down and kissed her as he had kissed no woman yet, recognizing her once for all.

When he finally held her at arm's length for a moment he laughed confusedly.

"The Russian bear is no longer a figure of speech," he said. "Forgive me. I forgot that you are as tender as you are strong."

Her hands were tightly elased against her breast, and the breath was short in her throat, but she made no protest. Her eyes were radiant, her mouth was the only color in that gray dawn. In a moment she too laughed.

"Dios de mi alma! What will they say? A heretic! If Tamalpais fell into the sea it would not make so great a sensation in this California of ours where civilized man exists but to drive heathen souls into the one true church."

"Will it matter to you? Are you strong enough? It will be only a question of time to win them over, if you are."

She nodded emphatically. "I was born with strength. Now—Dios!—now I can be stronger than the King of Spain himself, than the Governor, my parents and all the priests—— You would not become a Catholic?" she asked abruptly.

He shook his head, although he still smiled at her. "Not even for you."

"No," she said thoughtfully. "I will confess—what matters it?—I often dreamed that this would come just because I believed it would not. But why should one control the imagination when it alone can give us happiness for a little while? I gave it rein, for I thought that one-half of all my life was to be passed in that unreal but by no means niggardly world. And I thought of everything. To change your religion would mean the ruin of your career; moreover, it is not a possibility of your character. Were it I think I should not love you so much. Nor could I bear to think of any change in you. Only it will be harder—longer." Then she stretched out her hand, and closed and opened it slowly. The most obtuse could not have failed to read the old simile of

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the steel in the velvet. "I shall win because it is my nature—and my power—to hold what I grasp."

"But if they persistently refuse——"

"Dios!" she interrupted him. "Do you think that your love is greater than mine? I was born with a thousand years of love in me and had you not come I should have gone alone with my dreams to the grave. I am all women in one, not merely Coneha Argüello, a girl of sixteen." She clasped her hands high above her head, lifting her eyes to the ashen vault so soon to yield to the gay brush of dawn.

"Before all that great mystery," she said solemnly, "I give myself to you for ever, how much or how little that may mean here on earth. For ever."

XVI

THE Commandante of the San Francisco Company sat opposite Rezánov with his mouth open, the lines of his strong face elongated and relaxed. It was the hour of siesta, and they were alone in the sala.

"Mother of God!" he exclaimed. "Mother of God! Are you mad, Excellency?"

"No man was ever saner," said Rezánov cheerfully. "What better proof would you have than this final testimony to Doña Coneha's perfections?"

"But it cannot be! Surely, Excellency, you realize that? The priests! Ay yi! Ay yi!"

"I think I understand the priests. Persuade the Governor to buy my cargo and they will look upon me as an *amicus humani generis* to whom common rules do not apply. And I have won their sincere friendship."

"You have won mine, señor. But, though I say it, there is no more devout Catholic in the Californias than José Argüello. Do you know what they call me? *El santo*. God knows I am not, but it is not for want of the wish. Did I give my daughter to a heretic, not only should I become an outcast, a pariah, but I should imperil my everlasting soul and that of my best beloved child. It is impossible, Excellency—unless, indeed, you embrace our faith."

"That is so impossible that the subject is not worth the waste of a moment. But surely, Commandante, in your excitement at this perfectly natural issue you are misrepresenting yourself. Do not believe, devout Catholic as you are, that your soul is steeped in fanaticism. You are known far and wide as the first and most intelligent of his Catholic Majesty's subjects in New Spain.

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When you have my word of honor that your daughter's faith shall never be disturbed, it is impossible you should believe that marriage with me would ruin her chances of happiness in the next world. But I doubt if your soul and conscience will have the peace you desire if you ruin her happiness in this. What pleasure do you find in the thought of an old age companioned by a heart-broken daughter?"

Don José turned pale and hitched his chair. "Other maids have been balked when young, and have forgotten. Concha is but sixteen——"

"She is also unique. She will marry me or no one. Of that I am as certain as that she is the woman of women for me."

"How can you be so certain?" asked the Commandante sharply. "Surely you have had little talk alone with her?"

"The heart has a language of its own. Recall your own youth, señor."

"It is true," said Don José, with a heavy sigh, as he had a fleeting vision of Doña Ignacia, slim and lovely, at the grating, with a rose in her hair. "But this tremendous passion of the heart—it passes, señor, it passes. We love the good wife, but we sometimes realize that we could have loved another good wife as well."

"That is a bit of philosophy I should have uttered myself, Commandante—yesterday. But there are women and women, and your daughter is one of the chosen few who take from the years what the years take from others. I am not rushing into matrimony for the sake of a pair of black eyes and a fine figure. I have outlived the possibility of making a fool of myself if I would. Before I realized how deeply I loved your daughter I had deliberately chosen her out of all the women I have known, as my friend and companion for the various and difficult ways of life which I shall be called upon to follow. Your daughter will have a high place at the Russian Court, and she will occupy it as naturally as if I had found her in Madrid and you in

the great position to which your attainments and services entitle you."

Don José, despite his consternation, titillated agreeably. He privately thought no one in New Spain good enough for his daughter, and his weather-beaten self was not yet insensible to the rare visitation of winged darts tipped with honey. But the situation was one of the most embarrassing he had ever been called upon to face, and perhaps for the first time in his direct and honest life his resolution was shaken in a crisis.

"Believe me, your excellency, I appreciate the honor you have done my house, and I will add with all my heart that never have I liked any man more. But—Mother of God! Mother of God!"

Rezánov took out his cigarette case, a superb bit of Russian enamel, graven with the Imperial arms, and a parting gift from Alexander. He passed it to his host, who had developed a preference for Russian cigarettes.

"There are other things to consider besides the happiness of your daughter and myself," he remarked. "This alliance would mean the consolidation of Spanish and Russian interests on the Pacific coast. It would mean the protection of California in the almost certain event of 'American' aggression. And I hear that a courier brought word again yesterday that the Russian and the Spanish fleets had sailed for these waters. I do not believe a word of it; but should it be true, I would remind you of two things: that I have the powers of the Tsar himself in this part of the world, and that the Russian fleet is likely to arrive first."

Again the Commandante moved uneasily. The news from Mexico had kept himself and the Governor awake the better part of the night. He fully appreciated the importance of this powerful Russian's friendship. Nothing would bind and commit him like taking a Californian to wife. If only he had fallen in love with Carolina Ximéno or Delfina Rivera! Don José had an uneasy suspicion that his scruples as a Catholic might have gone down before his sense of duty to this poor

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California. But a heretic in his own family! He was justly renowned for his piety. Aside from the wrath of the church, the mere thought of one of his offspring in matrimonial community beyond its pale made him sick with repugnance. And yet—California! And he would have selected Rezánov for his daughter out of all men had he been of their faith. And he was deeply conscious of the honor that had descended, however unfruitfully, upon his house. Madre de Dios! How would it end? Suddenly he felt himself inspired. In blissful ignorance of her subtle feminine rule, he reminded himself that Concha's mind was the child of his own. When she saw his embarrassment, filial duty and woman's wit would extricate them both with grace and avert the enmity of the Russian even though the latter's more personal interest in California must die in his disappointment. He would make her feel the weight of the stern paternal hand, and then indicate the part she had to play.

He rang a bell and directed the servant to summon his daughter, drew himself up to his full height, and set his rugged face in hard lines. As Concha entered he looked the Commandante, the stern disciplinarian, every inch of him.

There was no trace of the siesta in Concha's cheeks. They were very white, but her eyes were steady and her mouth indomitable as she walked down the sala and took the chair Rezánov placed for her. Except for her Castilian fairness, she looked very like the martinet sitting on the other side of the table. The Commandante regarded her silently with brows drawn together. Dimly, he felt apprehension, wondered, in a flash of insight, if girls held fast to the parental recipe, or recombined with tongue in cheek. The bare possibility of resistance almost threw him into panic, but he controlled his features until the effort injected his eyes and drew in his nostrils. Concha regarded him calmly, although her heart beat unevenly, for she dreaded the long strain she foresaw.

"My daughter," said Don José finally, his tones harsh with repressed misgiving, "do you suspect why I have sent for you?"

"I think that his excellency wishes to marry me," replied Concha; and the Commandante was so staggered by the calm assurance of her tone and manner that his pent-up emotion exploded.

"Dios!" he roared. "What right have you to know when a man wishes to marry you? What manner of Spanish girl is this? Truly has his excellency said that you are not as other women. The place for you is your room, with bread and water for a week. Sixteen!"

"Ignacio was born when my mother was sixteen," said Concha coolly.

"What of that? She married whom and when she was told to marry."

"I have heard that you serenaded nightly beneath her grating——"

"So did others."

"I have heard that when of all her suitors her father chose one more highly born, a gentleman of the Viceroy's court, she pined until they gave their consent to her marriage with you, lest she die."

"But I was a Catholic! The prejudice against my birth was an unworthy one. I had distinguished myself. And she had the support of the priests."

"It is my misfortune that M. de Rezánov is not a Catholic, but it will make no difference. I shall not fall ill, for I am like you, not like my dear mother—and the education you have given me is very different from hers. But I shall marry his excellency or no one, and whether I marry him or live alone with the thought of him until the end of my mortal days, I do not believe that my soul will be imperilled in the least."

"You do not!" shouted the irate Spaniard. "How dare you presume to decide such a question for yourself? What does a woman know of love until she marries? It is nothing but a sickening of the imagination before; and if the man goes, the doctor soon comes."

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"You may not have intended—but you have taught me to think for myself. And I have seen others besides M. de Rezánov—the flower of California and more than one fine gentleman from Mexico. I will have none of them. I will marry the man of my choice or no one. It may be that I know naught of love. If you wish, you may think that my choice of a husband is determined by ambition, that I am dazzled with the thought of court life in St. Petersburg, of being the consort of a great and wealthy noble. It matters not. Love or ambition, I shall marry this Russian or I shall never marry at all."

"Mother of God! Mother of God!" Don José's face was purple. The veins swelled in his neck. He was the more wroth because he recognized his own daughter and his own handiwork, because he saw that he confronted a Toledo blade, not a woman's brittle will. Concha regarded him calmly.

"If you refuse your consent, you will lose me in another way. I may not be able to marry as I wish, but I will have no worldly alternative. I shall join the Third Order of the Franciscans, and enter a convent as soon as one is built in California. To that you cannot withhold your consent, or they no longer would call you *El santo*."

Don José leaped from his chair. "Go to your room!" he thundered. "And do not dare to leave it without my permission——"

But Concha sprang forward and flung herself upon his neck. She rubbed her warm elastic cheek against his own in the manner he loved, and softened her voice. "Papacito mio, papacito mio," she pleaded. "Thou wilt not refuse thy Concha the only thing she has ever begged of thee. And I beg! I beg! Papa mio! I love him! I love him!" And she broke into wild weeping and kissed him frantically, while Rezánov, who had followed her plan of attack and resistance in silent admiration, did not know whether he should himself be moved to tears or further admire.

Don José pushed her from him with a heavy sob and hastily left the room, oblivious in the confusion of his faculties of the boon he conferred on the lovers. Concha dried her eyes, but her face was deathly pale. It had not been all acting, by any means, and she was beginning to feel the tyranny of sleepless nights; and the joy and wonder of the morning had left her with but a remnant of endurance for the domestic battleground.

"Go," she whispered, as he took her in his arms "Return for the dance to-night as if nothing had happened—— I forgot, there is to be a bull-bear fight in the square. So much the better, for it is in your honor, and you could not well remain away. There is much trouble to come, but in the end we shall win."

XVII

THE muscles in Doña Ignacia's cheeks fell an inch as she listened, dumfounded, to the tale her husband poured out. To her simple aristocratic soul Rezánov had loomed too great a personage to dream of mating with a Californian; and as her sharp maternal instinct had recognized his personal probity, even his gallantries had seemed to her no more consequent than the more catholic trifling of his officers.

"Holy Mary!" she whimpered, when her voice came back. "Holy Mary! A heretic! And he would take our Concha from us! And she would go! To St. Petersburg! Ten thousand miles! To the priests with her—now—this very day!"

Concha had thrown herself on her bed in belated hope of siesta, when Malia (Rosa had been sent to the house of Don Mario Sal in the valley) entered with the message that she was to accompany her parents to the mission at once. She rose sullenly, but in the manifold essentials of a girl's life she had always yielded the implicit obedience exacted by the Californian parent. In a few moments she was riding out of the Presidio beside her father. Doña Ignacia jolted behind in her *carreta*, a low and clumsy vehicle, on solid wheels and springless, drawn by oxen, and driven by a stable-boy on a mustang. The journey was made in complete silence save for the maledictions addressed to the oxen by the boy, and an occasional "Ay yi!" "Madre de Dios!" "Sainted Mary, but the sun bores a hole in the head," from Doña Ignacia, whose increasing discomfort banished wrath and apprehension for the hour.

Don José did not even look at his daughter, but his face was ten years older than in the morning. He had

begun dimly to appreciate that she was suffering, and in a manner vastly different from the passionate resentment he had seen her display when the contents of a box from Mexico disappointed her, or she was denied a visit to Monterey. That his best-beloved child should suffer tore his own heart, but he merely cursed Rezánov and resolved to do his best to persuade the Governor to yield to his other demands, that California might be rid of him the sooner.

Father Abella was walking down the long outer corridor of the Mission reading his breviary, and praying he might not be diverted from righteousness by the comforting touch of his new habit, when he looked up and saw the party from the presidio floundering over the last of the sand hills. He shuffled off to order refreshments, and returned in time to disburden the carreta of Doña Ignacia—no mean feat—volubly delighted in the visit and the gossip it portended. But as he offered his arm to lead her into the sala, she pushed him aside and pointed to Concha, who had sprung to the ground unassisted.

"She has come to confess, padre!" she exclaimed, her mind, under the deep tiled roof of the corridor, readjusting itself to tragedy. "I beg that you will take her at once. Padre Landaeta can give us chocolate and we will tell our terrible news to him and receive advice and consolation."

Father Abella, not without a glimmering of the truth, for better than anyone he understood the girl he had confessed many times, besides himself having succumbed to the Russian, led the way to the confessional in some perturbation of spirit. He walked slowly, hoping that the long cool church, its narrow high windows admitting so scant a meed of sunlight that no one of its worshippers had ever read the painted legends on the walls, and even the stations were but deeper bits of shade, would attune her mind to holy things, and throw a mantle of unreality over those of the world.

He covered his face with his hand as she told her

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story. This she did in a few words, disjointed, for she was both tired and seething. For a few moments afterward there was a silence; the good priest was increasingly disturbed and by no means certain of his course. He was astonished to feel a tug at his sleeve. Before he could reprove this impenitent child for audacity she had raised herself that she might approach her lips more closely to his ear.

"Mi padre!" she whispered hoarsely, "you will take my part! You will not condemn me to a life of misery! I am too proud to speak openly to others—but I love this man more than my soul—more than my immortal soul. Do you hear? I am in danger of mortal sin. Perhaps I am already in that state. You cannot save me if he goes. I will not pray. I will not come to the church. I will be an outcast. If I marry him, I will be a good Catholic to the end of my days. If I marry him, I can think of other things besides—of my church, my father, my mother, my sisters, brothers. If he goes, I shall pass my life thinking of nothing but him, and if it be true that heretics are doomed to hell, then I will live so that I may go to hell with him."

In spite of his horror the priest was thrilled by the intense passion in the voice so close to his ear. Moreover, he knew women well, this good padre, for even in California they differed little from those that played ball with the world. So he dismissed the horror and spoke soothingly.

"What you have said would be mortal sin, my daughter, were it not that you are laboring under strong and natural excitement; and I shall absolve you freely when you have done the penance I must impose. You have always been such a good child that I am able to forgive you even in this terrible moment. But, my daughter, surely you know that this marriage can never take place——"

"It shall! It shall!"

"Control yourself, my daughter. You cannot bring this man into the true church. His character is long

since formed and cast—it is iron. Even love will not melt it. Were he younger——”

“I should hate him. All young men are insufferable to me—always have been. I have found my mate, and have him I will if I have to hide in the hold of his ship. Ah, padre mio I know not what I say. But you will help me. Only you can. My father thinks you as wise as a saint. And there are other things—my head turns round—I can hardly think—but you dare not lose the friendship of this Russian. And my marriage to him would be as much for the good of the Missions as for California herself. If you champion our cause, point out that not only would it be a great match for me, but that many ends would be lost by ruining my life. The Governor will find himself in a position to grant your prayers for the cargo, particularly if you first persuaded my father—so long they have been friends, the Governor could not resist if he joined our forces. What is one girl that she should be held of greater account than the welfare of this country to which you are devoting your life? The happier are your converts the more kindly will they take to Christianity—which they do not love as yet!—the more faithful and contented will they be, in the prospect of the luxuries and the toys and the trinkets of the Russian north. What is one girl against the friendship of Russia for Spain? Who am I that I should weigh a peseta in the scale?”

“You are Concha Argüello, the flower of all the maidens in California, and the daughter of the best of our men,” replied Father Abella musingly. “And until to-day there has been no Catholic more devout——”

“It lies with you, mi padre, whether I continue to be the best of Catholics or become the most abandoned of heretics. You know me better than anyone. You know that I will not weaken and bend and submit, like a thousand other women. I could be bad—bad—bad—and I will be! Do you hear?” And she shook his arm violently, while her hoarse voice filled the church.

“My child! My child! I have always believed that

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you had it in you to become a saint. Yes, yes, I feel the strength and maturity of your nature, I know the lengths to which it might lead another; but you could not be bad, Conchita. I have known many women. In you alone have I perceived the capacity for spiritual exaltation. You are the stuff of which saints and martyrs are made. The violent will, the transcendent passions—they have existed in the greatest of our saints, and been conquered.”

“I will not conquer. I—— Oh, padre—for the love of heaven——”

He left the box hastily and lifted her where she had fallen and carried her into the room adjoining the church. He laid her on the floor, and ran for Doña Ignacia, who, refreshed with wine and chocolate, came swiftly. But when Concha, under practical administrations and maternal endearments, finally opened her eyes, she pushed her mother coldly aside, rose and steadied herself against the wall for a moment, then returned to the church, closing the door behind her.

When a woman has borne thirteen children in the lost corners of the world, with scarce a thought in thirty years for aught else save the husband and his comforts, it is not to be expected that her wits should be rapiers or her vocabulary distinguished. But Doña Ignacia's unresting heart had an intelligence of its own, and no inner convulsion could alter the superb dignity of mien which Nature had granted her. As she rose and confronted Father Abella he moved forward with the instinct to kiss her hand, as he had seen Rezánov do.

“Mi padre,” she said, “Concha is the first of my children to push me aside, and it is like a blow on the heart; but I have neither anger nor resentment, for it was not the act of a child to its parent, but of one woman to another. Alas! this Russian, what has he done, when her own mother can give her no comfort? We all love when young, but this is more. I loved José so much I thought I should die when they would have compelled me to marry another. But this is more. She

will not die, nor even go to bed and weep for days, but it is more. I should not have died, I know that now, and in time I should have married another, and been as happy as a woman can be when the man is kind. Concha will love but once, and she will suffer—suffer— She may be more than I, but I bore her and I know. And she cannot marry him. A heretic! I no longer think of the terrible separation. Were he a Catholic I should not think of myself again. But it cannot be. Oh, padre, what shall we do?"

They talked for a long while, and after further consultation with Don José and Father Landaeta, it was decided that Concha should remain for the present in the house of Juan Moraga, where she could receive the daily counsels of the priests, and be beyond the reach of Rezánov. Meanwhile, all influence would be brought to bear upon the Governor that the Russian might be placated even while made to realize that to loiter longer in California waters would be but a waste of precious time.

XVIII

THERE was no performance after all in the Presidio square that night, for the bear brought in from the hills to do honor to the Russians died of exietement, and it rained besides. Rezánov made the storm his excuse for not dining and dancing as usual at the house of the Commandante. But the relations between the Presidio and the *Juno* during the next few days were by no means strained. Davidov and Khostov were always with the Spanish officers, drinking and card playing, or improving their dancing and Spanish with the girls, whose guitars were tuned for the waltz day and night. The dignitaries met as usual and conversed on all topics save those paramount in the minds of each. Nevertheless, there were three signifieant faets as well known to Rezánov as had they been aired to his liking.

He had sought an interview with Father Abella, and tactfully ignoring the question of his marriage, had persuaded that astute and influential priest to make the proposition regarding his eargo that Concha had suggested. The priest, backed by his three coadjutors, had made it, and been repulsed with fury. From another quarter Rezánov learned that during his absence little else was diseussed in the house of the Commandante save his formidable matrimonial project, and the supposed designs of his eountry. Troops had been ordered from the south to reinforce the San Francisco garrisons, and were even now massed at Santa Clara, within a day's march of the bay.

About a mile from the Presidio and almost opposite the *Juno's* anchorage were six great stone tubs sunken in the ground and filled by a spring of clear water. Here, once a week, the lincn, fine and heavy, of Fort and Presidio was washed, the stoutest serving women of

households and barracks meeting at dawn and scrubbing for half a day. Rezánov had watched the bright picture they made—for they wore a bit of every hue they could command—with a lazy interest, which quickened to thirst when he heard that they were the most reliable newsmongers in the country. In every Presidial district was a similar institution, and the four were known as the "Wash Tub Mail." Many of the women were selected by the tyrants of the tubs for their comeliness, and each had a lover in the couriers that went regularly with mail and official instructions from one end of the Californias to the other. All important news was known first by these women, and much was discussed over the tubs that was long in reaching higher but no less interested circles; and domestic bulletins were as eagerly prized. The sailor that brought this information to Rezánov was a good-looking and susceptible youth, already the victim of an Indian maiden from the handsome tribe in the Santa Clara valley and sister of Doña Ignacia's Malia. Rezánov furnished him with beads and other trinkets, and was at no disadvantage thereafter.

There was nothing Rezánov would have liked better than to see a Russian fleet sail through the straits, but he also knew that nothing was less likely, and that from such rumors he should only derive further annoyance and delay. Two of his sailors deserted at the prospect of war, and his hosts, if neutral, were manifestly alert. Luis and Santiago had been obliged to go to Monterey for a few days, and there was no one at the Presidio in whom Rezánov could confide either his impatience to see Concha or at the adjournment of his more prosaic but no less pressing interests. These two young men had been with him almost constantly since his arrival, and demonstrated their friendship and even affection unfailingly; but there was no love lost between himself and Gervasio. This young hidalgo had the hauteur and intense family pride of Santiago without his younger brother's frank intelligence and lingering ingenuousness. With all the superiority of inferiority, he had

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made himself so unpopular that his real kindness of heart atoned for his absurdities only with those that knew him best. Rezánov was not of these nor aspired to be. Like all lightly seasoned men of the world, he had no patience with the small vanities of the provincial, and although diplomatically courteous to all, in his present precarious position, he had taken too little trouble to conciliate Gervasio to find him of use in the absence of his friends.

At the end of three days Rezánov had forgotten his cargo, and would have sent the *Juno* to the bottom for ten minutes alone with Concha. He had been on fire with love of her since the moment of his actual surrender, and he was determined to have her if there were no other resource but elopement. All his old and intense love of personal freedom had melted out of form in the crucible of his lover's imagination. That he should have doubted for a moment that Concha was the woman for whom his soul had held itself aloof and unshackled was a matter for contemptuous wonder, and the pride he had taken in his keen and swift perceptive faculties suffered an eclipse. Mind and soul and body he was a lover, a union unknown before.

On the fourth morning, his patience at an end, he was about to leave the *Juno* to demand a formal interview with Don José when he saw Luis and Santiago dismount at the beach and enter the canoe always in waiting. A few moments later they had helped themselves to cigarettes from the gift of the Tsar and were assuring Rezánov of their partisanship and approval.

"We were somewhat taken aback at the first moment," Luis admitted. "But—well, we are both in love—Santiago no less than I, although I have had these six long years of waiting and am likely to have another. And we love Concha as few men love their sisters, for there is no one like her—is it not so, Rezánov? And we quite understand why she has chosen you, and why she stands firm, for we know the strength of her character. We would that you were a Catholic, but even so, we will

not sit by and see her life ruined, and we have called to assure you that we shall use all our influence, every adroit argument, to bring our parents to a more reasonable frame of mind. They have already risen above the first natural impulse of selfishness, and would consent to the inevitable separation were you only a Catholic. I have also talked with the Governor—we arrived at midnight—and he flew into a terrible temper—the poor man is already like a mad bull at bay—but if my father yielded, he would—on all points. This morning I shall ride over and talk with Father Abella, who, I fancy, needs only a little extra pressure—you may be sure Coneha has not been idle—to yield; and for more reasons than one. I shall enlist Father Uria and Father de la Cueva as well. They also have great influence with my parents, and as they return to San José in two days to prepare for the visit of the most estimable Dr. Langsdorff, there is no time to lose. I shall go this morning. One more cigarito, señor, and when that treaty is drawn remember the conversion of your brother to Russian tobacco.”

Rezánov thanked him so warmly, assured him with so convincing an emphasis that with his fate in such competent hands his mind was at peace, that the ardent heart of the Californian exulted; Rezánov, with his splendid appearance, and typical of the highest civilizations of Europe, had descended upon his narrow sphere with the authority of a demigod, and he not only thirsted to serve him, but to fasten him to California with the surest of human bonds.

As he dropped over the side of the ship, Rezánov's hand fell lightly on the shoulder of Santiago.

“I can wait no longer to see your sister,” he whispered, mindful of the sterner responsibilities of the older brother. “Do you think you could——”

Santiago nodded. “While Luis is at the Mission I shall go to my cousin Juan Moraga's. You will dine with us at the Presidio, and I shall escort you back to the ship.”

XIX

It was ten o'clock when Rezánov, who had supped on the *Juno*, met Santiago in a sandy valley half a mile from the Presidio and mounted the horse his young friend himself had saddled and brought. The long ride was a silent one. The youth was not talkative at any time, and Rezánov was conscious of little else save an overwhelming desire to see Concha again. One secret of his success in life was his gift of yielding to one energy at a time, oblivious at the moment to aught that might distract or enfeeble the will. To-night, as he rode toward the Mission on as romantic a quest as ever came the way of a lover, the diplomat, the anxious director of a great Company, the representative of one of the mighty potentates of earth, were submerged, forgotten, in the thrilling anticipation of his hour with the woman for whom every fiber of his being yearned.

Nor ever was there more appropriate a setting for one of those inaugural chapters in mating, half appreciated at the time, that glimmer as a sort of morning twilight on mountain tops over the mild undulations of matrimony. The moon rode without a masking cloud across the ambiguous night blue of the California sky, a blue that looks like the fire of strange elements, where the stars glow like silver coals, and out of whose depths intense shadows of blue and black fall; shadows in which all the under world seems to float and recombine, where houses are ghosts of ancient selves and men but the eidola of forgotten dust. To-night the little estate of Juan Moraga, the most isolated and eastern of the settlement, surrounded by its high white wall, looked as unreal and formless as the blue oval of water and black trees behind it, but Rezánov knew that it enfolded warm

and palpitating womanhood and was steeped in the sweetness of Castilian roses.

The riders, who had taken a path far to the east of the Mission, dismounted and tied their horses among the willows, then, in their dark cloaks but a part of the shadows, stole toward the wall designed to impress hostile tribes rather than to resist an onslaught; at the first warning the settlement invariably fled to the church where walls were massive and windows high.

In three of Moraga's four walls was a grille, or wicket of slender iron bars, whence the open could be swept with glass, or gun at a pinch; and for the grille looking eastward went Rezánov as swiftly as the uneven ground would permit. As Concha watched him gather form in the moonlight and saw him jerk his cloak off impatiently, she flung her soft body against the wall and shook the bars with her strong little hands. But when he faced her she was erect and smiling; in a sudden uprush of spirits, almost indifferent. She wore a white gown and a rose in her hair. A rosebush as dense as an arbor spread its prickly arms between herself and the windows of the house.

"Good-evening," she whispered.

Rezánov gave the grille an angry shake. (Santiago had considerably retired.) "Come out," he said peremptorily, "or let me in."

"There is but one gate, señor, and that is directly in front of the house door, that stands open——"

"Then I shall get over the wall——"

"Madre de Dios! You would leave your fine clothes and more on the thorns. My cousin planted those roses not for ornament, but to let the blood of defiant lovers. Not one has come twice——"

"Do you think I came here to talk to you through a grating? I am no serenading Spaniard."

His eyes were blazing. Adobe is not stone. Rezánov took the light bars in both hands and wrenched them out; then, as Concha, divided between laughter and a sudden timidity, would have retreated, he dexterously

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clasped her neck and drew her head through the embrasure. As Santiago, who had watched Rezánov from a distance with some curiosity, saw his sister's beautiful face emerge from the wall to disappear at once behind another rampart, he turned abruptly on his heel and could have wept as he thought of Pilar Ortego of Santa Barbara. But there was a hope that he would be a cadet of the Southern Company before the year was out, and his parents and hers were indulgent. Even as he sighed, his own impending happiness infused him with an almost patronizing sympathy for the twain with the wall between, and he concealed himself among the willows that they might feel to the full the blessed isolation of lovers. His Pilar presented him with twenty-two hostages, and he lived to enjoy an honorable and a prosperous career, but he never forgot that night and the part he had played in one of the poignant and happy hours of his sister's life.

Day and night a great silence reigned in the Mission valley, broken only by the hoot of the owl, the singing of birds, the flight of horses across the plain. Even the low huddle of Mission buildings and the few homes beyond looked an anomaly in that vast quiet valley asleep and unknown for so many centuries in the wide embrace of the hills. Its jewel oasis alone made it acceptable to the Spaniard, but to Rezánov the sandy desert, with its close companionable silences, its cool night air sweet with the light chaste fragrance of the roses, the simple, almost primitive, conditions environing the girl, possessed a power to stir the depths of his emotions as no artful reinforcement to passion had ever done. He forgot the wall. His ego melted in a sense of complete union and happiness. Even when they returned to earth and discussed the dubious future, he was conscious of an odd resignation, very alien in his nature, not only to the barrier but to all the strange conditions of his wooing. He had felt something of this before, although less definitely, and to-night he concluded that she had the gift of clothing the inevitable

with the semblance and the sweetness of choice; and wondered how long it would be able to skirt the arid steppes of philosophy.

She told him that she had talked daily with Father Abella. "He will say nothing to admit he is weakening, but I feel sure he has realized not only that our marriage will be for the best interests of California, but that to forbid it would wreck my life; and from this responsibility he shrinks. I can see it in his kind, shrewd, perplexed eyes, in the hesitating inflections of his voice, to say nothing of the poor arguments he advances to mine. What of my father and mother?"

"They look troubled, almost ill, but nothing could exceed their kindness to me, although they have pointedly given me no opportunity to introduce the subject of our marriage again. The Governor makes no sign that he knows of any aspiration of mine above corn, but he informed me to-day that California is doomed to abandonment, that the Indians are hopeless, that Spain will withdraw troops before she will send others, and that the country will either revert to savagery or fall a prey to the first enterprising outsider. As he was in comparison cheerful before, I fancy he apprehends the irresistible appeal of your father's surrender."

Concha nodded. "If my father yields he will see that you have everything else that you wish. He may have advocated meeting your wishes in other respects in order to leave you without excuse to linger, but that argument is not strong enough for the Governor, whereas if he made up his mind to accept you as a son he would throw the whole force of his character and will into the scale; and when he reaches that pitch he wins—with men. I must, must bring you good fortune," she added anxiously. "Marriage with a little California girl—are you sure it will not ruin your career?"

"I can think of nothing that would advantage it more. What are you going to call me?"

"I cannot say Petrovich or Nicolai—my Spanish

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tongue rebels. I shall call you Pédro. That is a very pretty name with us."

"My own harsh names suit my battered self rather better, but the more Californian you are and remain the happier I shall be. When am I to see your ears? Are they deformed, pointed and furry like a fawn's? Do they stand out? Were all the women of California tattooed in some Indian raid——"

Coneha glanced about apprehensively, but not even Santiago was there to see the dreadful deed. With a defiant sweep of her hands she lifted both loops of hair, and two little ears, rosy even in the moonlight, commanded amends and more from penitent lips.

"No man has ever seen them before—since I was a baby; not even my father and brothers," said Coneha, trembling between horror and rapture at the tremendous surrender. "You will never remind me of it. Ay yi! promise—Pédro mio!"

"On condition that you promise not to confess it. I should like to be sure that your mind belonged as much to me and as little to others as possible. I do not object to confession—we have it in our church; but remember that there are other things as sacred as your religion."

She nodded. "I understand—better than you understand Romanism. I must confess that I met you to-night, but Father Abella is too discreet to ask for more. It is such blessed memories that feed the soul, and they would fly away on a whisper."

XX

THE next morning Father Abella rode over to the Presidio and was closeted for an hour with the Commandante and the Governor. Then the three rode down to the beach, entered a canoe, and paddled out to the *Junco*. Rezánov met them on deck with a gravity as significant as their own, but led them at once to the cabin where wine, and the cigarettes for which alone they would have counselled the treaty, awaited them.

The quartette pledged each other in an embarrassed silence, disposed of a moment more with obdurate matches. Don José inhaled audibly, then lifted his eyes and met the veiled and steady gaze of the Russian.

"Señor," he said, "I have come to tell you that I consent to your marriage with my daughter."

"Thank you," said Rezánov. And their hands clasped across the table.

But this was far too simple for the taste of a Governor. So important an occasion demanded official dignity and many words.

"Your excellency," he said severely, sitting very erect, with one white hand on the table and the other on the hilt of his sword (yet full of courtesy, and longing to enjoy the cheer and conversation of his host); "the peaceful monotony of our lives has been rudely shaken by a demand upon three fallible human beings to alter the course of history in two great nations. That is a sufficient excuse for the suspense to which we have been forced to subject you. The marriage of a Russian and a Spaniard is of no great moment in itself, but the marriage of the Plenipotentiary of the Tsar himself with the daughter of José Dario Argüello, not only one of the most eminent, respected, and distinguished of His

Most Catholic Majesty's subjects in New Spain, but a man so beloved and influential that he could create a revolution were he so minded—indeed, José, no one knows better than I how incapable you are of treason”—as the Commandante gave a loud exclamation of horror—“I merely illustrate and emphasize. My sands are nearly run, Excellency; it is to the estimable mind and strong paternal hand of my friend that this miserable colony must look before long, would she continue even this hand to mouth existence—a fact well known to our king and natural lord. When he hears of this projected alliance——”

“Projected?” exclaimed Rezánov. “I wish to marry at once.”

Father Abella shook his head vigorously, but he spoke with great kindness. “That, Excellency, alas, is the one point upon which we are forced to disappoint you. Indeed, our own submission to your wishes is contingent. This marriage cannot take place without a dispensation from Rome and the consent of the King.”

Rezánov looked at Don José. “You too?” he asked curtly.

The Commandante stirred uneasily, heaved a deep sigh; he thought of the long impatience of his Concha. “It is true,” he said. “Not only would it be impossible for my conscience to resign itself to the marriage of my daughter with a heretic—pardon, Excellency—without the blessing of the Pope; not only would no priest in California perform the ceremony until it arrived, but it would mean the degradation of Governor Arrillaga and myself, and the ruin of all your other hopes. We should be ordered summarily to Mexico, perhaps worse, and no Russian would ever be permitted to set foot in the Californias again. I would it were otherwise. I know—I know—but it is inevitable. Your excellency must see it. Even were you a Catholic, Governor Arrillaga and the President of the Missions, at least, would not dare to countenance this marriage without the consent of the King.”

Rezánov was silent for a few minutes. In spite of the emotions of the past few days he was astonished at the depth and keenness of his disappointment. But never yet had he failed to realize when he was beaten, nor to trim his sails without loss of precious time.

"Very well," he said. "I will go to St. Petersburg at the earliest possible moment, obtain personal letters from the Tsar and proceed post haste to Rome and Madrid. At the same time I shall arrange for the treaty with full authority from the Tsar. Then I shall sail from Spain to Mexico and reach here as soon as may be. It will take a long while, the best part of two years; but I have your word——"

"You have," the three asserted with solemn emphasis.

"Very well. But there is one thing more. I am not in a diplomatic humor. My Sitkans are starving. I must leave here with a shipload of breadstuffs."

Again the Governor drew up his slim soldierly figure; deposited his cigarette on the malachite ash tray. "You may be sure that we have given that momentous question our deepest consideration. Father Abella's suggestion that we buy your commodities for cash, and that with our Spanish dollars you buy again of us, did not strike me favorably at first, for it savored of sophistry. I may have failed in every attempt to benefit and advance this Godforsaken country, but at least I have been the honest agent of my King. But the circumstances are extraordinary. You are about to become one of us, to do our unhappy colony the greatest service that is in the power of any mortal, and personally you have inspired us with affection and respect. I have therefore decided that the exchange shall be made on these terms, but that your cargo shall be received by Don José Argüello, Commandante of the San Francisco Company, and held in trust until the formal consent of the King to the purchase shall arrive."

Rezánov glowed to his finger tips. Not even the assurance of his union with the woman of his heart, which after all had met but the skeleton of his desires, gave

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him the acute satisfaction of this sudden fulfilment of his self-imposed mission. He dropped his own official demeanor and throwing himself across the table gripped the Governor's hand while he poured out his thanks in a voice thick with feeling, his eyes glittering with more than victory. He did not lose sight of his ultimate designs and pledge himself to eternal friendship, but he unwittingly conveyed the impression that Spain had that day made a friend she ill could afford to lose; and his three visitors rose well pleased with the culmination of the interview.

"You must stay here no longer, Rezánov," said Don José, as they were taking leave. "My house is now literally your own. It will be some weeks before the large quantities of corn and flour and other stores you wish can be got together—for we must lay a requisition on the fertile Mission ranchos in the valleys—and you will exchange these narrow quarters for such poor comfort as my house affords—I take no denial. Concha will remain at Juan Moraga's for the present."

XXI

CONCHA, after her father left her, sat for a long while in an attitude of such complete repose that Sturgis, watching her miserably from the veranda, remembered the consolations of his sketch book; and he was almost counterfeited the graceful proud figure, under the wall and the roses, before she stirred.

Concha had sent her father away deeply puzzled. When, after embracing her with unusual emotion, he had informed her of his consent to her marriage, she had received the news as a matter of course, her hopes and desires having mounted too high to contemplate a fall. Then the Commandante, after dwelling at some length upon his discussions with the Governor and the priests, and admonishing her against conceiving herself too important a factor in what might prove to be an alliance of international moment (she had laughed merrily and called him the most callous of parents and subtlest of diplomats), had announced with some trepidation and his most official manner that the consent of the Pope and the King would be sought by Rezánov in person, involving a delay and separation of not less than two years. But to his surprise she did not fling herself upon his neck with blandishments and tears. She merely became quite still, her light high spirits retreating as a breeze might before one of Nature's sudden and portentous calms. Don José, after a fruitless attempt to recapture her interest, mounted his horse and rode away; and Concha sat down on a bench under the wall and thought for an hour without moving a finger.

Her first sensation was one of bitter anger and disappointment with Rezánov. He had, apparently, in

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the first brief interview with their tribunal, given his consent to this long delay of their nuptials.

Her thoughts since his advent had flown on many journeys and known little rest. She had been rudely awakened and stripped of her girlish illusions in those days and nights of battle between pride and her dazzled womanhood when, in the new humility of love, she believed herself to be but one of a hundred pretty girls in the eyes of this accomplished and fortunate Russian. The interval had been brief, but long enough for the grandeur in her nature to awaken almost concurrently with her passions, and she had planned a life, in which, guided and uplifted by the star of fidelity, and delivered from the frivolous and commonplace temptations of other women, she should devote herself to the improvement and instruction not only of the Indians but of the youth of her own class. The schools founded by the estimable and enterprising Boriaea had practically disappeared, and she was by far the best educated woman in California. For such there was a manifest career and an inexorable duty. She would live to be old, she supposed, like all the Argüellos and Moragas; but hidden in her unspotted soul would be the flame of eternal youth, fed by an ideal and a memory that would outlive her weary insignificant body. And in it she would find her courage and her inspiration as well as an unwasting sympathy for those she taught.

Then had come the sudden and passionate wooing of Rezánov. All other ideals and aspirations had fled. She had alternated between the tragic extremes of bliss and despair. So completely did the ardor of her nature respond to his, so fierce and primitive was the cry of her ego for its mate, that she cared nothing for the distress of her parents nor the fate of California. There is no love complete without this early and absolute selfishness, which is merely the furious determination of the race to accomplish its object before the spirit awakens and the passions cool.

Last night life had seemed less serious; she had been

girlishly, romantically happy. It is true that her heart had thumped against the wall as he kissed her, and that she had been full of a wild desire to sing, although she could hardly shape and utter the words that danced in her throbbing brain. But she had been conscious through it all of the romantic circumstance, of the lonely beauty of the night, of the delightful wickedness of meeting her lover in the silence and the dark, even with a wall ten feet high between them. For the wall, indeed, she had been confusedly and deliciously grateful.

And this was what a man's love came to: ardors by night and expedience by day! Or was it merely that Rezánov was the man of affairs always, the lover incidentally? But how could a man who had seemed the very epitome of all the lovers of all the world but a few hours before, contemplate, far less permit, a separation of years? Poor Concha groped toward the great unacceptable fact of life the whole, lit by love its chief incident; and had a fleeting vision of the waste lands in the lives of women occupied only with matrimony. But she dropped her lashes upon this unalluring vision, and as she did so, inevitably she began to excuse the man.

None knew better than she every side of the great question that was shaking not only her life but California itself. Appeal from the dictum of state and clergy would be a mere waste of time. The only alternative was flight. That would mean the wreck of Rezánov's avowed purposes in coming to this quarter of New Spain, and perhaps of others she dimly suspected. It would mean the very acme of misery for his Sitkans, and an indefensible blow to the Company. It might even prove the fatal mistake in his career, for which his enemies were ever on the alert. He was not communicative about himself except when he had an object in view, but he had told her something of his life, and his officers and Langsdorff had told more. He was no silly caballero warbling and thrumming at her grating when

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she longed for sleep, but a man in his forties whose passions were in the leash of a remarkably acute and ambitious brain. She even thrilled with pride in his strength, for she knew how he loved her; and although his part was action, her stimulated instincts taught her that she would rarely be long from his mind. And what was she to seek to roll stumbling blocks into the career of a man like that? In this very garden, for four long days, she had dreamed exalted dreams of the manifold gifts she should develop both for his solace at home and his worldly advancement. She had once felt all a girl's impatience when her mother's tears made her father's departure on some distant mission more difficult than need be, and although she knew now that her capacity for tenderness was as great, she resolved to mould herself in a larger shape than that.

But she sighed and drooped a little. The burden of woman's waiting seemed already to have descended upon her. Two years were long—long. There might be other delays. He might fall ill; he had been ill before in that barbarous Russian north. And in all that time it was doubtful if she received a line from him, a hint of his welfare. The Boston and British skippers came no more, and it was certain that no Russian ship would visit California again until the treaty was signed and official news of it had made its slow way to these uttermost shores. She had resented, in her young ambition and indocility, the chance that had stranded her, equipped for civilization, on this rim of the world, but never so much as in that moment, when she sat with arrested breath and realized to the full the primitive conditions of a country thousands of miles from the very outposts of Europe, and with never the sight of a letter that did not come from Spain or one of her colonies.

"Would that we lived a generation later," she thought with a heavy sigh. "Progress is almost automatic, and to a land as fertile and desirable as this

the stream must turn in due course. But not in my time. Not in my time."

She rose and leaned her elbows in the embrasure of the grille, where Santiago had restored the bars, and looked out over the fields of grain planted by the padres, the immense sand dunes beyond that shut the lovely bay from sight; the hills embracing the primitive scene in a frowning arc. With all her imagination it was long before she could picture a great city covering that immense and almost desert space. A pueblo in time, perhaps, for Rezánov had awakened her mind to the importance of the harbor as a port of call. Many more adobe homes where the sand was not hot and shifting, a few ships in the bay when Spain had been compelled to relax her jealous vigilance—or—who knew?—perhaps!—a flourishing colony when the Russian bear had devoured the Spanish lion. She knew something and suspected more of the rottenness and inefficiency of Spain, and, were Russia a nation of Rezánovs, what opposition in California against the tide thundering down from the north? Then, perhaps, the city that had travelled from the brain of the Russian to hers when the fog had rolled over the heights; the towers and palaces and bazaars, the thousand little golden domes with the slender cross atop; the forts on the crags and the villas in the hollows, and on all the island and hills. But when she and her lover were dust. When she and her lover were dust.

But she was too young and too ardent to listen long to the ravens of the spirit. Two years are not eternity, and in happiness the past rolls together like a scroll and is naught. She fell to dreaming. Her lips that had been set with the gravity of stone relaxed in warm curves. The color came back to her cheek, the light to her eyes. She was a girl at her grating with the roses poignant above her, and the world, radiant, alluring, and all for her, swimming in the violet haze beyond.

XXII

REZÁNOV in those days was literally lord and master at the Presidio. If he did not burn the house of his devoted host he ran it to suit himself. He turned one of its rooms into an office where he received the envoys from all different Missions and examined the samples of everything submitted to him, trusting little to his commissary. He was also employed scouring the country for shooting or for quail in the company of his younger host. The mission of Don José accepted him as an actual member of the Californian, and, his consent at peace, revelled in his society as a sign from a propitiated heaven; rejoicing in the virtue of his Governor, testily remarking that as California was well governed for the present he would retire to Monterey and take a siesta, rode off one morning, but not without an affectionate: "God preserve the life of your excellency many years."

But though Rezánov saw the most sanguine hopes that had brought him to California fulfilled, although he looked from the mountain ridges east over the great low valleys watered by rivers and shaded by oaks, where enough grain could be raised to keep the blood red in a thousand times the colonial population of Russia, although he felt himself in more and more abundant health, more and more in love with life, it is not to be supposed for a moment that he was satisfied. Concha he barely saw. She remained with the Governor, and although she came occasionally to the afternoon dances at the Presidio, and he had dined once at her cousin's house, where the formal betrothal had taken place and the marriage contract had been signed in the presence of her family and more intimate friends,

the priests, his officers, and the Governor, he had not spoken with her for a moment alone. Nor had her eyes met his in a glance of understanding. At the dances she showed him no favor; and as the engagement was to be as secret as might be in that small community, until his return with consent of Pope and King, he was forced to concede that her conduct was irreproachable; but when on the day of the betrothal she was oblivious to his efforts to draw her into the garden, he mounted his horse and rode off in a huff.

The truth was that Concha liked the present arrangement no better than himself, and knowing that her own appeal against the proprieties would result in a deeper seclusion, she determined to goad him into using every resource of address and subtlety to bring about a more human state of affairs. And she accomplished her object. Rezánov, at the end of a week, was not only infuriated but alarmed. He knew the imagination of woman, and guessed that Concha, in her brooding solitude, distorted all that was unfortunate in the present and dwelt morbidly on the future. He knew that she must resent his part in the long separation, no doubt his lack of impulsiveness in not proposing elopement. There was a priest in his company who, although he ate below the salt and found his associates among the sailors, could have performed the ceremony of marriage when the *Juno*, under full sail in the night, was scudding for the Russian north. It is not to be denied that this romantic alternative appealed to Rezánov, and had it not been for the starving wretches so eagerly awaiting his coming he might have been tempted to throw commercial relations to the winds and flee with his bride while San Francisco, secure in the knowledge of the *Juno's* emerald, was in a first heavy sleep. It is doubtful if Rezánov, beyond impulse, for Rezánov, of a purpose to whet his talents, and life with much philosophy, but ignore

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the double dealing necessary to the accomplishment of patriotic or political acts, it revolted at the idea of outwitting, possibly wrecking, his trusting and hospitable host. But the mere fact that his imagination could dwell upon such an issue as reckless flight, inflamed his impatience, and his desire to see Concha daily during these last few weeks of propinquity. Finally he sought the co-operation of Father Abella, and that wise student of maids and men gave him cheer.

On Thursday afternoon there was to take place the long delayed Indian dance and bull-bear fight; not in the Presidio, but at the Mission, the pride of the friars inciting them to succeed where the military authorities had failed. All the little world of San Francisco had been invited, and it would be strange if in the confusion between performance and supper a lover could not find a moment alone with his lady.

The elements were kind to the padres. The afternoon was not too hot, although the sun flooded the plain and there was not a cloud on the dazzling blue of the sky. Never had the Mission and the mansions looked so white, their tiles so red. The trees were blossoming pink and white in the orchards, the lightest breeze rippled the green of the fields; and into this valley came neither the winds nor the fogs of the ocean.

The priests and their guests of honor sat on the long corridor beside the church; the soldiers, sailors, and Indians of Presidio and Mission forming the other three sides of a hollow square. The Indian women were a blaze of color. The ladies on the corridor wore their mantillas, jewels, and the gayest of artificial flowers. There were as many fans as women. Rezánov sat between Father Abella and the Commandante, and not being in the best of tempers had never looked more imposing and remote. Concha, leaning against one of the pillars, stole a glance at him and wondered miserably if this haughty European had really sought her hand, if it were not a girl's foolish dream. But Concha's humble moments at this period of her life were rare,

and she drew herself up proudly, the blood of the proudest race in Europe shaking angrily in her veins. A moment later, in response to a power greater than any within herself, she turned again. The attention of the hosts and guests was riveted upon the preliminary antics of the Indian dancers, and Rezánov seized the opportunity to lean forward unobserved and gaze at the girl whom it seemed to him he saw for the first time in the full splendor of her beauty. She wore a large mantilla of white Spanish lace. In the fashion of the day it rose at the back almost from the hem of her gown to descend in a point over the high comb to her eyes. The two points of the width were gathered at her breast, defining the outlines of her superb figure, and fastened with one large Castilian rose surrounded by its mass of tiny sharp buds and dull green leaves. As the familiar scent assailed Rezánov's nostrils they tingled and expanded. His lids were lifted and his eyes glowing as he finally compelled her glance, and her own eyes opened with an eager flash; her lips parted and her shoulders lost their haughty poise. For a moment their gaze lingered in a perfect understanding; his ill-humor vanished, and he leaned back with a complimentary remark as Father Abella directed his attention to the most agile of the Indians.

The swart natives of both sexes with their thick features and long hair were even more hideous than usual in bandeaux of bright feathers, scant garments made from the breasts of water-fowls, rattling strings of shells, and tattooing on arm and leg no longer concealed by the decorous Mission smock. Rezánov had that day sent them presents of glass beads and ribbons, and in these they took such extravagant pride that for some time their dancing was almost automatic.

But soon their blood warmed, and after the first dance, which was merely a series of measured springs on the part of the men and a beating of time by the women, a large straw figure symbolizing an entire hostile tribe was brought in, and about this pranced the men with

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savage cries and gestures, advancing, attacking, retreating, finally piercing it with their arrows and marching it off with sharp yells of triumph that reverberated among the hills; the women never varying from a loud monotonous chant.

There was a peaceful interlude, during which the men, holding bow and arrow aloft, hopped up and down on one spot, the women hopping beside them and snapping thumb and forefinger on the body, still singing in the same high measured voice. But while they danced a great bonfire was laid and kindled. The gyrations lasted a few moments longer, then the chief seized a live ember and swallowed it. His example was immediately followed by his tribe, and, whether to relieve discomfort or with energies but quickened, they executed a series of incredible handsprings and acrobatic capers. When they finally whirled away on toes and finger tips, another chief, in the horns and hide of a deer, rushed in, pursued by a party of hunters. For several moments he perfectly simulated a hunted animal lurking and dodging in high grass, behind trees, venturing to the brink of a stream to drink, searching eagerly for his mate; and when he finally escaped it was amidst the most enthusiastic plaudits as yet evoked.

After an hour of this varied performance, the square was enlarged by several mounted vaqueros galloping about with warning cries and much flourishing of lassos. They were the cattle herders of the Mission ranch just over the hills, and were in gala attire of black glazed sombrero with silver cord, white shirt open at the throat, short black velvet trousers laced with silver, red sash and high yellow boots. Four, pistol in hand, stationed themselves in front of the corridor, while the others rode out and in again, dragging a bear and a lion with hind legs attached by two yards of rope. The captors left the captives in the middle of the square, and without more ado the serious sport of the day began. The bull, with stomach empty and hide inflamed, rushed at the bear, furious from captivity, with such a roar

that the Indian women screamed and even the men shuffled their feet uneasily. But neither combatant was interested in aught but the other. The one sought to gore, his enemy to strike or hug. The vaqueros teased them with arrows and cries, the dust flew; for a few moments there was but a heaving, panting, lashing bulk in the middle of the arena, and then the bull, his tongue torn out, rolled on his back, and another was driven in before the victor could wreak his unsated vengeance among the spectators. The bear, dragging the dead bull, rushed at the living, who, unmartial at first, stiffened to the defensive as he saw a bulk of wiry fur set with eyes of fire, almost upon him. He sprung aside, lowered his horns, and caught the bear in the chest. But the victor was a compact mass of battle and momentum. His onslaught flung the bear over backward, and quickly disengaging himself he made another leap at his equally agile enemy. This time the battle was longer and more various, for the bull was smaller, more active and dexterous. Twice he almost had the bear on his horns, but was rolled, only saving his neck and back from the fury of the mountain beast, by such a kicking and leaping that both combatants were indistinguishable from the whirlwind of dust. Out of this they would emerge to stand panting in front of each other with tongues pendant and red eyes rolling. Finally the bear, nearly exhausted, made a sudden charge, the bull leaped aside, back again with incredible swiftness caught the bear in the belly, tossed him so high that he met the hard earth with a loud cracking of bone. The vaqueros circled about the maddened bull, set his hide thick with arrows, tripped him with the lasso. A wiry little Mexican in yellow, galloping in on his mustang, administered the coup de grace amidst the wild applause of the spectators, whose shouting and clapping and stamping might have been heard by the envious guard at the Presidio and Yerba Buena.

As the party on the corridor broke, Rezánov found no difficulty in reaching Coneha's side, for even Doña

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Ignacia was chattering wildly with several other good dames who renewed their youth briefly at the bullfight.

"Did you enjoy that?" he asked curiously.

"I did not look at it. I never do. But I know that you were not affronted. You never took your eyes from those dreadful beasts."

"I am exhilarated to know that you watched me. Yes, at a bullfight the primitive man in me has its way, although I have the grace to be ashamed of myself afterward. In that I am at least one degree more civilized than your race, which never repents."

The door of one of the smaller rooms stood open, and as they took advantage of this oversight with a singular concert of motive, he clasped both her hands in his. "Are you angry with me?" he asked softly. He dared not close the door, but his back was square against it, and the other guests were moving down to the refectory.

"For liking such horrid sport?"

"We have no time to waste in coquetry."

Her eyes melted, but she could not resist planting a dart. "Not now—I quite understand: love could never be first with you. And two years are not so long. They quickly pass when one is busy. I shall find occupation, and you will have no time for longings and regrets."

They were not yet alone, women were talking in their light high voices not a yard away. The hindrance, and her new loveliness in the soft mantilla, the pink of the roses reflected in her throat, the provocative curl of her mouth, sent the blood to his head.

"You have only to say the word," he said hoarsely, "and the *Juno* will sail to-night."

Never before had she seen his face so unmasked. Her voice shook in triumph and response.

"Would you? Would you?"

"Say the word!"

"You would sacrifice all—the Company—your career—your Sitkans?"

"All—everything." His own voice shook with more than passion, for even in that moment he counted the cost, but he did not care.

But Concha detected that second break in his voice, and turned her head sadly.

"You would not say that to-morrow. I hate myself that I made you say it now. I love you enough to wait forever, but I have not the courage to hand you over to your enemies."

"You are strangely far-sighted for a young girl." And between admiration and pique, his ardor suffered a chill.

"I am no longer a young girl. In these last days it has seemed to me that secrets locked in my brain, secrets of women long dead, but of whose essence I am, have come forth to the light. I have suffered in anticipation. My mind has flown—flown—I have lived those two years until they are twenty, thirty, and I have lived on into old age here by the sea, watching, watching——"

She had dropped all pretence of coquetry and was speaking with a passionate forlornness. But before he could interrupt her, take advantage of the retreating voices that left them alone at last, she had drawn herself up and moved a step away. "Do not think, however," she said proudly, "that I am really as weak and silly as that. It was only a mood. Should you not return I should grieve, yes; and should I live as long as is common with my race, still would my heart remain young with your image, and with the fidelity that would be no less a religion than that of my church. But I should not live a selfish life, or I should be unworthy of my election to experience a great and eternal passion. Memory and the life of the imagination would be my solace, possibly in time my happiness, but my days I should give to this poor little world of ours; and all that one mortal, and that a woman, has to bestow upon a stranded and benighted people. It may

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not be much, but I make you that promise, señor, that you will not think me a foolish romantic girl unworthy of the great responsibilities you have offered me."

"Concha!" He was deeply moved, and at the same time her words chilled him with subtle prophecy. Sink into some unexplored depth of his consciousness, making response as subtle, filling him with a rush of impatient response at the mortality of man. He glanced over his shoulder, then took her recklessly in his arms.

"Is it possible you doubt I will come back?" he demanded. "My faith?"

"No, not that. But such happiness seems to me too great for this life."

He remembered how often he had been close to death; he knew that during the greater part of the next two years he should see the glimmer of the scythe oftener yet. For a moment it seemed to him that he felt the dark waters rise in his soul, heard the jeers of the gods at the vanity of mortal will. But the blood ran strong and warm in his veins. He shook off the obsession, and smiled a little cynically, even as he kissed her.

"This is the hour for romance, my dear. In the years to come, when you are very prosaically my wife with a thousand duties, and grumbling at my exactions, your consolation will be the memory of some moment like this, when you were able to feel romantic and sad. I wish I could arrange for some such set of memories for myself, but I am unequal to your divine melancholy. When I cannot see you I am cross and sulky; and just now—I am, well—philosophically happy. Some day I shall be happier, but this is well enough. And I can harbor no ugly presentiments. As I entered California I was elated with a sense of coming happiness, of future victories; and I prefer to dwell upon that, the more particularly as in a measure the prophetic hint has been fulfilled. So make the most of the present. I shall see you daily during this last precious fortnight, for I am determined this arrangement shall

cease; and you must exorcise coquetry and abet me whenever there is a chance of a word alone."

She nodded, but she noted with a sigh that he said no more of sudden flight. She would never have consented to jeopardize the least of his interests, but she fain would have been besought. The experience she had had of the vehemence and fire in Rezánov made her long for his complete subjugation and the happiness it must bring to herself. But as he smiled tenderly above her she saw that his practical brain had silenced the irresponsible demands of love, and although she did not withdraw from his arms she stiffened her head.

"I fancy I shall return home to-morrow," she said. "My mother tells me that she can live without me no longer, and that Father Abella has reminded her that if I stay in the house of Elena Castro I shall be as free from gossip as here. I infer that he has rated my two parents for making a martyr of me unnecessarily, and told them it was a duty to enliven my life as much as possible before I enter upon this long period of probation. The grating of my room at Elena's is above a little strip of garden, and faces the blank wall of the next house. Sometimes—who knows?" She shrugged her shoulders and gave a gay little laugh, then stood very erect and moved past him to the door. She had recognized the shuffling step of Father Abella.

"Is supper ready, padre mio?" she asked sweetly. "His excellency and I have talked so much that we are very hungry."

"There is no need to deceive me," said Father Abella dryly. "You are not the first lovers I have known, although I will admit you are by far the most interesting, and for that reason I have had the wickedness to abet you. But I fancy the good God will forgive me. Come quickly. They are scattered now, but will go to the refectory in a moment and miss you. Excellency, will you give your arm to Doña Ignacia and take the seat at the head of the table? Concha, my child, I am

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afraid you must console our good Don Weeliam. He is having a wretched quarter of an hour, but has loyally diverted the attention of your mother."

"That is the vocation of certain men," said Concha lightly.

XXIII

LIFE was very gay for a fortnight. An hour after the Commandante's surrender he had despatched invitations to all the young folk of the gente de razon of Monterey, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Diego, and to such of the older as would brave the long journeys. The Montereños had arrived for the Mission entertainment, and during the next few days the rest poured over the hills: De la Gurras, Ximénos, Estudillos, Carrillos, Esténegas, Morenos, Cotas, Estradas, Picos, Pachecos, Lugos, Ortégas, Alvarados, Bandinis, Peraltas, members of the Luis, Rodriguez, Lopez families, all of gentle blood, that made up the society of Old California; as gay, arcadian, irresponsible, yet moral a society as ever fluttered over this planet. Every house in the Presidio and valley, every spare room at the Mission, opened to them with the exuberant hospitality of the country. The caballeros had their finest wardrobes of colored silks and embroidered botas, sombreros laden with silver, fine lawn and lace, jewel and sash, velvet serape for the chill of the late afternoon. The matrons brought their stiff robes of red and yellow satin, the girls as many flowered silk and lawns, mantillas and rebosos, as the family carretas would hold. The square of the Presidio was crowded from morning until midnight with the spirited horses of the country, prancing impatiently under the heavy Mexican saddle, heavier with silver, made a trifle more endurable by the blanket of velvet or cloth. No Californian walked a dozen rods when he had a horse to carry him.

But the horses were not always champing in the square. There was more than one bull-bear fight, and twice a week at least they carried their owners to the

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hills of the Mission ranch, or the rocky cliffs and gorges above Yerba Buena, the Indian servants following with great baskets of luncheon, perhaps roasting an ox whole in a trench. This the Californians called barbeeue and the picnic merienda.

There was dancing day and night, the tinkling of guitars, flirting of fans. Rezánov vowed he would not have believed there were so many fans and guitars in the world, and suddenly remembered he had never seen Concha with either. The lady of his choice reigned supreme. Many had taken the long blistering journey for no other purpose than to see the famous beauty and her Russian; the engagement was as well known as if cried from the Mission top. The girls were surprised and delighted to find Concha sweet rather than proud and envied her with amiable enthusiasm. The caballeros, fewer in number, for most of the men in California at that period before a freer distribution of land were on duty in the army, artfully ignored the unavowed bond, but liked Rezánov when he took the trouble to charm them.

Khostov and Davidov watched the loading of the *Juno* with a lively regret. Never had they enjoyed themselves more, nor seen so many pretty girls in one place. Both had begun by falling in love with Concha, and although they rebounded swiftly from the blow to their hopes, it happily saved them from a more serious dilemma; unwealthed and graceless as they were, they would have been regarded with little favor by the practical California father. As it was, their pleasures were unpoisoned by regrets or rebuffs. When they were not flirting in the dance or in front of a lattice, receiving a lesson in Spanish behind the portly back of a dueña, or clasping brown little fingers under cover of a fan when all eyes were riveted on the death struggle of a bull and a bear, they were playing cards and drinking in the officers' quarters; which they liked almost as well. It is true they sometimes paid the price in a cutting rebuke from their chief, but the rebukes were

not as frequent as in less toward circumstances, and were generally followed by some fresh indulgence. This, they uneasily guessed, was not only the result of the equable state of his excellency's temper, but because he had a signal unpleasantness in store, and would not hazard their resignation. They had taken advantage of an imperial ukase to enter the service of the Russian-American Company temporarily, and they knew that if they evaded any behest of Rezánov's their adventurous life in the Pacific would be over. Therefore, although they resented his implacable will, they pulled with him in outward amity; and indeed there were few of the *Juno's* human freight that did not look back upon that California springtime as the episode of their lives, commonly stormy or monotonous, in which the golden tide flowed with least alloy. Even Langsdorff, although impervious to female charms and with scientific thirst unslaked, enjoyed the Spanish fare and the society of the priests. The sailors received many privileges, attended bull-fights and fandangos, loved and pledged; and were only restrained from emigration to the interior of this enchanted land of pretty girls and plentiful food by the knowledge of the sure and merciless vengeance of their chief. Had the rumor of war still held it might have been otherwise, but that raven had flown off to the limbo of its kind, and the Commandante let it be known that deserters would be summarily captured and sent in irons to the *Juno*.

In the mind of Concha Argüello there was never a lingering doubt of the quality of that fortnight between the days of torturing doubts and acute emotional upheaval, and the sailing away of Rezánov. It was true that what he banteringly termed her romantic sadness possessed her at times, but it served as a shadow to throw into sharper relief an almost incredible happiness. If she seldom saw Rezánov alone there was the less to disturb her, and at least he was never far from her side. There were always the delight of unexpected moments unseen, whispered words in the crowd, the sense of

complete understanding, broken now and again by poignant attacks of unreasoning jealousy, not only on her part but his; quite worth the reconciliation at the lattice, while Elena Castro, gentle dueña, pitched her voice high and amused her husband so well he sought no opportunity for response.

Then there was more than one excursion about the bay on the *Juno*, dinner on La Bellissima or Nuestra Señora de los Angeles, a long return after sundown that the southerners might appreciate the splendor of the afterglow when the blue of the water was reflected in the lower sky, to melt into the pink fire above, and all the land swam in a pearly mist.

Once the Commandante took twenty of his guests, a gay cavalcade, to his rancho, El Pilar, thirty miles to the south: a long valley flanked by the bay and the eastern mountains on the one hand, and a high range dense with forests of tall thin trees on the other. But the valley itself was less Californian than any part of the country Rezánov had seen. Smooth and flat and free of undergrowth and set with at least ten thousand oaks, it looked more like a splendid English park, long preserved, than the present haunt of naked savages. There were deer and quail in abundance, here and there an open field of grain. Long beards of pale green moss waved from the white oaks, wild flowers, golden red and pale blue, burst underfoot. There were hedges of sweet briar, acres of lupins, purple and yellow. Altogether the ideal estate of a nobleman; and Rezánov, who had liked nothing in California so well, gave his imagination rein and saw the counterpart of the castle of his ancestors rise in the deep shade of the trees.

Don José's house was a long rambling adobe, red tiled, with many bedrooms and one immense hall. Beyond were a chapel and a dozen outbuildings. Dinner was served in patriarchal style in the hall, the Commandante—or El padrone as he was known here—and his guests at the upper end of the table; below the salt, the vaqueros, their wives and children, and the

humble friar who drove them to prayer night and morning. The friar wore his brown robes, the vaqueros their black and silver and red in honor of the company, their women glaring handkerchiefs of green or red or yellow about their necks, even pinned back and front on their shapeless garments; and affording a fine vegetable garden contrast to the delicate flower bed surrounding the padrone.

There was a race track on the ranch and many fine horses. After siesta the company mounted fresh steeds and rode off to applaud the feats of the vaqueros, who, not content with climbing the greased pole, wrenching the head of an unfortunate rooster from his buried body as they galloped by, submitting the tail of an oiled pig in full flight to the same indignity, gave when these and other native diversions were exhausted, such exhibitions of riding and racing as have never been seen out of California. As lithe as willow wands, on slender horses as graceful as themselves, they looked like meteors springing through space, and there was no trick of the circus they did not know by instinct, and translate from gymnastics into poetry. Even Rezánov shared the excitement of the shouting clapping Californians, and Conehe laughed delightedly when his cap waved with the sombreros.

"I think you will make a good Californian in time," she said as they rode homeward.

"Perhaps," said Rezánov musingly. His eyes roved over the magnificent estate and at the moment they entered a portion of it that deepened to woods, so dense was the undergrowth, so thick the oak trees. Here there was but a glimpse, now and again, of the mountains swimming in the dark blue mist of the late afternoon, the moss waved thickly from the ancient trees; over even the higher branches of many rolled a cascade of small brittle leaves, with the tempting opulence of its poisonous sap. The path was very abrupt, cut where the immense spreading trees permitted, and Rezánov

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and Concha had no difficulty in falling away from the chattering excited company.

"Tell me your ultimate plans, Pédro mio," said Concha softly. "You are dreaming of something this moment beyond corn and treaties."

"Do you want that final proof?" he asked, smiling. "Well, if I could not trust you that would be the end of everything, and I know that I can. I have long regarded California as an absolutely necessary field of supplies, and since I have come here I will frankly say that could I, as the representative of the Tsar in all this part of the world, make it practically my own, I should be content in even a permanent exile from St. Petersburg. I could attract an immense colony here and in time import libraries and works of art, laying the foundation of a great and important city on that fine site about Yerba Buena. But now that these kind people have practically adopted me I cannot repay their hospitality by any overt act of hostility. I must be content either slowly to absorb the country, in which case I shall see no great result in my lifetime, or—and for this I hope—what with the mess Bonaparte is making of Europe, every state may be at the others' throat before long, including Russia and Spain. At all events, a cause for rupture would not be far to seek, and it would need no instigation of mine to despatch a fleet to these shores. In that case I should be sent with it to take possession in the name of the Tsar, and to deal with these simple, kind—and inefficient people, my dear girl—as no other Russian could. They cannot hold this country. Spain could not—would not, at all events, for she has not troops enough here to protect a territory half its size—hold it against even the 'Americans,' should they in time feel strong enough to push their way across the western wilderness. It is the destiny of this charming Arcadia to disappear; and did Russia forego an opportunity to appropriate a domain that offers her literally everything except civilization, she would be unworthy of her place among nations. More-

over—a beneficent triumph impossible to us otherwise—with a powerful and flourishing colony up and down this coast, and sending breadstuffs regularly to our other possessions in these waters until the natives, immigrants, and exiles were healthy vitalized beings, it would be but a question of a few years before we should force open the doors of China and Japan.” He caught Coneha from her horse and strained her to him in the mounting ardor of his plunge down the future. “You must resent nothing!” he cried. “You must cease to be a Spanish woman when you become my wife, and help me as only you can in those inevitable years I have mapped out; and not so much for myself as for Russia. My enemies have sought to persuade three sovereigns that I am a visionary, but I have already accomplished much that met with resentment and ridicule when I broached it. And I know my powers! I tingle with the knowledge of my ability to carry to a conclusion every plan I have thought worth the holding when the ardor of conception was over. I swear to you that death alone—and I believe that nothing is further aloof—shall prevent my giving this country to Russia before five years have passed and within another brief span the trade of China and Japan. It is a glorious destiny for a man—one man!—to pass into history as the Russian of his century who has done most to add to the extent and the wealth and the power of his empire! Does that sound vain-glorious, and do you resent it? You must not, I tell you, you must not!”

Coneha had never seen him in such a mood. Although he held her so closely that the horses were angrily biting each other, she felt that for once there was nothing personal in his ardor. His eyes were blazing, but they stared as if a great and prophetic panorama had risen in this silent wood, where the long faded moss hung as motionless as if by those quiet waters that even the most ardent must cross in his time. She felt his heart beat as she had felt it before against her soft breast, but she knew that if he thought of her at all it

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was but as a part of himself, not as the woman he impatiently desired. But she was sensible of no resentment, either for herself or her race, which, indeed, she knew to be but a wayfarer in the wilderness engaged in a brief chimerical enterprise. For the first time she felt her individuality melt into, commingle with his: and when he lowered his gaze, still with that intensity of vision piercing the future, her own eyes reflected the impersonalities of his; and in time he saw it.

XXIV

"We should all wear black for so mournful an occasion," said Rafaela Sal, spreading out her scarlet skirts.

"Father Abella is right. The occasion is sad enough without giving it the air of a funeral."

"Sad! Dios de mi alma! Will he return?"

Elena Castro shook her wise head. She was nearly twenty, and four years of matrimony had made her sceptical of man's capacity for romance. "Two years are long, and he will see many girls, and become one again of a life that is always more brilliant than our sun in May. His eyes will be dazzled, his mind distracted, full to the brim. To sit at table with the Tsar, to talk with him alone in his cabinet, to have for the asking audience of the Pope of Rome and the King of Spain! Ay yi! Ay yi! Perhaps he will be made a prince when he returns to St. Petersburg and all the beautiful princesses will want to marry him. Can he remember this poor little California, and even our lovely Concha? I doubt! Valgame Dios, I doubt!"

"Concha has always been too fortunate," said Rafaela with a touch of spite, for years of waiting had tried her temper and the sun always freckled her nose. The flower of California stood on the corridor of the Mission and before the church awaiting the guest of honor and his escort. A mass was to be said in behalf of the departing guests; the *Juno* would sail with the turn of the afternoon tide. Men and women were in their gayest finery, an exotic mass of color against the rough white-washed walls, chattering as vivaciously as if the burden of their conversation were not regret for the Chamberlain and his gay young lieutenants. Concha, alone, wore no color; her frock was white, her mantilla black. She

stood somewhat apart, but although she was pale she commanded her eyes to dwell absently on the shifting sand far down the valley, her haughty Spanish profile betraying nothing of the despair in her soul.

"Yes, Coneha has always been too fortunate," repeated Rafaella. "Why should she be chosen for such a destiny—to go to the Russian court and wear a train ten yards long of red velvet embroidered with gold, a white veil spangled with gold, a head-dress a foot high set so thick with jewels her head will ache for a week—Madre de Dios! And we stay here forever with white walls, horsehair furniture, Baja California pearls and three silk dresses a year!"

"No one in all Russia will look so grand in court dress as our Conehita," said Elena loyally. "But I doubt if it is the dress and the state she thinks of losing to-day. She will not talk even to me of him—Ay yi! she grows more reserved every day, our Coneha!—except to say she will wed him when he returns, and that I know, for did not I witness the betrothal? She only mocks me when I beg her to tell me if she loves him, languishes, or sings a bar of some one of our beautiful songs with ridiculous words. But she does. She did not sleep last night. Her room is next to mine. No, it is of Rezánov she thinks, and always. Those proud silent girls, who jest when others would weep and use many words and must die without sympathy—they have tragedy in their souls, ay yi! And you think she is fortunate? True she is beautiful, she is La Favorita, she receives many boxes from Mexico, and she has won the love of this Russian. But—I have not dared to remind her—I remembered it only yesterday—she came into this world on the thirteenth of a month, and he into her life but one day before the thirteenth of another—new style! True some might say that it was an escape, but if he came on the twelfth, it was on the thirteenth she began to love him—on the night of the ball; of that I am sure."

Rafaella shuddered and crossed herself. "Poor

Coneha! Perhaps in the end she will always stand apart like that. Truly she is not as others. I have always said it. Thanks be to Mary it was Luis that wooed me, not the Russian, for I might have been tempted. True his eyes are blue, and only the black could win my heart. But the court of St. Petersburg! Dios de mi vida! Did I lie awake at night and think of Coneha Argüello in red velvet and jewels all over, I should hate her. But no—to-day—I cannot. Two years! Have I not waited six? It is eternity when one loves and is young."

"They come," said Elena.

The cavalcade was descending the sand hills on the left, Rezánov in full uniform between the Commandante and Luis Argüello and followed by a picked escort of officers from Presidio and Fort. The Californians wore full-dress uniform of white and scarlet, Don José a blue velvet serape, embroidered in gold with the arms of Spain.

As they dismounted Rezánov bowed ceremoniously to the party on the corridor, and they returned his salutation gravely, suddenly silent. He walked directly over to Coneha.

"We will go in together," he said. "It matters nothing what they think. I kneel beside no one else."

And Coneha, with the air of leading an honored guest to the banquet, turned and walked with him into the dark little church.

"Why did you not wear a white mantilla?" he whispered. "I do not like that black thing."

"I am not a bride. I knew we should kneel together—it would have been ridiculous. And I could not wear a colored reboso to-day."

"I should have liked to fancy we were here for our nuptials. Delusions pass but are none the less sweet for that."

They knelt before the altar, the Commandante, Doña Ignacia, Luis, Santiago, Rafaella Sal and Elena Castro just behind; the rest of the party, their bright garments

shimmering vaguely in the gloom, as they listed; and enough fervent prayers went up to insure the health and safety of the departing guests for all their lives.

Rezánov, who had much on his mind, stared moodily at the altar until Concha, who had bowed her head almost to her knees, finished her supplication; then their eyes turned and met simultaneously. For a moment their brains did swim in the delusion that the priest with his uplifted hands pronounced benediction upon their nuptials, that probation was over and union nigh. But Father Abella dismissed all with the same blessing, and they shivered as they rose and walked slowly down the church.

Doña Ignacia took her husband's arm, and muttering that she feared a chill, hurried the others before her. The priests had gone to the sacristy. Before they reached the door Rezánov and Concha were alone.

His hands fell heavily on her shoulders.

"Concha," he said. "I shall come back if I live. I make no foolish vows, so idle between us. There is only one power that can prevent our marriage in this church not later than two years from to-day. And although I am in the very fulness of my health and strength, with my work but begun, and all my happiness in the future, and even to a less sanguine man it would seem that his course had many years to run, still have I seen as much as any man of the inconsequence of life, of the insignificance of the individual, his hopes, ambitions, happiness, and even usefulness, in the complicated machinery of natural laws. It may be that I shall not come back. But I wish to take with me your promise that if I have not returned at the end of two years or you have received no reason for my detention, you will believe that I am dead. There would be but one insupportable drop in the bitterness of death, the doubt of your faith in my word and my love. Are you too much of a woman to curb your imagination in a long unbroken silence?"

"I have learned so much that one lesson more is no tax on my faith. And I no longer live in a world of

little things. I promise you that I shall never falter nor doubt."

He bent his head and kissed her for the first time without passion, but solemnly, as had their nuptials indeed been accomplished, and the greater mystery of spiritual union isolated them for a moment in that twilight region where the mortal part did not enter.

As they left the church they saw that all the Indians of the Mission and neighborhood, in a gala of color, had gathered to cheer the Russians as they rode away. Concha was to return as she had come, beside the carreta of her mother, and as Rezánov mounted his horse she stood staring with unseeing eyes on the brilliant animated scene. Suddenly she heard a suppressed sob, and felt a touch on her skirt. She looked round and saw Rosa, kneeling close to the church. For a moment she continued to stare, hardly comprehending, in the intense concentration of her faculties, that tangible beings, other than herself and Rezánov, still moved on the earth. Then her mind relaxed. She was normal in a normal world once more. She stooped and patted the hands clasping her skirts.

"Poor Rosa!" she said. "Poor Rosa!"

Over the intense green of islands and hills were long banners of yellow and purple mist, where the wild flowers were lifting their heads. The whole quivering bay was as green as the land, but far away the mountains of the east were pink. Where there was a patch of verdure on the sand hills the warm golden red of the poppy flaunted in the sunshine. All nature was in gala attire like the Californians themselves, as the *Juno* under full sail sped through "The Mouth of the Gulf of the Farallones." Fort San Joaquin saluted with seven guns; the *Juno* returned the compliment with nine. The Commandante, his family and guests, stood on the hill above the fort, cheering, waving sombreros and handkerchiefs. Wind and tide carried the ship rapidly out the straits. Rezánov dropped the cocked

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hat he had been waving and raised his field-glass. Coneha, as ever, stood a little apart. As the ship grew smaller and the company turned toward the Presidio, she advanced to the edge of the bluff. The wind lifted her loosened mantilla, billowing it out on one side, and as she stood with her hands pressed against her heart, she might, save for her empty arms, have been the eidolon of the Madonna di San Sisto. In her eyes was the same expression of vague arrested horror as she looked out on that world of menacing imperfections the blind forces of nature and man had created; her body was instinct with the same nervous leashed impotent energy.

XXV

THE white rain clouds, rolling as ever like a nervous intruder over the great snow peaks behind the steep hills black with forest that rose like a wall back of the little settlement of Sitka, parted for a moment, and the sun, a coy disdainful guest, flung a glittering mist over what Nature had intended to be one of the most enchanting spots on earth, until, in a fit of ill-temper—with one of the gods, no doubt—she gave it to Niobe as a permanent outlet for her discontent. When it does not rain at Sitka it pours, and when once in a way she draws a deep breath of respite and lifts her grand and glorious face to the sun, in pathetic gratitude for dear infrequent favor, comes a wild flurry of snow or a close white fog from the inland waters; and, like a great beauty condemned to wear a veil through life, she can but stare in dumb resentment through the folds, consoling herself with the knowledge that could the world but see it must surely worship. Perhaps, who knows? she really is a frozen goddess, condemned to the veil for infidelity to him imprisoned in the great volcano across the sound—who sends up a column of light once in a way to dazzle her shrouded eyes, and failing that batters her with rock and stone like any lover of the slums. One day he spat forth a rock like a small hill, and big enough to dominate the strip of lowland at least, standing out on the edge of the island like a guard at the gates, and never a part of the alien surface. Between this lofty rock and the forest was the walled settlement of New Archangel, that Baránkov, the dauntless, had wrested from the bloodthirsty Kolosh but a short time since and purposed to hold in the interest of the Russian-American Company. His log hut, painted like the other

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buildings with a yellow ochre found in the soil, stood on the rock, and his glass swept the forest as often as the sea.

As Rezánov, on the second of July, thirty-one days after leaving San Francisco, sailed into the harbor with its hundred bits of volcanic woodland weeping as ever, he gave a whimsical sigh in tribute to the gay and ever-changing beauties of the southern land, but was in no mood for sentimental reminiscence. Natives, paddling eagerly out to sea in their bidarkas to be the first to bring in good news or bad, had given him a report covering the period of his absence that filled him with dismay. There had been deaths from scurvy; one of the largest ships belonging to the Company had been wrecked and the entire cargo lost; of a hunting party of three hundred Aleuts in one hundred and forty bidarkas, which had gone from Sitka to Kadiak in November of the preceding year, not one had arrived at its destination, and there was reason to believe that all had been drowned or massacred; and the Russians and Aleuts at Behring's Bay settlement had been exterminated by one of the native tribes.

But the *Juno* was received with salvos of artillery from the fort, and cheered by the entire population of the settlement, crowded on the beach. Baránhov, looking like a monkey with a mummy's head in which only a pair of incomparably shrewd eyes still lived, his black wig fastened on his bald red-fringed pate with a silk handkerchief tied under his chin, stood, hands on hips, shaking with excitement and delight. The bearded long-haired priests, in full canonicals of black and gold, were beside the Chief-Manager, ready to escort the Chamberlain to the chapel at the head of the solitary street, where the bells were pealing and a mass of thanksgiving was to be said for his safe return.

But it was some time before Rezánov could reach the chapel or even exchange salutations with Baránhov. As he stepped on shore he was surrounded, almost hustled by the shouting crowd of Russians—many of them con-

viets—Aleuts and Sitkans, who knelt at his feet, endeavored to kiss his hand, his garments, in their hysterical gratitude for the food he had brought them. For the first time he felt reconciled to his departure from California, and Concha's image faded as he looked at the tearful faces of the diseased ill-nourished wretches who gave their mite of life that he might live as became a great noble of the Russian Empire. But although he tingled with pleasure and was deeply moved, he by no means swelled with vanity, for he was far too clear-sighted to doubt he had done more than his duty, or that his duty was more than begun. He made them a little speech, giving his word they should be properly fed hereafter, that he would make the improvement of their condition as well as that of all the employees of the Company throughout this vast chain of settlements on the Pacific, the chief consideration of his life; and they believed him and followed him to the chapel rejoicing, reconciled for once to their lot.

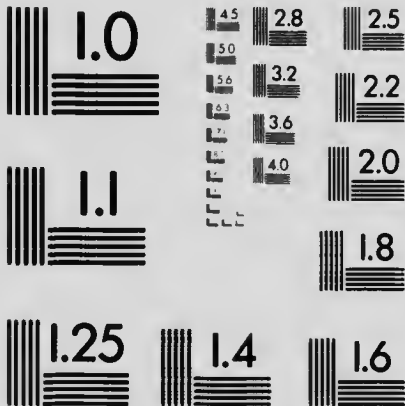
After the service Rezánov went up to the hut of the Chief-Manager, a habitation that leaked winter and summer, and was equally deficient in light, ventilation and order. But Baránhov in the sixteen years of his exile had forgotten the bare lineaments of comfort, and devoted his days to advancing the interests of the Company, his nights, save when sleep overcame him, to potations that would have buried an ordinary man under Alaskan snows long before. But Baránhov had fourteen years more of good service in him, and rescued the Company from insolvency again and again, nor ever played into the hands of marauding foreigners; with brain on fire he was shrewder than the soberest.

He listened with deep satisfaction to the Chamberlain's account of his success with the Californians and his glowing pictures of the country, nodding every few moments with emphatic approval. But as the story finished his wonderful eyes were two bubbling springs of humor, and Rezánov, who knew him well, recrossed his legs nervously.



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"What is it?" he asked. "What have I done now? Remember that you have been in this business for sixteen years, and I one——"

"How many measures of corn did you say you had brought, Exceelleney?"

"Two hundred and ninety-four," replied Rezánov proudly.

"A provision that exceeds my most sanguine hopes. The only thing that mitigates my satisfaction is that there is not a mill in the settlement to grind it."

Rezánov sprang to his feet with a violent exclamation, his face very red. There was no one whose good opinion he valued as he did that of this brilliant, dissipated, disinterested old genius; and he felt like a schoolboy. But although he started for the door, he recovered half-way, and reseating himself joined in the laughter of the little man who was rocking back and forth on his bench, his weakened leg clasped against his shrunken chest.

"How on earth was I to know all your domestic arrangements?" he said testily. "God knows I found them limited enough last winter, but it never occurred to me there was any mysterious process involved in converting corn into meal. Is it quite useless, then?"

"Oh, no, we can boil or roast it. It will dispose of what teeth we have left, but that will serve the good purpose of reminding us always of your exceelleney's interest in our welfare."

Rezánov shrugged his shoulders. "Give the corn to the natives. It is farinaaceous at all events. And you can have nothing to say against the flour I have brought, and the peas, beans, tallow, butter, barley, salt, and salted meats—in all to the value of twenty-four thousand Spanish dollars."

The Chief-Manager's head nodded with the vigor and rapidity of a mechanical toy. "It is a God-send, a God-send. If you did no more than that you would have earned our everlasting gratitude. It will make us over,

give us renewed courage in this cursed existence. Are you not going to get me out of it?"

Rezánov shook his head with a smile. "Literally you are the whole Company. As long as I live here you stay—although when I reach St. Petersburg I shall see that you receive every possible reward and honor."

Baránhov lifted his shoulders to his ears in quizzical resignation. "I suppose it matters little where the last few years left me are spent, and I can hang the medals on the walls to console me when I have rheumatism, and shout my titles from the top of the fort when the Kolosh are yelling at the barricades."

"You must make yourself more comfortable," said Rezánov emphatically. "You are wrong to carry your honesty and enthusiasm to the point of living like the promuschleniki. Take enough of their time to build you a comfortable dwelling, and I will send you, on my own account, far more substantial rewards than orders and titles. Build a big house, for that matter. I shall be here more or less—when I am not in California." And he told Baránhov of his proposed marriage with the daughter of Don José Argüello.

The Chief-Manager listened to this confidence with an even livelier satisfaction than to the list of the *Juno's* cargo.

"We shall have California yet!" he cried, his eyes snapping like live coals under the black thatch of wig. "Absorption or the bayonet. It matters little. Ten years from now and we shall have a line of settlements as far south as San Diego. My plan was to feel my way down the northern coast of California with a colony, which should buy a tract of land from the natives and engage immediately in otter hunting—somewhere between Cape Mendocino and Drake's Bay. The Spanish have no settlements above San Francisco and are too weak to drive us out. They would rage and bluster and do nothing. Then quietly push forward, building forts and ships. But you have taken hold in the grand manner and will accomplish in ten years what would have

taken me fifty. Marry this girl, use your advantage over the entire family—whose influence I well know—and that great personal power with which the Almighty has been so lavish, and you will have the whole weakly garrisoned country under your foot before they know where they are, and the Russian settlers pouring in. Spain cannot come to the rescue while this devil Bonaparte is alive, and he is young, and like yourself a favorite of destiny. Those damned Bostonians inherit the grabbing instincts of the too paternal race they have just rejected, but there are thousands of miles of desert between California and their own western outposts, hundreds of savage tribes to exterminate. By the time they were in a position to attempt the occupation of California we should be so securely entrenched they would either let us alone or send troops that would be half dead by the time they reached us. As to ships, we could soon build enough at Okhotsk and Petropaulovsky for our purpose. For the matter of that, if your gifted tongue impressed the Tsar with the riches of California there would always be war ships on her coast.” He leaned forward and caught the strong shoulders above him in hands that looked like a tangle of baked nerves, and shook them vigorously. “You are a great boy!” he said with a sort of quizzical solemnity. “A great boy. This damned, God-forsaken, pestilential, demoralizing, brutalizing factory for enriching a few with the very life blood and vitals of thousands that will suffer and starve and never be heard of” (all his language cannot be recorded), “will make two or three reputations by the way. Mine will be one, although I’ll get nothing else. Shelikov is safe; but you will have a monument. Well, God bless you. I grudge you nothing. Not even the happiness you deserve and are bound to have—for when all is said and done, Rezánov, you are a lucky dog, a lucky dog! Any man may see that, even when these infernal snows have left him with but half an eye. To quarrel with a destiny like yours would be as great a waste of time as to protest that California

is warm and fertile, while this infernal North is like living in a refrigerator with the deluge to vary the monotony. Now let us get drunk!"

But Rezánov laughingly extricated himself, and sending a message to Davidov and Khostov to come to him immediately, walked toward the tent he had ordered erected on the edge of the settlement; only the worst of weather drove him indoors in these half-civilized communities.

As he was passing the chapel, followed again by the employees of the Company, to whom he had granted a holiday, he suddenly found his hand taken possession of, and looked up to see himself confronted by a dissipated-looking person in plain clothes. His hand became so limp that it was dropped as if it had put forth a sting, and he narrowed his eyes and demanded with a bend of his mouth that brought the blood to the face of the intruder:

"And who are you, may I ask?"

The man threw back his head defiantly. "I am Lieutenant Sookin of the Imperial Navy of Russia," he said in a loud defiant tone.

"And I am Chamberlain of the Russian Court and Commander of all America," replied Rezánov coolly. "Now go to your quarters, dress yourself in your uniform, and present your report to me an hour hence."

The officer, concentrating in his injected eyes all the lively hatred and jealousy of his service for the Russian-American Company in this region where it reigned supreme and cared no more for the Admiralty than for some native chieftain covered with shells and warpaint, glared at its plenipotentiary as if calling upon his deeper resources of insolence; but the steady contemptuous gaze of the man who had dealt with his kind often and successfully overcame his sodden spirit, and he turned sulkily and slouched off to his quarters to console himself with more brandy. Rezánov shrugged his shoulders and went on to his tent.

There was no furniture in it as yet, and he was

obliged to receive Davidov and Khostov standing, but this he preferred. They followed him almost immediately, apprehensive and nervous, and before speaking he looked at them for a moment with his strong penetrating gaze. He well knew the power of his own personality, and that it was immeasurably enhanced by the fact that of all with whom he had to do in these benighted regions his will alone was never weakened by liquor. These young men, clever, high-bred, with an honorable record not only in Russia, but in England and America, looked upon a hilarious night as the just reward of work well done by day. Brandy was debited to their account by the "bucket" (a bucket being a trifle less than two gallons), and they found little fault with life. But it gave a commanding spirit like Rezánov's an advantage which they did not underestimate for a moment; and they alternately hated and worshiped him.

"I think you have an inkling of what I am going to ask you to do." The Chamberlain brought out the euphemism with the utmost suavity. "I have made up my mind not to ignore the indignity to which Russia was subjected last year by Japan, but to inflict upon it such punishment as I find it in my power to compass. It was my intention to build a flotilla here, but owing to the diseased condition and reduced numbers of the employees, that was impossible, and I shall be obliged to content myself with the *Juno* and the *Avos*, whose keel, as you know, was laid in November, and is no doubt finished long since. These I shall fit with armaments in Okhotsk. I shall place the enterprise I have spoken of in your charge, sailing with you from Sitka five days hence. From Okhotsk I desire that you proceed to the Japanese settlements in the lower Kurile Islands, take possession of them and bring all stores and as many of the inhabitants as the vessels will accommodate, to Sitka, where Paránov will see that they are comfortably established on that large island in the harbor—which we shall call Japonsky—and converted

into good servants of the Company. The excuse for this enterprise is that those islands were formally taken possession of by Shelikov; and although abandoned later, the fact remains that the Russian flag was the first to float over them. The stores captured may not be worth much and the islands are of no particular use to us, but it is wise that Japan should have a taste of Russian power; and the consequences may be salutary in more ways than one. I hope you will do me this great favor, for there is no one of your tried probity and skill to whom I can trust so delicate an enterprise. I am doing it wholly upon my own responsibility, for although I wrote tentatively to the Tsar on this subject before I sailed for California, it is not yet time for a reply. However, I take the consequences upon my own shoulders. You shall not suffer in any way, for your orders are to obey mine while you remain in these waters."

He paused a moment, and then suddenly smiled into the unresponsive faces before him. He held out his hand and shook their limp ones warmly.

"Let me thank you here for all your inestimable services in the past, and particularly during our late hazardous voyages. Be sure that whether you succeed in this enterprise or not, your rewards shall be no less for what you have already done. I shall make it a personal matter with the Tsar. You shall have promotion and a substantial increase in pay, besides the orders and Imperial thanks you so richly deserve. Lest anything happen to me on my homeward journey, I shall write to St. Petersburg before I leave."

The lieutenants, overcome as ever when he chose to put forth his full powers, assured him of their fidelity and, if with misgivings, vowed to mete vengeance to the Japanese. And although their misgivings were not unfounded, and they paid a high price in suffering and mortification, they accomplished their object and in due course received the rewards the Chamberlain had promised them.

They did not retire, and Rezánov, noting their sud-

den hesitation and embarrassment, felt an instant thrill of apprehension.

"What is it?" he demanded. "What has happened?"

"Life has moved slowly in Sitka during your absence, Excellency," replied Davidov. "There has been little work done on the *Avos*. It will not be finished for a month or six weeks."

Then, had the young men been possessed by a not infrequent mood, they would have glowed with a sense of just satisfaction. Rezánov felt himself turn so white that he wheeled about and left the tent. A month or six weeks! And the speed and safety of his journey across Siberia depended upon his making the greater part of it before the heavy autumn rains swelled the rivers and flooded the swamps. Winter or summer the journey from Okhotsk to St. Petersburg might be made in four months; with the wealth and influence at his command, possibly in less; but in the deluge between he was liable to detentions lasting nearly as long again, to say nothing of illness caused by inevitable exposure.

He stood staring at the palisades for many minutes. The separation must be long enough, the dangers numerous enough if he started within the week, but at least he had in a measure accustomed himself to the idea of not seeing Concha again for "the best part of two years," and the sanguineness of his temperament had led him to hope that the time might be reduced to eighteen months. If he delayed too long, only by means of an unprecedented run of good fortune would he reach St. Petersburg but a month behind his calculations. And the chances were in favor of four, or three at the best! Never since the morning that the real nature of his feeling for Concha had declared itself had he yearned toward her as at that moment; never since the dictum of what she called their "tribunal" had he so rebelled against the long delay. And yet he hesitated. To leave Japan unpunished for the senseless humiliations to which it had subjected Russia in his person was not to be thought of, and yet did he leave without seeing the *Avos* finished,

the two boats supplied with armaments at Ohkotsk, and under way before he started across Siberia, he knew it was doubtful if the expedition took place before his return; in that case might never take place, for these two young men might have drifted elsewhere, and he knew no one else to whom he could entrust such a commission. In spite of their idiosyncrasies he could rely upon them implicitly—up to a certain point. That point involved keeping them in sight until exactly the right moment and leaving nothing to their executive which could be certainly accomplished by himself alone. Did he sail five days hence on the *Juno* one of the officers would be exposed for an indeterminate time to the temptations of Okhotsk, the ship, perhaps, at the mercy of some sudden requirement of the Company. His authority was absolute when enforced in person, but it was a proverb west of the Ural: "God reigns and the Tsar is far away." If the *Juno* were wanted the manager at Okhotsk would argue that two years was a period in which an ardent servant of the Company could find many an excuse to justify its seizure.

And here in Sitka it was doubtful if the work on the *Avos* proceeded at all. Baránhov was not in sympathy with the enterprise against the Japanese, fearing the consequences if in the event of the Tsar's disapproval, and resented the impressment of the promuschleniki into a service that deprived him of their legitimate work. Moreover, although he loved Rezánov personally, he had enjoyed supreme power in the wilderness too long not to chafe under even the temporary assumption of authority by his high-handed superior. With the best of intentions Davidov could make little headway against the passive resistance of the Chief-Manager, and those intentions would be weakened by the consolations the Company so generously afforded.

The result was hardly open to doubt. If he left Sitka before the completion of the *Avos*, Russia would go unavenged for the present. Or himself? Rezánov, sanguine and imaginative as he was, even to the point

of creating premises to rhyme with ends, was very honest fundamentally. He turned abruptly on his heel, and calling to the officers that he would announce his decision on the morrow, ordered the sentry to open the gate and passed out of the enclosure.

He crossed the clearing and entered the forest. The warlike tribes themselves had trodden paths through the dense undergrowth of young trees and ferns. Rezánov, despite Baránhov's warning, had tramped the forest many times. It was the one thing that reconciled him to Sitka, for there are few woods more beautiful. In spite or because of the incessant rains, it is pervaded by a rich golden gloom, the result of the constant rotting of the brown and yellow bark, not only of the prostrate trees, but of the many killed by crowding and unable to seek the earth with the natural instinct of death. And above, the green of hemlock and spruce was perennially fresh and young, glistening and fragrant. Here and there was a small clearing where the clans had erected their ingenious and hideous totem poles, out of place in the ancient beauty of the wood.

The ferns brushed his waist, the roar of the river came to his ears, the forest had never looked more primeval, more wooing to a man burdened with civilization, but Rezánov gave it less heed than usual, although he had turned to it instinctively. He was occupied with a question to which nature would turn an aloof disdainful ear. Was his own wounded vanity at the root of his desire to humiliate Japan? Russia was too powerful, too occupied, for the present at least, greatly to care that her overtures and presents had been scorned. Upon her ambassador had fallen the full brunt of that wearisome and incomparably mortifying experience, and unfortunately the ambassador happened to be one of the proudest and most autocratic men in her empire. No man of Rezánov's caliber but accommodates that sort of personal vanity that tenaciously resents a blow to the pride of which it is a part, to the love of power it feeds. As well expect a lover without passion, a state without

corruption. Rezánov finally shrugged his shoulders and admitted the impeachment, but at the same time he recognized that the desire for vengeance still held, and that the tenacity of his nature, a tenacity that had been no mean factor in the remodeling of himself from a voluptuous young sprig of nobility into one of the most successful business men and subjugator of other men that the Russian Empire could show, was not likely to weaken when its very roots had been stiff with purpose for fifteen months. Power had been Rezánov's ruling passion for many years before he met Concha Argüello, and, although it might mate very comfortably with love, it was not to be expected that it would remain submerged beyond the first enthusiasm, nor even assume the position of the "party of the second part." Rezánov was Rezánov. He was also in that interval between youth and age when the brain rules if it is ever to rule at all. That the ardor of his nature had awakened refreshed after a long sleep was but just proved, as well as the revival of his early ideals and capacity for genuine love; but the complexities, the manifold interests and desires of the ego had been growing and developing these many years; and no mere mortal that has given up his life for a considerable period to the thirst for dominance can ever, save in a brief exaltation, sacrifice it to anything so normal as the demands of sex and spirit. For good or ill, the man who has burned with ambition, exulted in the exercise of power, bitterly resented the temporary victories of rivals and enemies, fought with all the resources of brain and character against failure, is in a class apart from humanity in the mass. Rezánov loved Concha Argüello to the very depths of his soul, but he had lived beyond the time when even she could engage successfully with the ruthless forces that had molded into immutable shape the Rezánov she knew. Her place was second, and it is probable that she would have loved him less had it been otherwise; she, in spite of her fine intellect and strong will, being all woman, as he, despite his depth of intuition, was all man. Equal-

ity is possible in no relation or condition of life. When woman subjugates man the conquered will enjoy a sense of revenge proportionate to the meanness of his state.

It is possible that had Coneha awaited Rezánov in St. Petersburg her attraction would have focused his desires irresistibly; but his mind had resigned itself to the prospect of separation for a definite period, and while it had not relegated her image to the background, her part in his life had been settled there among many future possibilities, and all the foreground was crowded with the impatient symbols of the intervening time. Moreover, he well knew that the savor would be gone from his happiness with the woman were the taste of another failure acrid in his mouth.

As he realized that the die was cast, the sanguineness of his temperament rushed to do battle against apprehension and self-accusing. After all, he was rarely balked of his way, accustomed to ride down obstacles, to the amiable coöperation of fate. He could arrive in Okhotsk late in September or early in October. Captain D'Wolf, who had been detained at Sitka during his absence by the same indifference that had operated against the completion of the *Avos*, would precede him and order that all be in readiness at Okhotsk both for the ships and his journey to Yakutsk. He could proceed at once; and, no doubt, with twice the number of horses needed, would make the first and most difficult stage of the journey in the usual time, and with no great embarrassment from the rains. From Yakutsk to Irkutsk the greater part of the travel was by water in any case, and after that the land was flat for the most part and bridges were more numerous. The governor of every town in Siberia would be his obsequious servant, the entire resources of the country would be at his disposal. He was sound in health again, as resistant against hardships as when he had sailed from Kronstadt. And God knew, he thought with a sigh, his will and purpose had never been stronger.

XXVI

REZÁNOV disembarked from the *Juno* at Okhotsk during the first days of October. Had it not been for a touch of fever that had returned in the filth and warm dampness of Sitka, he would have felt almost as buoyant in mind and body as in those days when California had gone to his head. The *Juno* had touched at Kadiak, Oonalaska, and others of the more important settlements, and he had found his schools and libraries in good condition, seals and otters rapidly increasing in their immunity from indiscriminate slaughter, new and stronger forts threatening the nefarious Bostonian and Briton. At Okhotsk he learned that the embassy of Count Golofkin to China had failed as signally as his own, and this alone would have put him in the best of tempers even had he not found his armament and caravan awaiting him, facilitating his immediate departure. He wrote a gay letter to Concha, giving her the painful story of the naturalist attached to the Golofkin embassy, Dr. Redovsky, who had remained in the East animated by the same scientific enthusiasm as that of his colleague, the good Langsdorff; parted some time since from his too exacting master. Rezánov had written Concha many letters during his detention in Sitka, and left them with Baránhov to send at the first opportunity. The Chief-Manager, deeply interested in the romance of the mighty Chamberlain with whom he alone dared to take a liberty, vowed to guard all that came to his care and sooner or later to send them to California. Rezánov had also written comprehensively to the Tsar and the directors of the Russian-American Company, adroitly placing his marriage in the light of a diplomatic maneuver, and painting California in colors the

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more vivid and enticing for the sullen clouds and roaring winds, the dripping forests and eternal snows of that derelict corner of Earth where he had been stranded so long. He had also, when Langsdorff announced his intention to start upon a difficult journey in the interest of science, provided him not only with letters of recommendation, but with all the comforts procurable in a land where the word comfort was the stock in trade of the local satirist. But Langsdorff, although punctiliously acknowledging the favors, never quite forgave the indifference of a mere ambassador and chamberlain, rejoicing in the dignity of an honorary membership in the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, to the supreme division of natural history.

The first stage of the journey—from Okhotsk to Yakutsk—was about six hundred and fifty English miles, not as the crow flew, but over the Stanovoi mountains in a southwesterly direction to the Maya, by this river's wavering course to the Youdoma, then northwest to the Aldan, and south beside the Lena. The beaten track lay entirely alongside the rivers at this season, upon their surface in winter; and in addition to these great streams there were many too unimportant for the map, but as erratic in course and as irresistible in energy after the first rains of autumn.

Captain D'Wolf had proved himself capable and faithful, and a caravan of forty horses had been in Okhotsk a week; twenty for immediate use, twenty for relief, or substitutes in almost certain emergency. As there were but one or two stations of any importance between Okhotsk and Yakutsk, and as a week might pass without the shelter of so much as a hut, it was necessary to take tents and bearskin beds for the Chamberlain, his Cossack guard, valet-de-chambre, cook and other servants, one set of fine blankets and linen, cooking utensils, axes, arms, tinder-boxes, provisions for the entire trip, besides a great quantity of personal luggage.

Rezánov lost no time. He had changed his original plan and dispatched Davidov on the *Avos* from Oon-

alaska. Guns and provisions awaited the *Juno* at Okhotsk, and in less than a week after his arrival Rezánov was able to start on his long journey with a mind at rest. Although the almost extravagant delight that his body had taken in the comforts of his manager's home, after ten weeks on the *Juno*, warned him that he might be in a better condition to begin a journey of ten thousand versts, he hearkened neither to the hint nor to the insistence of his host. His impatient energy and stern will, combined with the passionate wish to accomplish the double object of his journey, returning in the least possible time to California with his treaty and the consent of the Pope and King to his marriage, would have carried him out of Okhotsk in forty-eight hours had disease declared itself. Nor were there any inducements aside from a comfortable bed and refined fare, in the flat unhealthy town with its everlasting rattle of chains, and the hideous physiognomies of criminals always at work to the rumbling accompaniment of Cosack oaths.

For the first week the exercise he loved best and the long days in the crisp open air renewed his vigor, and he even looked forward to the four months of what was then the severest traveling in the world, in a boyish spirit of adventure. He reflected that he might as well give his brain a relief from the constant revolving of schemes and plans for the advancement of his country, his company, and himself, and let his thoughts have their carnival of anticipation with the unparalleled happiness and success that awaited him in the future. There was no possible doubt of the acquiescence and assistance of the Tsar, and no man ever looked down a fairer perspective than he, as he galloped over the ugly country, often far ahead of his caravan, splashing through bogs and streams, fording rivers without ferries, camping at night in forests so dense the cold never escaped their embrace, muffled to the eyes in furs as he made his way past valleys whose eternal ice fields chilled the country for miles about; sometimes able to procure a

little fresh milk and butter, oftener not; occasionally passing a caravan returning for furs, generally seeing nothing but a stray reindeer for hours together, once meeting the post and finding much for himself that in nowise dampened his spirit.

But on the eighth day the rains began; a fine steady mist, then in torrents as endless. Wrapped in bearskins at night within the shelter of a tent or of some wayside hut, and closely covered by day, Rezánov at first merely cursed the inconvenience of the rain; but while crossing the river Allach Juni, his guides without consulting him having taken him miles out of his way in order to avoid the hamlet of the same name where the small-pox was raging, but where there was a government ferry, his horse lost his footing in the rapid swollen current and fell. Rezánov managed to retain his seat, and pulled the frightened plunging beast to its feet while his Cossacks were still shouting their consternation. But he was soaked to the skin, his personal luggage was in the same condition, and they did not reach a hut where a fire could be made until nine hours later. It was then that the seeds of malaria, accumulated during the last three years in unsanitary ports and sown deep by exceptional hardships, but which he believed had taken themselves off during his six weeks in California, stirred more vigorously than in Sitka or Okhotsk. He rode on the next day in a burning fever. Jón, minding Langsdorff's instructions, doctored him—not without difficulty—from the medicine chest, and for a day or two the fever seemed broken. But Jón, sick with apprehension, implored him to turn back. He might as well have implored the sky to turn blue.

"How do you think men accomplish things in this world?" asked Rezánov angrily. "By turning back and going to bed every time they have a migraine?"

"No, Excellency," said the man humbly. "But health is necessary to the accomplishment of everything, and if the body is eaten up with fever——"

"What are drugs for? Give me the whole damned

pharmacopeia if you choose, but don't talk to me about turning back."

"Very well, Excellency," said Jón, with a sigh.

The next day he and one of the Cossack guard caught him as he fell from his horse unconscious. A Yakhut hut, miserable as it was, offered in the persistent down-pour a better shelter than the tent. They carried him into it, and his bedding at least was almost as luxurious as had he been in St. Petersburg. Jón, at his wits' end, remembered the practice of Langsdorff in similar cases, and used the lancet, a heroic treatment he would never have accomplished had his master been conscious. The fever ebbed, and in a few days Rezánov was able to continue the journey by shorter stages, although heavy with an intolerable lassitude. But his will sustained him until he reached Yakutsk, not at the end of twenty-two days, but of thirty-three. Here he succumbed immediately, and although his sick-bed was in the comfortable home of the agent of the Company, and he had medical attendance of a sort, his fever and convalescence lasted for eight weeks. Then, in spite of the supplications of his friends, chief among whom was his faithful Jón, and the prohibition of the doctor, he began the second stage of his journey.

The road from Yakutsk to Irkutsk, some two thousand six hundred versts, or fifteen hundred and fifty English miles, lay for the most part alternately on and along the river Lena in a southeasterly direction; there being no attempt to cross Siberia at any point in a straight line. By this time the river was frozen, and the only concession Rezánov would make to his enfeebled frame was an arrangement to cover the entire journey by private sledge instead of employing the swifter course of post sledge on the long stretches and horseback on the shorter cuts.

The weather was now intensely cold, the river winding, the delays many, but there were adequate stations for the benefit and accommodation of travelers every hundred versts or less. Rezánov felt so invigorated by

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the long hours in the open after the barbarous closeness of his sick room, that at the end of a fortnight he was again possessed with all his old ardor of desire to reach the end of his journey. He vowed he was well again, abandoned his comfortable sledge, and pushed on in the common manner. In the wretched post sledges he was often exposed to the full violence of a Siberian winter, and although the horseback exercise stirred his blood and refreshed him for the moment, he suffered in reaction and was several times forced to remain two nights instead of one at a station. But he was muffled in furs to his very eyes, and the road was diverting, often beautiful, with its Gothic mountains, its white plains set with villages and farms, the high thin crosses above the open or swelling domes of the little churches. Sometimes the Lena narrowed until its frozen surface looked like a mass of ice that had ground its way between perpendicular walls or overhanging masses of rock that awaited the next convulsion of nature to close the pass altogether. Then the dogs trotted past caves and grottos, left the abrupt and craggy banks, crossed level plains once more; where herds of cattle grazed in the summertime, now a vast unchecked expanse of white. The Government and Company agents fawned upon him, the best of horses and beds, food and wine, were eagerly placed at the disposal of the favorite of the Tsar. Rezánov's spirit, always of the finest temper, suffered no eclipse for many days. He revelled in the belief that his sorely tried body was regenerating its old vigors.

From Wercholsensk to Katschuk the journey was so winding by river that it consumed more than twice the time of the land route, which although only thirty versts in extent was one of the most difficult in Siberia. Rezánov chose the latter without hesitation, and would listen to no dissuasion from the Commissary of the little town or from his distracted Jón: the journey from Yakutsk had now lasted five weeks and the servant's watchful eye noted signs of exhaustion.

The hills were very high and very steep, the roads but a name in summer. Had not the snow been soft and thin, the horses could not have made the ascent at all; and, as it was, the riders were forced to walk the greater part of the way and drag their unwilling steeds behind them. They were twelve hours covering the thirty versts, and at Katsehuk Rezanov succumbed for two days, while Jón scoured the country in search of a telega; as sometimes happened there was a long stretch of country without snow, and sledges, by far the most comfortable method of travel in Siberia, could not be used. The rest of the journey, but one hundred and ninety-six versts, must be made by land. Rezanov admitted that he was too weary to ride, and refused to travel in the post carriage. On the third day the servant managed to hire a telega from a superior farmer and they started immediately, the heavy luggage having been consigned to a merchant vessel at Yakutsk.

Rezanov stood the telega exactly half a day. Little larger than an armchair and far lighter, it was drawn by horses that galloped up and down hill and across the intervening valleys with no change of gait, and over a road so rough that the little vehicle seemed to be propelled by a succession of earthquakes. Rezanov, in a fever which he attributed to rage, dismissed the telega at a village and awaited the coming of Jón, who followed on horseback with the personal luggage.

It was a village of wooden houses built in the Russian fashion, and inhabited by a dignified tribe wearing long white garments bordered with fur. They spoke Russian, a language little heard farther north and east in Siberia, and when Rezanov declined their hospitality they dispatched a courier at once to the Governor-General of Irkutsk acquainting him with the condition of the Chamberlain and of his imminent arrival. In consequence, when Rezanov drew rein two days later and looked down upon the city of Irkutsk with its pleasant squares and great stone buildings beside the shining river, the gilded domes and crosses of its thirty churches

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and convents glittering in the sun, the whole picture beckoning to the delirious brain of the traveler like some mirage of the desert, his appearance was the signal for a salute from the fort; and the Governor-General, privy counselor and senator de Pestel, accompanied by the civil governor, the commandant, and the archbishop, and with a military escort, sallied forth and led the guest, with the formality of officials and the compassionate tenderness of men, into the capital.

For three weeks longer Rezánov lay in the palace of the Governor. Between fever and lassitude, his iron will seemed alternately to melt in the fiery furnace of his body, then, a cooling but still viscous and formless mass, sink to the utmost depths of his being. But here he had the best of nursing and attendance, rallied finally and insisted upon continuing his journey. His doctor made the less demur as the traveling was far smoother now, in the early days of March, than it would be a month hence, when the snow was thinner and the sledges were no longer possible. Nevertheless, he announced his intention to accompany him as far as Krasnoiarsk, where the Chamberlain could lodge in the house of the principal magistrate of the place, Counselor Keller, and, if necessary, be able to command fair nursing and medical attendance; and to this Rezánov indifferently assented.

The prospect of continuing his journey and the bustle of preparation raised the spirits of the invalid and gave him a fictitious energy. He had fought depression and despair in all his conscious moments, never admitted that the devastation in his body was mortal. With but a remnant of his former superb strength, and emaciated beyond recognition, he attended a banquet on the night preceding his departure, and on the following morning stood up in his sledge and acknowledged the God-speed of the population of Irkutsk assembled in the square before the palace of the Governor. All his life he had excited interest wherever he went, but never to such a degree as on that last journey when he made his desperate fight for life and happiness.

XXVII

THE snow rarely falls in Krasnoiarsk. It is a little oasis in the great winter desert of Siberia. Rezánov, his face turned to the window, could see the red banks on the opposite side of the river. The sun transformed the gilded eupolas and crosses into dazzling points of light, and the sky above the spires and towers, the stately square and narrow dirty streets of the bustling little capital, was as blue and unflecked as that which arched so high above a land where Castilian roses grew, and one woman among a gay and thoughtless people dreamed, with all the passion of her splendid youth, of the man to whom she had pledged an eternal troth. Rezánov's mind was clear in those last moments, but something of the serenity and the selfishness of death had already descended upon him. He heard with indifference the sobs of Jón, crouched at the foot of his bed. Tears and regrets were a part of the general futility of life, insignificant enough at the grand threshold of death.

No doubt that his great schemes would die with him, and were he remembered at all it would be as a dreamer; or as a failure because he had died before accomplishing what his brain and energy and enthusiasm alone could force to fruition. None realized better than he the paucity of initiative and executive among the characteristics of the Slav. What mattered it? He had had glimpses more than once of the apparently illogical sequence of life, the vanity of human effort, the wanton cruelty of Nature. He had known men struck down before in the maturity of their usefulness, cities destroyed by earthquake or hurricane in the fairest and most promising of their days: public men, priests, parents, children, wantons, criminals, blotted out with equal

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impartiality by a brutal force that would seem to have but a casual use for the life she flung broadcast on her planets. Man was the helpless victim of Nature, a calf in a tiger's paws. If she overlooked him, or swept him contemptuously into the class of her favorites, well and good; otherwise he was her sport, the plaything of her idler moments. Those that cried "But why?" "What reason?" "What use?" were those that had never looked over the walls of their ego at the great dramatic moments in the career of Nature, when she made immortal fame for herself at the expense of millions of pigmies.

And if his energies, his talents, his usefulness, were held of no account, at least he could look back upon a past when he would have seemed to be one of the few supreme favorites of the forces that shaped man's life and destiny. Until he had started from Kronstadt four years before on a voyage that had humiliated his proud spirit more than once, and undermined as splendid a physique as ever was granted to even a Russian, he had rolled the world under his foot. With an appearance and a personal magnetism, gifts of mind and manner and character that would have commanded attention amid the general flaccidity of his race and conquered life without the great social advantages he inherited, he had enjoyed power and pleasure to a degree that would have spoiled a coarser nature long since. True, the time had come when he had cared little for any of his endowments save as a means to great ends, when all his energies had concentrated in the determination to live a life of the highest possible usefulness—without which man's span was but existence—his ambitions had cohered and been driven steadily toward a permanent niche in history; then paled and dissolved for an hour in the glorious vision of human happiness.

And wholly as he might realize man's insignificance amid the blind forces of nature, he could accept it philosophically and die with his soul uncorroded by misanthropy, that final and uncompromising admission of

failure. The misanthrope was the supreme failure of life because he had not the intelligence to realize, or could not reconcile himself to, the incomplete condition of human nature. Man was made up of little qualities, and aspirations for great ones. Many yielded in the struggle and sank into impotent discontent among the small material things of life, instead of uplifting themselves with the picture of the inevitable future when development had run its course, and indulgently pitying the children of their own period who so often made life hateful with their greed, selfishness, snobbery—most potent obstacle to human endeavor—and injustice. The bad judgment of the mass! How many careers it had balked, if not ruined, with its poor ideals, its mean heroes, its instinctive avoidance of superior qualities foreign to itself, its contemptible desire to be identified with a fashion. It was this low standard of the crowd that induced misanthropy in many otherwise brave spirits who lacked the insight to discern the divine spark underneath, the persistence, sure of reward, to fight their way to this spark and reveal it to the gaze of astonished and flattered humanity. Rezánov's very arrogance had led him to regard the mass of mankind as but one degree removed from the nursery; his good nature and philosophical spirit to treat them with an indulgence that kept sourness out of his cynicism and inevitably recurring weariness and disgust; his ardent imagination had consoled itself with the vision of a future when man should live in a world made reasonable by the triumph of ideals that now lurked half ashamed in the high spaces of the human mind.

He looked back in wonder at the moment of wild regret and protest—the bitterer in its silence—when they had told him he must die; when in the last rally of the vital forces he had believed his will was still strong enough to command his ravaged body, to propel his brain, still teeming with a vast and complicated future, his heart, still warm and insistent with the image it cherished, on to the ultimates of ambition and love.

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How brief it had been, that last cry of mortality, with its accompaniment of furious wonder at his unseemly and senseless cutting off. In the adjustment and readjustment of political and natural forces the world ambled on philosophically, fulfilling its inevitable destiny.

If he had not been beyond humor, he would have smiled at the idea that in the face of all eternity it mattered what nation on one little planet eventually possessed a fragment called California. To him that fair land was empty and purposeless save for one figure, and even of her he thought with the terrible calm of dissolution. During these last months of illness and isolation he had been less lonely than at any time of his life save during those few weeks in California, for he had lived with her incessantly in spirit; and in that subtle imaginative communion had pressed close to a profound and complex soul, revealed before only in flashes to a vision astray in the confusion of the senses. He had felt that her response to his passion was far more vital and enduring than dwelt in the capacity of most women; he had appreciated her gifts of mind, her piquant variousness that scotched monotony, the admirable characteristics that would give a man repose and content in his leisure, and subtly advance his career. But in those long reveries, at the head of his forlorn caravan or in the desolate months of convalescence, he had arrived at an absolute understanding of what she herself had divined while half comprehending.

Theirs was one of the few immortal loves that reveal the rarely sounded deeps of the soul while in its frail tenement on earth; and he harbored not a doubt that their love was stronger than mortality and that their ultimate union was decreed. Meanwhile, she would suffer, no one but he could dream how completely, but her strong soul would conquer, and she would live the life she had visioned in moments of despair; not of cloistered selfishness, but of incomparable usefulness to her little world; and far happier, in her eternal youthfulness of

heart, in that divine life of the imagination where he must always be with her as she had known him briefly at his best, than in the blunt commonplaceness of daily existence, the routine and disillusionment of the world. Perhaps—who knew?—he had, after all, given her the best that man can offer to a woman of exalted nature; instead of taking again with his left hand what his right had bestowed; completed the great gift of life with the priceless beacon of death.

How unlike was life to the old Greek tragedies! He recalled his prophetic sense of impending happiness, success, triumph, as he entered California, the rejuvenescence of his spirit in the renewal of his wasted forces even before he loved the woman. Every event of the past year, in spite of the obstacles that mortal must expect, had marched with his ambitions and desires, and straight toward a future that would have given him the most coveted of all destinies, a station in history. There had not been a hint that his brain, so meaningly and consummately equipped, would perish in the ruins of his body in less than a twelvemonth from that fragrant morning when he had entered the home of Concha Argüello tingling with a pagan joy in mere existence, a sudden rush of desire for the keen wild happiness of youth——

His eyes wandered from the bright cross above the little cemetery where he was to lie, and contracted with an expression of wonder. Where had Jón found Castilian roses in this barren land? No man had ever been more blest in a servant, but could even he—here——With the last triumph of will over matter he raised his head, his keen searching gaze noting every detail of the room, bare and unlovely save for its altar and ikons, its kneeling priests and nuns. His eyes expanded, his nostrils quivered. As he sank down in the embrace of that final delusion, his unconquerably sanguine spirit flared high before a vision of eternal and unthinkable happiness.

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So died Rezánov; and with him the hope of Russians and the hindrance of Americans in the west; and the mortal happiness and earthly dross of the saintliest of California's women.

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THE DOOMSWOMAN

TO
STEPHEN FRANKLIN

THE DOOMSWOMAN

CHAPTER I

IT was at Governor Alvarado's house in Monterey that Chonita first knew of Diego Estenega. I had told him much of her, but never had dared to mention the name of Estenega in the presence of an Iturbi y Moncada.

Chonita came to Monterey to stand god-mother to the child of Alvarado and of her friend Doña Martina, his wife. She arrived the morning before the christening, and no one thought to tell her that Estenega was to be godfather. The house was full of girls, relatives of the young mother, gathered for the ceremony and subsequent week of festivities. Benicia, my little one, was at the rancho with Ysabel Herrera, and I was staying with the Alvarados. So many were the guests that Chonita and I slept together. We had not seen each other for a year, and had so much to say that we did not sleep at all. She was ten years younger than I, but we were as close friends as she, with her alternate frankness and reserve, would permit. But I had spent several months of each year since childhood at her home in Santa Barbara, and I knew her better than she knew herself; when, later, I read her journal, I found little in it to surprise me, but much to fill and cover with shapely form the skeleton of the story which passed in greater part before my eyes.

We were discussing the frivolous mysteries of dress, if I remember aright, when she laid her hand on my mouth suddenly.

"Hush!" she said.

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A caballero serenaded his lady at midnight in Monterey.

The tinkle of a guitar, the jingling of spurs, fell among the strong tones of a man's voice.

Chonita had been serenaded until she had fled to the mountains for sleep, but she crept to the foot of the bed and knelt there, her hand at her throat. A door opened, and, one by one, out of the black beyond, five white-robed forms flitted into the room. They looked like puffs of smoke from a burning moon. The heavy wooden shutters were open, and the room was filled with a cold light.

The girls waltzed on the bare floor, grouped themselves in mock-dramatic postures, then, overcome by the strange magnetism of the singer, fell into motionless attitudes, listening intently. How well I remember that picture, although I have almost forgotten the names of the girls!

In the middle of the room two slender figures embraced each other, their black hair falling loosely over their white gowns. On the window-step knelt a tall girl, her head pensively supported by her hand, a black shawl draped gracefully about her; at her feet sat a girl with head bowed to her knees. Between the two groups was a solitary figure, kneeling with hand pressed to the wall and face uplifted.

When the voice ceased I struck a match, and five pairs of little hands applauded enthusiastically. He sang them another song, then galloped away.

"It is Don Diego Estenega," said one of the girls. "He rarely sings, but I have heard him before."

"An Estenega!" exclaimed Chonita.

"Yes; of the North, you know. His Excellency thinks there is no man in the Californias like him, so bold and so clever. You remember the books that were burned by the priests when the Governor was a boy, because he had dared to read them? No? Well, when Diego Estenega heard of that, he made his father send to Boston and Mexico for those books and many more, and took

them up to his redwood forests in the north, far away from the priests. And they say he had read other books before, although such a lad; his father had brought them from Spain, and never cared much for the priests. And he has been to Mexico and America and Europe! God of my soul! it is said that he knows more than his Excellency himself, that his mind works faster. Ay! but there was a time when he was wild, when the mescal burnt his throat like hornets and the aguardiente was like scorpions in his brain; but that was long ago, before he was twenty; now he is thirty-four. He amuses himself sometimes with the girls—*valgame Dios!* he has made hot tears flow; but I suppose we do not know enough for him, for he marries none. Ay! but he has a charm."

"Like what does he look? A beautiful caballero, I suppose, with eyes that melt and a mouth that trembles like a woman in the palsy."

"Ay, no, my Chonita; you are wrong. He is not beautiful at all. He is rather haggard, and wears no mustache, and he has the profile of the great man, fine and aquiline and severe, save when he smiles, and then sometimes he looks kind and sometimes he looks like a devil. He has not the beauty of color; his hair is brown, I think, and his eyes are gray, and set far back; but how they flash! I think they could burn if they looked too long. He is tall and straight and very strong, not so indolent as most of our men. They call him the American because he moves so quickly and gets so cross when people do not think fast enough. He thinks like lightning strikes. Ay! they all say that he will be Governor in his time; that he would have been long ago, but he has been away so much. It must be that he has seen and admired you, my Chonita, and discovered your grating. You are happy that you too have read the books. You and he will be great friends, I know!"

"Yes!" exclaimed Chonita scornfully. "It is likely. You have forgotten—perhaps—the enmity between the

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Capulets and the Montagues was a sallow flame to the bitter hatred, born of jealousy in love, politics, and social precedence, which exists between the Estenegas and the Iturbi y Moneadas?"

Ah! We took our California seriously in those days.

CHAPTER II

DELFINA, the first child of Alvarado, born in the purple at the Governor's mansion in Monterey, in the year of our Lord 1840, was about to be baptized with all the pomp and ceremony of the Church and time. Doña Martina, the wife of a year, was unable to go to the church, but lay beneath her lace and satin coverlet, her heavy black hair half covering the other side of the bed. Beside her stood the nurse, a fat, brown, high-beaked old crow, holding a mass of grunting lace. I stood at the foot of the bed, admiring the picture.

"Be careful for the sun, Tomasa," said the mother. "Her eyes must be strong, like the Alvarados'—black and keen and strong."

"Si, señora."

"And let her not smother, nor yet take cold. She must grow tall and strong—like the Alvarados."

"Si, señora."

"Where is his Excellency?"

"I am here." And Alvarado entered the room. He looked amused, and probably had overheard the conversation. He justified, however, the admiration of his young wife. His tall military figure had the perfect poise and suggestion of power natural to a man whose genius had been recognized by the Mexican government before he had entered his twenties. The clean-cut face, with its calm profile and fiery eyes, was not that of the Washington of his emulation, and I never understood why he chose so tame a model. Perhaps because of the meagerness of that early proscribed literature; or did the title, "Father of His Country," appeal irresistibly to that lofty and doomed ambition?

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He passed his hand over his wife's long white fingers, but did not offer her any other caress in my presence.

"How do you feel?"

"Well; but I shall be lonely. Do not stay long at the church, no? How glad I am that Chonita came in time for the christening! What a beautiful *comadre* she will be! I have just seen her. Ay, poor Diego! he will fall in love with her; and what then?"

"It would have been better had she come too late, I think. To avoid asking Diego to stand for my first child was impossible, for he is the man of men to me. To avoid asking Doña Chonita was equally impossible, I suppose, and it will be painful for both. He serenaded her last night, not knowing who she was, but having seen her at her grating; he only returned yesterday. I hope she plants no thorns in his heart."

"Perhaps they will marry and bind the wounds," suggested the woman.

"An Estenega and an Iturbi y Moneada will not marry. He might forget, for he is passionate and of a nature to break down barriers when a wish is dear; but she has all the wrongs of all the Iturbi y Moneadas on her white shoulders, and all their pride in the carriage of her head; to say nothing of that brother whom she adores. She learned this morning that it was Diego's determined opposition that kept Reinaldo out of the Departmental Junta, and meets him in no tender frame of mind——"

Doña Martina raised her hand. Chonita stood in the doorway. She was quite beautiful enough to plant thorns where she listed. Her tall supple figure was clothed in white, and over her gold hair—warm and bright, but without a tinge of red—she wore a white lace mantilla. Her straight narrow brows and heavy lashes were black; but her skin was very white. Her nose was finely cut the arch almost indiscernible; and she had the most sculptured mouth I have ever seen. Her long eyes were green, dark, luminous. Sometimes they had the look of a child, sometimes she allowed them

to flash with the fire of an animated spirit. But the expression she chose to cultivate was that associated with crowned head and sceptered hand; and sure no queen had ever looked so calm, so inexorable, so haughty, so terribly clear of vision. She never posed—for any one, at least, but herself. For some reason—a youthful reason probably—the iron in her nature was most admired by her. Wherefore—also, as she had the power, as twin, to heal and curse—I had named her The Doomswoman, and by this name she was known far and wide. By the lower class of Santa Barbara she was called The Golden Señorita, on account of her hair and of her father's vast wealth.

"Come," she said, "everyone is waiting. Do not you hear the voices?"

The windows were closed, but through them came a murmur like that of a pine forest.

The Governor motioned to the nurse to follow Chonita and me, and she trotted after us, her ugly face beaming with pride of position. Was not in her arms the oldest-born of a new generation of Alvarados? the daughter of the Governor of The California? Her smock, embroidered with silk, was new, and looked whiter than sea spray against her bare brown arms and face. Her short red satin skirt, a gift of her happy lady's, was the finest ever worn by exultant nurse. About her stringy old throat was a gold chain; bright red roses were woven in her black reboso. I saw her admire Chonita's stately figure, with scornful reserve of the colorless gown.

We were followed in a moment by the Governor, adjusting his collar and smoothing his hair. As he reached the doorway at the front of the house he was greeted with a shout from assembled Monterey. The plaza was gay with beaming faces and bright attire. The men, women, and children of the people were on foot, a mass of color on the opposite side of the plaza; the women in gaudy cotton frocks girt with silken sashes, tawdry jewels and spotless camisas, the coquet-

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tish reboso draping with equal grace faces old and brown, faces round and olive; the men in glazed sombreros, short calico jackets and trousers; Indians wound up in gala blankets. In the foreground, on prancing silver-trapped horses, were caballeros and doñas, laughing and coquetting, looking down in triumph upon the dueñas and parents who rode older and milder mustangs and shook brown knotted fingers at heedless youth. The young men had ribbons twisted in their long black hair, and silver eagles on their soft gray sombreros. Their velvet serapes were embroidered with gold; the velvet knee-breeches were laced with gold or silver cord over fine white linen; long deerskin botas were gartered with vivid ribbon; flaunting sashes bound their slender waists, knotted over the hip. The girls and young married women wore black or white mantillas, the silken lace of Spain, regardless of the sun which might darken their Castilian fairness. Their gowns were of flowered silk or red or yellow satin, the waist long and pointed, the skirt full; jeweled buckles of tiny slippers flashed beneath the hem. The old people were in rich dress of sober color. A few Americans were there in the ugly garb of their country, a blot on the picture.

At the door, just in front of the cavalcade, stood General Vallejo's carriage, the only one in California, sent from Sonoma for the occasion. Beside it were three superbly trapped horses.

The Governor placed the swelling nurse in the carriage, then glanced about him. "Where is Estenega?—and the Castros?" he asked.

"There are Don José and Doña Modeste Castro," said Chonita.

The crowd had parted suddenly, and two men and a woman rode toward the Governor. One of the men was tall and dark, and his somber military attire became the stern sadness of his face. Castro was not Comandante-General of the army at that time, but his bearing was as imperious in that year of 1840 as when six years later the American Occupation closed forever the career of a

man made in derision for greatness. At his right rode his wife, one of the most queenly beauties of her time, small as she was in stature. Every woman's eye turned to her at once; she was our leader of fashion, and we all copied the gowns that came to her from the city of Mexico.

But Chonita gave no heed to the Castros. She fixed her cold direct regard on the man who rode with them, and who, she knew, must be Diego Estenega, for he was their guest. She was curious to see this enemy of her house, the political rival of her brother, the owner of the voice which had given her the first thrill of her life. He was dressed as plainly as Castro, and had none of the rich southern beauty of the caballeros. His hair was cut short like Alvarado's, and his face was thin and almost sallow. But the life that was in that face, the passion, the intelligence, the kindness, the humor, the grim determination! And what splendid vitality was in his tall thin figure, and nervous activity under the repose of his carriage! I remember I used to think in those days that Diego Estenega could conquer the world if he wished, although I suspected that he lacked one quality of the great rulers of men—inexorable cruelty.

From the moment his horse carried him into the plaza he did not remove his eyes from Chonita's face. She lowered hers angrily after a moment. As he reached the house he sprang to the ground, and Alvarado presented the sponsors. He lifted his cap and bowed, but not so low as the caballeros who were wont to prostrate themselves before her. They murmured the usual form of salutation:

"At your feet, señorita."

"I appreciate the honor of your acquaintance."

"It is my duty and pleasure to lift you to your horse." And, still holding his cap in his hand, he led her to one of the three horses which stood beside the carriage; with little assistance she sprang to its back, and he mounted the one reserved for him.

The cavalcade started. First the carriage, then Al-

varado and myself, followed by the sponsors, the Castros, the members of the Departmental Junta and their wives, then the caballeros and the doñas, the old people and the Americans; the populace trudging gaily in the rear, keeping good pace with the riders, who were held in check by a fragment of pulp too young to be jolted.

"You never have been in Monterey before, señorita, I understand," said Estenega to Chonita. No situation could embarrass him.

"No; once they thought to send me to the convent here—to Doña Concha Argiello—but it was so far, and my mother does not like to travel. So Doña Concha came to us for a year, and, after, I studied with an instructor who came from Mexico to educate my brother and me." She had no intention of being communicative with Diego Estenega, but his keen reflective gaze confused her, and she took refuge in words.

"Doña Eustaquia tells me that, unlike most of our women, you have read many books. Few Californian women care for anything but to look beautiful and to marry—not, however, being unique in that respect. Would you not rather live in our capital? You are so far away, down there, and there are but few of the *gente de razon*, no?"

"We are well satisfied, señor, and we are gay when we wish. There are ten families in the town, and many rancheros within a hundred leagues. They think nothing of coming to our balls. And we have ground religious processions, and bull-fights, and races. We have beautiful cañons for meriendas; and I could dance every night if I wished. We are few, but we are quite as gay and quite as happy as you in your capital." The pride of the Iturbi y Moncadas and of the Barbariña flashed in her eyes, then made way for anger under the amused glance of Estenega.

"Oh, of course!" he said teasingly. "But then you are to Monterey what Monterey is to the city of Mexico. Pardon me, señorita; I would not anger you for all the gold which is said to lie like rocks under our Californias, if

it be true that certain padres hold that mighty secret. (God! how I should like to get one by the throat and throttle it out of him!) Pardon me again, señorita; I was going to say that you may be pleased to know there is little magnificence where my ranchos are—high on the coast, among the redwoods. I live in a house made of big ugly logs, unpainted. There are no cañadales in the cold depths of those redwood forests, and the ocean beats against ragged cliffs. Only at Fort Ross, in her log palace, does the beautiful Russian Princess Hélène Rotschev strive occasionally to make herself and others forget that the forest is not the Bois of her beloved Paris, that in it the grizzly and the panther hunger for her, and that an Indian chieftain, mad with love for the only fair-haired woman he has ever seen, is determined to carry her off——”

“Tell me! tell me!” cried Chonita eagerly, forgetting her rôle and her enemy. “What is that? I do not know the princess, although she has sent me word many times to visit her. Did an Indian try to carry her off?”

“It happened only the other day. Prince Solano, perhaps you have heard, is chief of all the tribes of Sonoma, Valley of the Moon. He is a handsome animal, with a strong will and remarkable organizing abilities. One day I was entertaining the Rotschevs at dinner when Solano suddenly flung the door open and strode into the room; we are old friends, and my servants do not stand on ceremony with him. As he caught sight of the princess he halted abruptly, stared at her for a moment, much as the first man may have stared at the first woman, then turned and left the house, sprang on his mustang, and galloped away. The princess, you must know, is as blonde as only a Russian can be, and an extremely pretty woman, small and dainty. No wonder the mighty prince of darkness took fire. She was much amused. So was Rotschev, and he joked her the rest of the evening. Before he left, however, I had a word with him alone, and warned him not to let the princess stray beyond the walls of the fortress. That same night

I sent a courier to General Vallejo—who, fortunately, was at Sonoma—bidding him watch Solano. And, sure enough—the day I left for Monterey the Princess Hélène was in hysterics, Rotchev was swearing like a madman, and a soldier was at every carronade; word had just come from General Vallejo that he had that morning intercepted Solano in his triumphant march, at the head of six tribes, upon Fort Ross, and sent him flying back to his mountain-top in disorder and bitterness of spirit.”

“That is very interesting!” cried Chonita. “I like that. What an experience those Russians have had! That terrible tragedy—Ah, I remember, it was you who were to have aided Natalie Ivanhov¹ in her escape——”

“Ah!” said Estenega. “Do not speak of that. Here we are. At your service, señorita.” He sprang to the whaleboned pavement in front of the little church facing the blue bay and surrounded by the gray ruins of the old Presidio, and lifted her down.

Chonita, recalled, and angry with herself for having been beguiled by her enemy, took the infant from the nurse’s arms and carried it fearfully up the aisle. Estenega, walking beside her, regarded her meditatively.

“What is she?” he thought, “this Californian woman with her hair of gold and her unmistakable intellect, her marble face crossed now and again by the animation of the clever American woman? What an anomaly to find on the shores of the Pacific! All I had heard of The Doomsdame, The Golden Señorita, gave me no idea of this. What a pity that our houses are at war! She is not maternal, at all events; I never saw a baby held so awkwardly. What a poise of head! She looks better fitted for tragedy than for this little comedy of life in the Californias. A sovereignty would suit her, were it not for her eyes. They are not quite so calm and just and inexorable as the rest of her face. She would not even make a good household tyrant, like Doña Jacoba

¹ People merely referred to in this book are characters in “The Splendid Idle Forties.”

Duncan. Unquestionably she is religious, and swaddled in all the traditions of her race; but her eyes—they are at odds with all the rest of her. They are not lovely eyes; they lack softness and languor and tractability; their expression changes too often, and they mirror too much intelligence for loveliness, but they never will be old eyes, and they never will cease to look. And they are the eyes best worth looking into that I have ever seen. No, a sovereignty would not suit her at all; a salon might. But, like a few of us, she is some years ahead of her sphere. Glory be to the Californias—of the future, when we are dust and our children have found the gold!"

The baby was nearly baptized by the time he had finished his soliloquy. She had kicked alarmingly when the salt was laid on her tongue, and squalled under the deluge of water which gave her her name and also wet Chonita's sleeve. The godmother longed for the ceremony to be over; but it was more protracted than usual, owing to the importance of the restless object on the pillow in her weary arms. When the last word was said, she handed pillow and baby to the nurse with a fervent sigh of relief, which made her appear girlish and natural.

After Estenega had lifted her to her horse, he dried her sleeve with his handkerchief. He lingered over the task; the cavalcade and populace went on without them, and when they started they were in the rearward of the chattering crowd.

"Do you know what I thought as I stood beside you in the church?" he asked.

"No," she said indifferently. "I hope you prayed for the fortune of the little one."

"I did not; nor did you. You were too afraid you would drop it. I was thinking how unmotherly, I had almost said unwomanly, you looked. You were made for the great world—the restless world, where people fly faster from monotony than from a tidal wave."

She looked at him with cold dignity, but flushed a

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little. "I am not unwomanly, señor, although I confess I do not understand babies, and do detest to sew. But if I ever marry I shall be a good wife and mother. No Spanish woman was ever otherwise, for every Spanish woman has had a good mother for example."

"You have said exactly what you should have said, prompted by the inborn principles and sentiments of the Spanish woman. I should be interested to know what your individual sentiments are. But you misunderstand me. I said that you were too good for the average lot of woman. You are a woman, not a doll; an intelligence, not a bundle of shallow emotions and transient desires. You should have a larger destiny."

She gave him a swift sidelong flash from eyes that suddenly looked childish and eager.

"It is true," she said frankly, "I have no desire to marry and have many children. My father has never said to me, 'Thou must marry;' and I have sometimes thought I should say 'No' when that time came. For the present I am contented with my books and to ride about the country on a wild horse; but perhaps—I do not know—I may not always be contented with that. Sometimes when reading Shakespeare I have imagined myself each of those women in turn. But generally, of course, I have thought little of being any one but myself. What else could I be here?"

"Nothing; excepting a Jeanne d'Are when the Americans sweep down upon us. But that would be only for a day; we should be such easy prey. If I could put you to sleep and awaken you fifty years hence, when California is a modern civilization! God speed the Americans! Therein lies our only chance."

"What!" she cried. "You—you would have the Americans? You—a Californian! But you are an Estenega; that explains everything."

"I am a Californian," he said, "but I hope I have acquired some common sense in roving about the world. The women of California are admirable in every way—chaste, strong of character, industrious, devoted wives

and mothers, born with sufficient capacity for small pleasures. But what are our men? Idle, thriftless, unambitious, too lazy to walk across the street, but with a horse for every step, sleeping all day in a hammock, gambling and drinking all night. They are the natural followers of a race of men who came here to force fortune out of an unbroken country with little to help them but brains and will. The great effort produced great results; therefore there is nothing for their sons to do, and they luxuriously do nothing. What will the next generation be? Our women will marry Americans—respect for men who are men will overcome prejudice—the crossed blood will fight for a generation or two, then a race will be born worthy of California. Why are our few great men so very great to us? What have men of exceptional talent to fight down in the Californias except the barriers to its development? In England or the United States they still would be great men—Alvarado and Castro, at least—but they would have to work harder.”

Chonita, in spite of her disapproval and her blood, looked at him with interest. His ideas and language were strikingly unlike the sentimental rhetoric of the caballeros.

“It is as you say,” she admitted; “but the Californian’s highest duty is loyalty to his country. Ours is a double duty, isolated as we are on this far strip of land, away from all other civilization. We should be more contemptible than Indians if we were not true to our flag.”

“No wonder that you and that famous patriot of ours, Doña Eustaquia Ortega, are bonded friends. I doubt if you could hate as well as she. You have no such violence in your nature; you could neither love nor hate very hard. You would love (if you loved at all) with majesty and serenity, and hate with chill severity.” While he spoke he watched her intently.

She met his gaze unflinchingly. “True, señor; I am no ‘bundle of shallow emotions,’ nor have I lion in me, like

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Eustaquia. I am a creature of deliberation, not of impulse: I love and hate as duty dictates."

"You are by nature the most impulsive woman I ever saw," he said, much amused, "and Eustaquia's lion is a kitten to the one that sleeps in you. You have cold deliberation enough, but it is manufactured, and the result of pretty hard work at that. Like all edifices reared without a foundation, it will fall with a crash some day, and the fragments will be of very little use to you." And there the conversation ended; they had reached the plaza, and a babel of voices surrounded them. Governor Alvarado stood on the upper corridor (verandah) of his house, throwing handfuls of small gold coins among the people, who were shrieking with delight. The girl guests mingled with them, seeing that no palm went home empty. Beside the Governor sat Doña Martina, radiant with pride, and behind her stood the nurse, holding the infant on its pillow.

"We had better go to the house as soon as possible," said Estenega. "It is nearly time for the bull-bear fight, and we must have good seats."

They forced their way through the crowd, dismounted at the door, and went up to the corridor. The Castros and I were already there, with a number of other invited guests. The women sat in chairs, close to the corridor railing; several rows of men stood behind them.

The plaza was a jagged circle surrounded by dwelling-houses, some one story in height, others with overhanging balconies; from it radiated five streets. All corridors were crowded with splendidly dressed men and women of the aristocracy; large black fans were waving; every eye was flashing expectantly; the people stood on platforms which had been erected in four of the streets.

Amid the shouts of the spectators, two vaqueros, dressed in black velvet short-clothes, dazzling linen, and stiff black sombreros, tinkling bells attached to their trappings, jingling spurs on their heels, galloped into the plaza, driving a large aggressive bull. They chased him about in a circle, swinging their reatas,

dodging his onslaughts, then rode out, and four others entered, dragging an unwilling bear by a reata tied to each of its legs. By means of a long chain and much dexterity they fastened the two beasts together, freed the legs of the bear, then retired to the entrance to await events. But the bull and the bear would not fight. The latter arose on his haunches and regarded his enemy warily. The bull appeared to disdain the bear as too small game; he but lowered his horns and pawed the ground. The spectators grew impatient. The brave caballeros and dainty doñas wanted blood. They tapped their feet and murmured ominously. As for the populace, it howled for slaughter. Governor Alvarado made a sign to one of the vaqueros; the man rushed abruptly upon the bull and hit him a sharp blow across the nose with the cruel quirt. The bull's dignity vanished. With the quadrupedian capacity for measuring distance, he inferred that the blow had been inflicted by the bear, who sat some twenty feet away, mildly licking his paws. He made a savage onset. The bear, with the dexterity of a vaquero, leaped aside and sprang upon the assailant's neck, his teeth meeting argumentatively in the rope-like tendons. The bull roared with pain and rage, and attempted to shake him off; but he hung on; both lost their footing and rolled over and over amid clouds of dust, a mighty noise, and enough blood to satisfy the early thirst of the beholders. Then the bull wrenched himself free; before the mountain visitor could scramble to his feet, he fixed him with his horns and tossed him on high. As the bear came down on his back with a thud and a snap, which would have satisfied a bull less anxious to show what a bull could do, the victor rushed upon the corpse, kicked and stamped and bit until the blood spouted into his eyes, and pulp and dust were indistinguishable. Then how the delighted spectators clapped their hands and cried "Brava!" to the bull, who pranced about the plaza, dragging the carcass of the bear after him, his head high, his big eyes red and rolling! The women tore off their rebosos and waved

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them like banners, smashed their fans, and stamped their little feet; the men whirled their sombreros with supple wrists. But the bull was not satisfied; he pawed the ground with demanding hoofs, and the vaqueros galloped into the ring with another bear. Nor had they time to detach their reatas before the bull was upon the second antagonist, and they were obliged to retire in haste.

Estenega, who stood between Chonita and myself, watched The Doomsman attentively. Her lips were compressed fiercely; for a moment they bore a strange resemblance to his own as I had seen them at times. Her nostrils were expanded, her lids half covered her eyes. "She has cruelty in her," he murmured to me as the first battle finished; "and it was her imperious wish that the bull should win, because he is the more lordly animal. She has no sympathy for the poor bundle of hair and quivering flesh that bounded on the mountain yesterday. Has she brutality in her?—just enough——"

"Brava! Brava!" The women were on their feet; even Chonita for the moment forgot herself, and beat the railing with her small fist. Another bear had been impaled and tossed and trampled. The bull, panting from his exertions, dashed about the plaza, still dragging his first victim after him. Suddenly he stopped; the blood gushed from his nostrils; he shivered like a skeleton hanging in the wind, then fell in an ignominious heap—dead.

"A warning, Diego," I said, rising and shaking my fan at him. "Be not too ambitious, else wilt thou die of thy victories. And do not love the polar star," I murmured in his ear, "lest thou set fire to it and fall to ashes thyself."

CHAPTER III

IN the long dining-room, opening upon the large high-walled garden at the back of the Governor's house, a feast was spread for fifty people. Doña Martina sat for a little time at the head of the table, her yellow gown almost hidden by the masses of hair which her small head could not support. Castro was on one side of her, Estenega on the other, Chonita by her arch-enemy. A large bunch of artificial flowers was at each plate, and the table was loaded with yellowed chickens sitting proudly in scarlet gravy, tongues covered with walnut sauce, grilled meats, tamales, mounds of tortillas, and dulces.

Alvarado, at the lower end of the table, sat between Doña Modeste Castro and myself; and between the extremes of the board were faces glowing, beautiful, ugly, but without exception fresh and young. From all, the mantilla and serape had been removed, jewels sparkled in the lace shirts of the men, white throats were encircled by the invariable necklace of Baja Californian pearls. Chonita alone wore a string of black pearls. I never saw her without it.

Doña Martina took little part in the talk and laughter, and after a time slipped away, motioning to Chonita to take her place. The conversation turned upon war and politics, and in its course Estenega, looking from Chonita to Castro with a smile of good-natured irony, said:

"Doña Chonita is of your opinion, coronel, that California was the direct gift of Heaven to the Spaniards, and that the Americans cannot have us."

Castro raised his glass to the *comadre*. "Doña Chonita has the loyal bosom of all Californian women. Our men love better the olive of peace than the flavor of

discord; but did the bandoleros dare to approach our peaceful shores with dastardly intent to rob, then, thanks be to God, I know that every man among them would fight for this virgin land. You, too, Diego, you would unsheathe your sword, in spite of your pretended admiration of the Americans."

Estenega raised his shoulders. "Possibly. But in American occupation lies the hope of California. What have we done with it in our seventy years of possession? Built a few missions, which are rotting, terrorized or cajoled a few thousand worthless Indians into civilized imbecility, and raised a respectable number of horses and cattle. Our hide and tallow trade is only good; the Russians have monopolized the fur trade; we continue to raise cattle and horses because it would be an exertion to suppress them; and meanwhile we dawdle away our lives very pleasurably, while a magnificent territory, filled with gold and richer still in soil, lies idle beneath our feet. Nature never works without a plan. She compounded a wonderful countr and she created a wonderful people to develop it. She has allowed us to drone on it for a little time, but it was not made for us; and I am sufficiently interested in California to wish to see her rise from her sleep and feel and live in every part of her." He turned suddenly to Chonita. "If I were a sculptor," he said, "I should use you as a model for a statue of California. I have the somewhat whimsical idea that you are the human embodiment of her."

Before she could muster her startled and angry faculties for reply, before Estenega had finished speaking, Castro brought his open palm down on the table, his eyes blazing.

"Oh, execrable profanation!" he cried. "Oh, unheard-of perfidy! Is it possible that a man calling himself a Californian could give utterance to such sentiments? Oh, abomination! You would invite, welcome, uphold the American adventurer? You would tear apart the bosom of your country under pretence of doctoring its evils? You would cast this fair gift of Almighty God

at the feet of American swine? Oh, Diego! Diego! This comes of the heretic books you have read. It is better to have heart than brain."

"True; the palpitations do not last as long. We have had proof which I need not recapitulate that to preserve California to herself she must be tied fast to Mexico, otherwise would she die of anarchy or fall a prey to the first invader. So far so good. But what has Mexico done for California? Nothing; and she will do less. She is a mother who has forgotten the child she put out to nurse. England and France and Russia would do as little. But the United States, young and ambitious, will give her greedy attention, and out of their greed will California's good be wrought. And although they sweep us from the earth, they will plant fruit where they found weeds."

Don José pushed back his chair violently and left the table. Estenega turned to Chonita and found her pallid, her nostrils tense, her eyes flashing.

"Traitor!" she articulated. "I hate you! And it was you—you—who kept my loyal brother from serving his country in the Departmental Junta. He is as full of fire and patriotism as Castro; and yet you, whose blood is ice, could be a member of the Electoral College and defeat the election of a man who is as much an honor to his country as you are a shame."

He smiled a little cruelly, but without anger or shame in his face. "Señorita," he said, "I defeated your brother because I did not believe him to be of any use to his country. He would only have been in the way as a member of the Junta, and an older and wiser man wanted the place. Your brother has Don José's enthusiasm without his magnetism and remarkable executive power. He is too young to have had experience, and has done neither reading nor thinking. Therefore, I did my best to defeat him. Pardon my rudeness, señorita; ascribe it to revenge for calling me a traitor."

"You—you——" she stammered, then bent her head over her plate, her Spanish dignity aghast at the threat-

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ening tears. Her hand hung clinched at her side. Diego took it in spite of resistance, and, opening the rigid fingers, bent his head beneath the board and kissed them.

"I believe you are somewhat of a woman, after all," he said.

CHAPTER IV

THE party deserted the table for the garden, there to idle until evening should give them the dance. All of the men, and most of the women, smoked cigaritos, the women using the gold or silver holder, supporting it between the thumb and finger. The high walls of the garden were covered with the delicate fragrant pink Castilian roses, and the girls plucked them and laid them in their hair.

"Does it look well, Don Diego?" asked one girl, holding her head coquettishly on one side.

"It looked better on its vine," he said absently. He was looking for Chonita, who had disappeared. "Roses are like women: they lose their subtler fragrance when plucked; but, like women, their heads always droop invitingly."

"I do not understand you, Don Diego," said the girl, fixing her wide innocent eyes on the young man's inscrutable face. "What do you mean?"

"That thou art sweeter than Castilian roses," he said, and passed on. "And how is your little one?" he asked a young matron whose lithe beauty had won his admiration a year ago, but to whom maternity had been too generous. She raised her soft brown eyes, out of which the coquettish sparkle had gone.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" she cried. "And so clever, Don Diego. He beats the air with his little fists, and—Holy Mary, I swear it!—he winks one eye when I tickle him."

Estenega sauntered down the garden, endeavoring to imagine Chonita fat and classified. He could not. He paused beside a woman who did not raise her eyes at once, but coquettishly pretended to be absorbed in the

conversation of those about her. She, too, had been married a year and more, but her figure had not lost its elegance, and she was very handsome. Her coquetry was partly fear. Estenega's power was felt alike by innocent girls and chaste matrons. There were few scandals in those days; the women of the aristocracy were virtuous by instinct and rigid social laws; but, how it would be hard to tell, Estenega had acquired the reputation of being a dangerous man. Perhaps it had followed him back from the city of Mexico, where, at one time, he had spent three years as diputado, and whence returned with a brilliant and startling record of gallantry. A woman had followed on the next ship, and, unless I am much mistaken, Diego passed many uneasy hours before he persuaded her to return to Mexico. Then old Don José Briones' beautiful young wife was found dead in her bed one morning, and the old women who dressed the body swore that there were marks of hard skinny fingers on her throat. Estenega had made no secret of his admiration of her. At different times girls of the people had left Monterey suddenly, and vague rumors had floated down from the North that they had been seen in the redwood forests where Estenega's ranchos lay. I asked him, point-blank, one day, if these stories were true, prepared to scold him as he deserved; and he remarked coolly that stories of that sort were always exaggerated, as well as a man's success with women. But one had only to look at that face, with its expression of bitter-humorous knowledge, its combination of strength and weakness, to feel sure that there were chapters in his life that no woman outside of them would ever read. I always felt, when with Diego Estenega, that I was in the presence of a man who had little left to learn of life's manifold phases and sensations.

"The sun will freckle your white neck," he said to the matron who would not raise her eyes. "Shall I bring your mantilla, Doña Carmen?"

She looked up with a swift blush, then lowered her

soft black eyes suddenly before the penetrating gaze of the man who was so different from the caballeros.

"It is not well to be too vain, señor. We must think less of those things and more of—of our Church."

"True; the Church may be a surer road to heaven than a good complexion, if less of a talisman on earth. Still I doubt if a freckled virgin would have commanded the admiration of the centuries, or even of the Holy Ghost."

"Don Diego! Don Diego!" cried a dozen horrified voices.

"Diego Estenega, if it were any man but you," I exclaimed, "I should have you excommunicated. You blasphemer! How could you?"

Diego raised my threatening hand to his lips. "My dear Eustaquia, it was merely a way of saying that woman should be without blemish. And is not the Virgin the model for all women?"

"Oh," I exclaimed impatiently, "you can plant an idea in people's minds, then pluck it out before their very eyes, and make them believe it never was there. That is your power—but not over me. I know you." We were standing apart, and I had dropped my voice. "But come and talk to me a while. I cannot stand those babies," and I indicated with a sweep of my fan the graceful richly dressed caballeros, whose soft drooping eyes and sensuous mouths were more promising of compliments than conversation. "Neither Alvarado nor Castro is here. You, too, would have gone in a moment had I not captured you."

"On the contrary, I should have captured you. If we were not too old friends for flirting, I should say that your handsome-ugly face is the most attractive in the garden. It is a pretty picture, though," he went on meditatively—"those women in their gay soft gowns, coquetting demurely with the caballeros. Their eyes and mouths are like flowers; and their skin is so white, and their hair so black! The high wall, covered with green leaves and Castilian roses, was purposely designed by

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Nature for their background. Sometimes I have a passing regret that it is all doomed, and, half a century hence, will have passed out of memory."

"What do you mean?" I asked sharply.

"Oh, we will not discuss the question of the future. I sent Castro away from the table in a towering rage, and it is too hot to excite you. Even the impassive Doomswoman became so angry that she could not eat her dinner."

"It is your old wish for American occupation—the bandoleros! No; I will not discuss it with you. I have gone to bed with my head bursting when we have talked of it before. You might have spared poor José. But let us talk of something else—Chonita. What do you think of her?"

"A thousand things more than one usually thinks of a woman after the first interview."

"But do you think her beautiful?"

"She is better than beautiful. She is original."

"I often wonder if she would be La Favorita of the South if it were not for her father's great wealth and position. The men who profess to be her slaves must have absorbed the knowledge that she has the brains they have not, although she conceals her superiority from them admirably. Her pride and love of power demand that she shall be La Favorita, although her caballeros must weary her. If she made them feel their insignificance for a moment they would fly to the standard of her rival, Valencia Menéndez, and her regalities would be gone forever. A few of her adorers have gambled all night to dull the pangs of unrequited passion, but I doubt if anyone has really loved her. Such women receive a surfeit of admiration, but little love. If she were an unintellectual woman she would have an extraordinary power over men, with her beauty and her subtle charm; but now she is isolated. What a pity that your houses are at war!"

He had been looking away from me. As I finished speaking he turned his face slowly toward me, first the

profile, which looked as if cut rapidly with a sharp knife out of ivory, then the full face, with its eyes set so deeply under the scraggy brows, its mouth grimly humorous. He looked somewhat sardonic and decidedly selfish. Well I knew what that expression meant. He had the kindest heart I had ever known, but it never interfered with a most self-indulgent nature. Many times I had begged him to be considerate of some girl who I knew charmed him for the moment only; but one secret of his success with women was his unfeigned if brief enthusiasm.

"Let her alone!" I exclaimed. "You cannot marry her. She would go into a convent before she would sacrifice the traditions of her house. And if you were not at war, and she married you, you would only make her miserably happy."

He merely smiled and continued to look me straight in the eyes.

CHAPTER V

I WENT upstairs, and found Chonita reading Landor's "Imaginary Conversations." (When Chonita was eighteen—she was now twenty-four—Don Alfredo Robinson, one of the American residents, had, at her father's request, sent to Boston for a library of several hundred books, a birthday gift for the ambitious daughter of the Iturbi y Moncadas. The selection was an admirable one, and a rancho would have pleased her less. She read English and French with ease, although she spoke both languages brokenly.) As I entered, she laid down the book and clasped her hands behind her head. She looked tranquil, but less amiable than was her wont.

"You have been far away from the caballeros and the doñas of Monterey," I said.

"Not even among Spanish ghosts."

"I think you care at heart for nothing but your books."

"And a few people, and my religion."

"But they come second, although you will not acknowledge it even to yourself. Suppose you had to sacrifice your religion or your books—never to read another—which would you choose?"

"God of my soul! what a question! No Spanish woman was ever a truer Catholic; but to read is my happiness, the only happiness I want on earth."

"Are you sure that to train the intellect means happiness?"

"Quite sure. Does it not give us the power to abstract ourselves from life when we are tired of it?"

"True; but there is another result you have not thought of. The more the intellect is developed, the more acute and aggressive is the nervous system; the

more tenacious is the memory, the more has one to live with, and the higher the ideals. When the time comes for you to live you will suffer with double the intensity and depth of the woman whose nerves are dull or stunted."

"To suffer you must love, and I never shall love. Whom is there to love? Books always suffice me, and I suppose there are enough in the world to make the time pass as long as I live."

I did not continue the argument, knowing the placid superiority of inexperience.

"But you have not yet told me which you would give up."

"The books, of course. I hope I know my duty. I would sacrifice all things to my religion. But the priests do not interfere now as they did."

I was very religious in those days, and my heart beat with approval. "I have always said that the Church may let women read what they choose. The good principles they are born with they will adhere to."

"We are by nature conservatives, that is all. And we have need of religion. We must have something to lean on, and men are poor props, as far as I have observed. Sometimes after having read a long while in an absorbing book, particularly one that seemed to put something with a living hand into my brain and make it feel larger, I find that I am miles away from the Church; I have forgotten its existence. I always *run* back."

"*Dios!* I should think so. Yes, it is well we do need our religion. Men do not; for that reason they drop it the moment the wings on their minds grow fast—as they would, when the warm sun came out, drop the thick blanket of the Indian, borrowed and gratefully worn in dark uncertain weather. I do not dare ask Diego Estenega what he believes, lest he tell me he believes nothing and I should have to hear it. How do you like my friend, Chonita?"

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"Are you asking me how I like the enemy of my house? I hate him!"

"If he goes to Santa Barbara with Alvarado this summer, shall you ask him to be your guest?"

"Of course. The enmity has always been veiled with much courtesy; and I would have him see that we know how to entertain."

I watched her covertly; I could detect no sign of interest. Presently she took up the volume of Landor and read aloud to me, the stately English sounding oddly with her Spanish accent.

CHAPTER VI

At ten o'clock the large sala of the Governor's house was thronged with guests, and the music of the flute, harp, and guitar floated through the open windows; the musicians sat on the corridor. How harmonious was the Monterey ballroom of that day!—the women in their white gowns of every rich material, the men in white trousers, black silk jackets, and low morocco shoes; no color except in the jewels and the rich Southern faces. The bare ugly sala, from which the uglier furniture had been removed, needed no ornaments with that moving beauty; and even the coffee-colored high-stomached old people were picturesque. I wander through those deserted salas sometimes, and, as the tears blister my eyes, imagination and memory people the cold rooms, and I forget that the dashing caballeros and lovely doñas who once called Monterey their own and made it a living picture-book, are dust beneath the wild oats and thistles of the deserted cemetery on the hill. The Americans hardly know that such a people once existed.

Chonita entered the sala at eleven o'clock, looking like a snow queen. Her gold hair, which always glittered like metal, was arranged to simulate a crown; she wore a gown of Spanish lace, and no jewels but the string of black pearls. I never had seen her look so cold and so regal.

Estenega stepped out upon the corridor. "Play El Son," he said peremptorily. Then as the vivacious music began he walked over to Chonita and clapped his hands in front of her as authoritatively as he had bidden the musicians. What he did was of frequent occurrence in the Californian ballroom, but she looked haughtily rebellious. He continued to strike his hands together,

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and looked down upon her with an amused smile which brought the angry color to her face. Her hesitation aroused the eagerness of the other men, and they cried loudly:

"El Son! El Son! señorita."

She could no longer refuse, and, passing Estenega with head erect, she bent it slightly to the caballeros and passed to the middle of the room, the other guests retreating to the wall. She stood for a moment, swaying her body slightly; then, raising her gown high enough for the lace to sweep the instep of her small arched feet, she tapped the floor in exact time to the music for a few moments, then glided dreamily along the sala, her willowy body falling in lovely lines, unfolding every detail of El Son, unheeding the low ripple of approval. Then, dropping her gown, she spun the length of the room like a white cloud caught in a cyclone; her garments whirled, her heels elicked, her motion grew faster and swifter, until the spectators panted for breath. Then, unmindful of the lively melody, she drifted slowly down, swaying languidly, her long round arms now lolling in the lace of her gown, now lifted to graceful sweep and curve. The caballeros shouted their appreciation, flinging gold and silver at her feet; never had El Son been given with such variations before. Never did I see greater enthusiasm until the night which culminated the tragedy of Ysabel Herrera. Estenega stood enraptured, watching every motion of her body, every expression of her face. The blood blazed in her cheeks, her eyes were like green stars, and sparkled wickedly. The cold curves of her statuesque mouth were warm and soft, her chin was saucily uplifted, her heavy waving hair fell over her shoulders to her knees, a glittering veil. Where had The Doomsdame, the proud daughter of the Iturbi y Moncadas, gone?

The girls were a little frightened; this was not the dance to which they were accustomed. The young matrons frowned. The old people exclaimed, "Caramba!" "Mother of God!" "Holy Mary!" I was aghast; well

as I knew her, this was a piece of audacity for which I was unprepared.

As the dance went on and she grew more and more like an untamed wood-nymph, even the caballeros became vaguely uneasy, hotly as they admired the beautiful wild thing enchaining their gaze. I looked again at Estenega, and knew that his heart beat in passionate sympathy.

"I have found *her*," he murmured exultantly. "She is California, magnificent, audacious, incomprehensible, a creature of storms and convulsions and impregnable calm; the germs of all good and all bad in her; woman sublimated. Every husk of tradition has fallen from her."

Once, as she passed Estenega, her eyes met his. They lit with a glance of recognition, then the lids drooped, and she floated on. He left the room, and when he returned she sat on a window-seat, surrounded by caballeros, as calm and as pale as when he had commanded her to dance. He did not approach her, but joined me at the upper end of the sala, where I stood with Alvarado, the Castros, Don Thomas Larkin—the United States Consul—and half a dozen others. We were discussing Chonita's interpretation of El Son.

"That was a strange outbreak for a Spanish girl," said Señor Larkin.

"She is Chonita Iturbi y Moncada," said Castro severely. "She is like no other woman, and what she does is right."

The consul bowed. "True, coronel. I have seen no one here like Doña Chonita. There is a delicious uniformity about the Californian women; so reserved, shrinking yet dignified, ever on their guard. Doña Chonita changed so swiftly from the typical woman of her race to an houri, almost a bacchante—only an extraordinary refinement of nature kept her this side of the line—that an American would be tempted to call her eccentric."

Alvarado lifted his hand and pointed through the

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window to the stars. "The golden coals in the blue fire of heaven are not higher above censure," he said.

Doña Modeste raised her eyebrows. "Coals are safest when burned on the domestic hearth and carefully watched; safer still when they have fallen to ashes."

"What is this rumor of pirates on the coast?" demanded Alvarado abruptly.

I put my hand through Estenega's arm and drew him aside. The music of the contradanza was playing, and we stood against the wall.

"Well, you know Chonita better since that dance," I said to him. "Polar stars are not unlikely to have volcanoes. Better let the deeps alone, my friend; the lava might scorch you badly. Women of complex natures are interesting studies, but dangerous to love. They wear the nerves to a point, and the tired brain and heart turn gratefully to the crystalline idle-minded woman. She is too much like yourself, Diego. And you—how long could you love anybody? Love with you means curiosity."

His face looked like chalk for a moment, an indication with him of suppressed and violent emotion. Then he turned his head and regarded me with a slight smile. "Not altogether. You forget that the most faithless men have been the most faithful when they have found the one woman. Curiosity and fickleness mean restless seeking—nothing more."

"I was sure you would acquit yourself with credit! But you have an unholy charm, and you never hesitate to exert it."

He laughed outright. "One would think I was a rattlesnake. My unholy charm consists of a reasonable amount of address born of a great weakness for women, and some personal magnetism—the latter the offspring of the habit of mental concentration——"

"And an inexorable will——"

"Perhaps. As to the exercise of it—why not? *Vive la bagatelle!*"

"It is useless to argue with you. Are you going to let that girl alone?"

"She is the only girl in the Californias whom I shall not let alone."

I could have shaken him. "To what end? And her brother? I have often wondered which would rule you in a crisis, your head or your passions."

"It would depend upon the crisis. I am afraid you are right—that altiloquent Reinaldo will give trouble."

"Is it true that he has been conspiring with Carillo, and that an extraordinary and seeret session of the Departmental Junta has been called?"

He looked down upon me with his grimmest smile. "You curious little woman! You must not put your white fingers into the Departmental pic. If you had been a man, with as good a brain as you have for a woman, you would have been an ornament to our politics. But as it is—pardon me—the better for our balancing cuntry the less you have to do with it."

I could feel my eyes snap. "You respect no woman's mind," I said savagely; "nothing but the woman in her. But I will not quarrel with you. Tell that baby over there to come and waltz with me."

At dawn, as we entered our room, I seized Chonita by the shoulders and shook her. "What did you mean by such a performance?" I demanded. "It was unprecedented!"

She threw back her head and laughed. "I could not help it," she said. "First, I felt an irresistible desire to show Monterey that I dared do anything I chose. And then I have a wild something in me which has often threatened to break loose before; and to-night it did. It was that man. He made me."

"*Ay, Dios!*" I thought, "it has begun already."

CHAPTER VII

THE festivities were to last a week, everyone taking part but Alvarado and Doña Martina. She was not strong enough; the Governor cared more for duty than for pleasure.

The next day we had a merienda on the hills behind the town. The green pine woods were gay with the bright colors of the young people. Here and there a caballero dashed up and down to show his horsemanship and the silver and embroidered silk of his saddle. Silver, too, were his jingling spurs, the eagles on his sombrero, the buttons on his colourful silken jacket. Horses, without exception handsomely trapped, were tethered everywhere, pawing the ground or nibbling the grass. The girls wore white or flowered silk or muslin gowns, and rebosos about their heads; the brown ugly dueñas, ever at their sides, were foils they would gladly have dispensed with. The tinkle of the guitar never ceased, and the sweet voices of the girls and the rich voices of the men broke forth with the joyous spontaneity of the birds' songs about them.

Chonita wore a white silk gown, I remember, flowered with blue—large blue lilies. The reboso matched the gown. As soon as we arrived—we were a little late—she was surrounded by caballeros, who hardly knew whether to like her or not, but who adhered to the knowledge that she was Chonita Iturbi y Moneada, the most famous beauty of the South.

"*Dios!* but thou art beautiful," murmured one, his dreamy eyes dwelling on her shining hair.

"*Gracias, señor!*" She whispered it as bashfully as the maidens to whom he was accustomed, her eyes fixed upon a rose she held.

"Will you not stay with us here in Monterey?"

She raised her eyes slowly—he could not but feel the effort—gave him one bewildering glance, half appealing, half protesting, then dropped them suddenly.

"Wilt thou stay with me?" panted the caballero.

"Ay, señor! you must not speak like that. Someone will hear you."

"I care not! God of my life! I care not! Wilt thou marry me?"

"You must not speak to me of marriage, señor. It is to my father you should speak. Worth I, a Californian maiden, betroth myself without his knowledge?"

"Holy Heaven! I will! But give me one word that thou lovest me—one word!"

She lifted her chin saucily and turned to look at the caballero, who, I doubt not, proposed also. The man who had watched her, laughed.

"She acts the part of perfection," said he to me. "Either natural or acquired beauty was more to do with saving her from the solitary place of the intellectual woman than her beauty or her father's wealth. I am inclined to think that it is acquired. I do not believe that she is a coquette at heart, any more than that she is the marble doomsman she so fully believes herself."

"You will tell her that," I exclaimed anxiously; "and she will end by loving you because you understand her; all women want to be understood. Why don't you go to Paris again? You have not been there for a long time."

Not deeming his suggestion worthy of answer, he left me and joined the little court about Chonita, who was glancing over the top of her fan into the ardent eyes of a third caballero.

"You will step on a bunch of nettles in a moment," he said practically. "Your slippers are very thin; you had better stand over here on the path." And he dexterously separated her from the other men. "Will you

walk to that opening over there with me? I want to show you a better view of Monterey."

His manner had not a touch of gallantry, and she was tired of the caballeros.

"Very well," she said. "I will look at the view."

As she followed him she noted that he led her where the bushes were thinnest, and kicked the stones from her path. She also remarked the nervous energy of his thin figure. "It comes from his love of the Americans," she thought angrily. "He must even walk like them. The Americans!" And she brought her teeth together with a sharp click.

He turned, smiling. "You look very disapproving," he said. "What have I done?"

"You look like an American! You even wear their clothes, and they are the color of smoke; and you wear no lace. How cold and uninteresting a scene would this be if all the men were dressed as you are!"

"We cannot all be made for decorative purposes. And you are as unlike those girls, in all but your dress, as I am unlike the men. I will not incur your wrath by saying that you are American; but you are modern. Our lovely compatriots were the same three hundred years ago. Will Doña California be pleased to observe that whale spouting in the bay? There is the tree beneath which Junipero Serra said his first mass in this part of the country. Did you ever see bay bluer than that? or sand whiter? or a more perfect semicircle of hills than this? or a more straggling town? There is the Custom-house on the rocks. You will go to a ball there to-night, and hear the boom of the surf as you dance." He turned with one of his sudden impatient motions. "Suppose we ride. The air is too sharp to lie about under the trees. This white horse mates your gown. Let us go over to Carmelo."

"I should like to go," she said doubtfully; his abruptness and energy were like a running fire of criticism on the languid men of her race, and she resented it, but his conversation interested her, and her free spirit ap-

proved of a ride over the hills unattended by dueña. "But—you know—I do not like you."

"Oh, never mind that; the ride will interest you just the same." And he lifted her to the horse, sprang on another, caught her bridle, lest she should rebel, and galloped up the road. When they were on the other side of the hill he slackened speed and looked at her with a smile. She was inclined to be angry, but found herself watching the varying expressions of his mouth, which diverted her mind. It was a baffling mouth, even to experienced women, and Chonita could make nothing of it. It had neither sweetness nor softness, but she had never felt impelled to study the mouth of a caballero. And then she wondered how a man with a mouth like that could have manners so gentle.

"Are you aware," he said abruptly, "that your brother is accused of conspiracy?"

"What?" She looked at him as if she inferred that this was the order of badinage that an Iturbi y Moncada might expect from an Estenega.

"I am not joking. It is quite true."

"It is not true! Reinaldo conspire against his government? Some one has lied. And you are ready to believe!"

"I hope some one has lied. The news is very direct, however." He looked at her speculatively. "The more obstacles the better," he thought; "and we may as well declare war on this question at once. It would be idle to begin as a hypocrite, when every act would tell her what I thought of him. Moreover, he will have more or less influence over her until her eyes are opened to his true worth. She will not believe me, of course, but she is a woman who only needs an impetus to do a good deal of thinking and noting."

"I am going to make you angry," he said. "I am going to tell you that I do not share your admiration of your brother. He has ten thousand words for every idea, and although, God knows, we have more time than anything else in this land of the poppy where only the

horses run, still there are more profitable ways of employing it than to listen to meaningless and bombastic words. Moreover, your brother is a dangerous man. No man is so safe in seclusion as the one of large vanities and small abilities. He is not big enough to conceive a revolution, but is ready to be the tool of any unscrupulous man who is, and, having too much egotism to follow orders, will ruin a project at the last moment by attempting to think for himself. I do not say these things wantonly to insult you, señorita, only to let you know at once how I regard your brother, that you may not accuse me of treachery or hypocrisy later."

He had expected and hoped that she would turn upon him with a burst of fury; but she had drawn herself up to her most stately height. Her mouth was as hard as a pink jewel, her eyes glittered like ice.

"Señor," she said, "it seems to me that you, too, waste many words—in speaking of my brother; for what you say of him cannot interest me. I have known him for twenty-two years; you have seen him four or six times. What can you tell me of him? Not only is he my brother and the natural object of my love and devotion, but he is Reinaldo Iturbi y Moneada, the last male descendant of his house, and as such I hold him in a regard only second to that which I bear to my father. And with the blood in him he could not be otherwise than a great and good man."

Estenega looked at her with the first stab of doubt he had felt. "She is Spanish in her marrow," he thought—"the steadfast unreasoning child of traditions. I could not well be at greater disadvantage. But she is magnificent."

"Another thing which was unnecessary," she added, "was to defend yourself to me or to tell me how you feel toward my brother, and why. We are enemies by tradition and instinct. We shall rarely meet, and shall probably never talk together again."

"We shall talk together more times than you will care to count. I have much to say to you, and you shall lis-

ten. But we will discuss the matter no further at present. Shall we gallop?"

He spurred his horse, and once more they fled through the pine woods. Before long they entered the valley of Carmelo. The mountains were massive and gloomy, the little bay was blue and quiet, the surf of the ocean roared about Point Lobos, Carmelo River crawled beneath its willows. In the middle of the valley stood the impressive yellow church, with its Roman tower and rose-window; about it were the crumbling brown hovels of the deserted Mission. Once as they rode Estenega thought he heard voices, but could not be sure, so loud was the clatter of the horses' hoofs. As they reached the square they drew rein swiftly, the horses standing upright at the sudden halt. Then strange sounds came to them through the open doors of the church; ribald shouts and loud laughter, curses and noise of smashing glass, such songs as never were sung in Carmelo before; an infernal clash of sound which mingled incongruously with the solemn mass of the surf. Chonita's eyes flashed. Even Estenega's face darkened; the traditions planted in plastic youth arose and rebelled at the desecration.

"Some drunken sailors," he said. "There—do you see that?" A craft rounded Point Lobos. "Pirates!"

"Holy Mary!" exclaimed Chonita.

"Let down your hair," he said peremptorily; "and follow all that I suggest. We will drive them out."

She obeyed him without question, excited and interested. Then they rode to the doors and threw them wide.

The upper end of the long church was swarming with pirates; there was no mistaking those bold cruel faces, blackened by sun and wind, half covered with ragged hair. They stood on the benches, they bestrode the railing, they swarmed over the altar, shouting and carousing in riotous wassail. Their coarse red shirts were flung back from hairy chests; their faces were distorted with rum and sacrilegious delight. Every station, every candlestick, had been hurled to the floor and trampled

upon. The crucifix stood on its head. Sitting high on the altar, reeling and waving a communion goblet, was the drunken chief, singing a blasphemous song of the pirate seas. The voices rumbled strangely down the hollow body of the church; to perfect the scene, flames should have leaped among the swinging arms and bounding forms.

"Come," said Estenega. He spurred his horse, and together they galloped down the stone pavement of the edifice. The men turned at the loud sound of horses' hoofs; but the riders were in their midst, scattering them right and left, before they realized what was happening. The horses were brought to a sudden halt. Estenega rose in his stirrups, his fine bold face looking down impassively upon the demoniacal gang, that could have rent him apart, but that stood, silent and startled, gazing from him to the beautiful woman, whose white gown looked part of the white horse she rode. Estenega raised his hand and pointed to Chonita.

"The Virgin!" he said, in a hollow, impressive voice. "The Mother of God! She has come to defend her church. Go!"

Chonita's face blanched to the lips, but she looked at the sacrilegists sternly. Fortune favored the audacity of Estenega. The sunlight, drifting through the star-window above the doors at the lower end of the church, smote the uplifted golden head of Chonita, wreathing it with a halo, gifting the face with unearthly beauty.

"Go!" repeated Estenega, "lest she weep. With every tear a heart will cease to beat."

The chief scrambled down from the altar and ran like a rat past Chonita, his swollen mouth drooping. The others crouched and followed, stumbling one over the other, their dark evil faces bloodless, their knees knocking together with superstitious terror. They fled from the church and down to the bay, and swam to their craft. Estenega and Chonita rode out. They watched the ugly vessel scurry round Point Lobos. Then Chonita spoke for the first time.

"Blasphemer!" she exclaimed. "Mother of God, wilt thou ever forgive me?"

"Why not call me a Jesuit? It was a case where mind or matter must triumph. And you can confess your enforced sin, say a hundred aves or so, and be whiter than snow again; whereas, had our Mission of Carmelo been razed to the ground, as it was in a fair way to be, California would have lost an historical monument."

"And Junípero Serra's bones are there, and it was his favorite Mission," said the girl unwillingly.

"Exactly. And now that you are reasonably sure of being forgiven, will not you forgive me? I shall ask no priest's forgiveness."

She looked at him a moment, then shook her head. "No; I cannot forgive you for having made me commit what may be a mortal sin. But, Holy Heaven!—I cannot help saying it—you are very quick!"

"For each idea is a moment born. Upon whether we wed the two or think too late depends the success or the failure of our lives."

"Suppose," she said suddenly, "suppose you had failed, and those men had seized me and made me captive; what then?"

"I should have killed you. Not one of them should have touched you. But I had no doubts, or I should not have made the attempt. I know the superstitious nature of sailors, especially when they are drunk. Shall we gallop back? They will have eaten all the dulces."

CHAPTER VIII

MONTEREY danced every night, and all night, of that week, either at Alvarado's or at the Custom-house, and every afternoon met at the races, the bull-fight, a merienda, or to climb the greased pole, catch the greased pig by its tail as it ran, or exhibit skill in horsemanship. Chonita, at times an imperious coquette, at others indifferent, perverse, or coy, was La Favorita without appeal, and the girls alternately worshiped her—she was abstractedly kind to them—or heartily wished her back in Santa Barbara. Estenega rarely attended the socialities, being closeted with Alvarado and Castro most of the time, and when he did she avoided him if she could. The pirates had fled and were seen no more; but their abrupt retreat, as described by Chonita, continued to be an exciting topic of discussion. There were few of us who did not openly or secretly approve of Estenega's Jesuitism and admire the nimbleness of his mind. The elergy did not express itself.

On the last night of the festivities, when the women, weary with the unusually late hours of the past week, had left the ballroom early and sought their beds, and the men, being at loss for other amusement, had gone in a body to a saloon, there to drink and gamble and set fire to each other's curls and trouser-seats, the Departmental Junta met in secret session. The night was warm, the plaza deserted; all who were not in the saloon at the other end of the town were asleep; after the preliminary words in Alvarado's office the Junta picked up their chairs and went forth to hold conclave where bulls and bears had fought and the large indulgent moon gave clearer light than suet lamps. They drew close together, and, after rolling the cigarito, solemnly re-

garded the sky for a few moments without speaking. Their purpose was a grave one. They met to try Pio Pico for contempt of government and annoying insistence in behalf of his pet project to remove the capital from Monterey to Los Angeles; José Antonio Carillo and Reinaldo Iturbi y Moneada for conspiracy; and General Vallejo for evil disposition and unwarrantable comments upon the policy of the administration. None of the offenders was present.

With the exception of Alvarado, Castro, and Estenega, the members of the Junta were men of middle age and represented the political talent of California—Ximeno, Gonzales, Argüello, Requena, Del Valle. Their dark bearded faces, upturned to the stars, made a striking set of profiles; but, alas! about each dome of wisdom a silk handkerchief was knotted, the ends standing out straight.

Alvarado spoke, finally, and, after presenting the charges in due form, continued:

"The individual enemy to the government is like the fly to the lion; it cannot harm, but it can annoy. We must brush away the fly as a vindication of our dignity, and take precaution that he does not return, even if we have to bend our heads to tie his little legs. I do not purpose to be annoyed by these blistering midgets we are met to consider, nor to have my term of administration spotted with their gall. I leave it to you, my compatriots and friends, to advise me what is best to do."

Ximeno put his feet on the side rung of Castro's chair, puffed a large gray cloud, and half closed his eyes. He then, for three quarters of an hour, in a low musical voice, discoursed upon the dignity of the administration and the depravity of the offenders. When his brethren were beginning to drop their heads and breathe heavily, Alvarado politely interrupted him and referred the matter to Castro.

"Imprison them!" exclaimed the impetuous General, suddenly alert. "With such a Governor and such a people, this should be a land white as the mountaintops, unblemished by the tracks of mean ambitions and

sinful revolutions. Let us be summary, although not cruel; let no man's blood flow while there are prisons in the Californias; but we must pluck up the roots of conspiracy and disquiet, lest a thousand suckers grow about them, as about the half-cut trunks of our redwood trees, and our Californias be no better than any degenerate country of the Old World. Let us cast them into prison without further debate."

"The law, my dear José, gives them a trial," drawled Gonzales. And then for a half hour he quoted such law as was known in the country. When he finished, the impatient and suppressed members of the Junta delivered their opinions simultaneously; only Estenega had nothing to say. They argued and suggested, cited evidence, defended and denounced, lashing themselves into a mighty excitement. At length they were all on their feet gesticulating and prancing.

"Mother of God!" cried Requena. "Let us give Vallejo a taste of his own cruelty. Let us put him in a temascal and set those of his Indian victims who are still alive to roast him out——"

"No! no! Vallejo is maligned. He had no hand in that massacre. His heart is whiter than an angel's——"

"It is his liver that is white. His heart is black as a black snake's. To the devil with him!"

"Make a law that Pio Pico can never put foot out of Los Angeles again, since he loves it so well——"

"His ugly face would spoil the next generation——"

"Death to Carillo and Iturbi y Moncada! Death to all! Let the poison out of the veins of California!"

"No! no! As little blood in California as possible. Put them in prison, and keep them on frijoles and water for a year. That will cure rebellion; no chickens, no dulces, no aguardiente——"

Alvarado brought his staff of office down sharply upon a board he had provided for the purpose.

"Gentlemen," he said, "will you not sit down and smoke another cigarito? We must be calm."

The Junta took to its chairs at once. Alvarado never failed to command respect.

"Don Diego Estenega," said the Governor, "will you tell us what you have thought while the others have talked?"

Estenega, who had been star-gazing, turned to Alvarado, ignoring the Junta. His keen brilliant eyes gave the Governor a thrill of relief; his mouth expressed a mind made up and intolerant of argument.

"Vallejo," he said, "is like a horse that will neither run nor back into his stall; he merely stands still and kicks. His kicking makes a noise and raises a dust, but does no harm. In other words, he will irritate, but never take a responsibility. Send him an official notice that if he does not keep quiet an armed force will march upon Sonoma and imprison him in his own house, humiliating him before the eyes of his soldiers and retainers.

"As for Pio Pico, threaten to fine and punish him. He will apologize at once, and be quiet for six months, when you can call another secret session and issue another threat. It would prolong the term of his submission to order him to appear before the Junta, and make it an apology with due humility.

"Now for Carillo and Reinaldo Iturbi y Moneada." He paused a moment and glanced at Chonita's grating. He had the proofs of her brother's treason in his pocket; no one but himself had seen them. He hesitated the fraction of another moment, then smiled grimly. "Oh, Helen!" he thought, "the same old story."

"That Carillo is guilty," he said aloud, "is proven to us beyond doubt. He has incited rebellion against the government in behalf of Carlos Carillo. He is dangerous to the peace of the country. Iturbi y Moneada is young and heedless, hardly to be considered seriously; furthermore, it is impossible to obtain proof of his complicity. His intimacy with Carillo gives him the appearance of guilt. It would be well to frighten him a little by a short term of imprisonment. He is restless and

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easily led; a lesson in time may save his honored house from disaster. But to Carillo no quarter." He rose and stood over them. "The best thing in Machiavelli's 'Prince,' " he said, "is the author's advice to Cæsar Borgia to exterminate every member of the reigning house of a conquered country, in order to avoid future revolutions and their infinitely greater number of dead. Do not let the water in your blood whimper for mercy. You are not here to protect an individual, but a country."

"You are right," said Alvarado.

The others looked at the young man who had merely given them the practical advice of statecraft as if he had opened his chest and displayed the lamp of wisdom burning. His freedom from excitement in all ordeals which animated them to madness had long ago inspired the suspicion that he was rather more than human. They uttered not a protest. Alvarado's one-eyed secretary made notes of their approval; and the Junta, after another friendly smoke, adjourned, well pleased with itself.

"Would I sacrifice my country for her a year hence?" thought Estenega, as he sauntered home. "But, after all, little harm is done. He is not worth killing, and fright and discomfort will probably cure him."

CHAPTER IX

CHONITA and Estenega faced each other among the Castilian roses of the garden behind the Governor's house. The dueña was nodding in a corner; the first-born of the Alvarados, screaming within, absorbed the attention of every member of the household, from the frantic young mother to the practical nurse.

"My brother is to be arrested, you say?"

"Yes."

"And at your suggestion?"

"Yes."

"And he may die?"

"Possibly."

"Nothing would have been done if it had not been for you?"

"Nothing."

"God of my life! Mother of God! how I hate you!"

"It is war, then?"

"I would kill you if I were not a Catholic."

"I will make you forget that you are a Catholic."

"You have made me remember it to my bitterest sorrow. I hate you so mortally that I cannot go to confession: I cannot forgive."

"I hope you will continue to hate for a time. Now listen to me. You have several reasons for hating me. My house is the enemy of yours. I am, to all intents and purposes, an American; you can consider me as such. I have that indifference for religious superstition and intolerance for religion's thralldom which all minds larger of circumference than a napkin-ring must come to in time. I have endangered the life of your brother, and I have opposed and shall oppose him in his political aspirations; he has my unequivocal contempt. Neverthe-

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less, I tell you here that I should marry you were there five hundred reasons for your hatred of me instead of a paltry five. I shall take pleasure in demonstrating to you that there is a force in the universe a good deal stronger than traditions, religion, or even family ties."

His eyes were not those of a lover; they shone like steel. His mouth was forbidding. She drew back from him in terror, then struck her hands together passionately.

"I marry you!" she cried. "An Estenega! A renegade? May God cast me out of heaven if I do! There! I have sworn! I have sworn! Do you think a Catholic would break that vow? I swear it by the Church—and I put the whole Church between us!"

"I told you just now that I would make you forget your Church." He caught her hand and held it firmly. "A last word," he said. "Your brother's life is safe; I promise you that."

"Let me go!" she said. "Let me go! I fear you." She was trembling; his warmth and magnetism had sprung to her shoulder.

He gave her back her hand. "Go!" he said; "so ends the first chapter."

CHAPTER X

CASA GRANDE,¹ the mansion of the Iturbi y Moncadas in Santa Barbara, stood at the right of the Presidio, facing the channel. A mile behind, under the shadow of the gaunt rocky hills curving about the valley, was the long white Mission, with its double towers, corridor of many arches, and sloping roof covered with red tiles. Between was the wild valley, where cattle grazed among the trees and the massive boulders. The red-tiled white adobe houses of the Presidio and of the little town clustered under its wing, the brown mud huts of the Indians, were grouped in the foreground of the deep valley.

The great house of the Iturbi y Moncadas, erected in the first years of the century, was built about three sides of a court, measuring one hundred feet each way. Like most of the adobes of its time, it had but one story. A wide-pillared corridor, protected by a sloping roof, faced the court, which was as bare and hard as the floor of a ballroom. Behind the dwelling were the manufactories and huts of the Indian retainers. Don Guillermo Iturbi y Moncada was the magnate of the South. His ranchos covered four hundred thousand acres; his horses and cattle were unnumbered. His Indians, carpenters, coopers, saddlers, shoemakers, weavers, manufacturers of household staples, supplied the garrison and town with the necessities of life; he also did a large trading business in hides and tallow. Rumor had it that in the wooden tower built against the back of the house he kept gold by the bushel-basketful; but no one called

¹ In writing of Casa Grande and its inmates, no reference to the distinguished De la Guerra family of Santa Barbara is intended, beyond the description of their house and state, and of the general characteristics of the founder of the family fortunes in California.

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him miser, for he gave the poor of the town all they ate and wore, and kept a supply of drugs for their sick. So beloved and revered was he that when earthquakes shook the town, or fires threatened it from the hills, the poor ran in a body to the court-yard of Casa Grande and besought his protection. They never passed him without saluting to the ground, nor his house without bending their heads. And yet they feared him, for he was an irascible old gentleman at times, and thumped unmercifully when in a temper. Chonita, alone, could manage him always.

When I returned to Santa Barbara with Chonita after her visit to Monterey, the yellow fruit hung in the padres' orchard, the grass was burning brown, sky and water wore the hard blue of sapphire.

The afternoon of our arrival, Don Guillermo, Chonita, and I were on the long middle corridor of the house: in Santa Barbara one lived in the air. The old don sat on the long green bench by the sala door. His heavy flabby leathery face had no wrinkles but those which curved from the corners of the mouth to the chin. The thin upper lip was habitually pressed hard against the small protruding under one, the mouth ending in straight lines which seemed no part of the lips. His small slanting eyes, usually stern, could snap with anger, as they did to-day. The nose rose suddenly from the middle of his face; it might have been applied by a child sculpturing with putty; the flat bridge was crossed by erratic lines. A fringe of grizzled hair escaped from the black silk handkerchief wound as tightly as a turban about his head. He wore short clothes of dark brown cloth, the jacket decorated with large silver buttons, a red damask vest, shoes of embroidered deer-skin, and a cravat of fine linen.

Chonita, in a white gown, a pale-green reboso about her shoulders, her arms crossed, her head thoughtfully bent forward, walked slowly up and down before him.

"Holy God!" cried the old man, pounding the floor with his stick. "That they have dared to arrest my

son!—the son of Guillermo Iturbi y Moneada! That Alvarado, my friend and thy host, should have permitted it!”

“Do not blame Alvarado, my father. Remember, he must listen to the Departmental Junta; and this is their work. Fool that I am!” she added to herself, “why do I not tell who alone is to blame? But I need no one to help me hate him!”

“Is it true that this Estenega, of whom I hear so much, is a member of the Junta?”

“It may be.”

“If so, it is he, he alone, who has brought dishonor upon my house. Again they have conquered!”

“This Estenega I met—and who was *compadre* with me for the baby—lives little in California, my father. If it be he who is a member of the Junta, he hardly could rule such men as Alvarado, Ximeno, and Castro. I saw no other Estenega.”

“True! I must have other enemies in the North; but I had not known of it. But they shall learn of my power in the South. Don Juan de la Borrassa went to-day to Los Angeles with a bushel of gold to bail my son, and both will be with us the day after to-morrow. A curse upon Carillo—but I will speak of it no more. Tell me, my daughter—God of my soul, but I am glad to have thee back!—what thoughtest thou of this son of the Estenegas? Is it Ramon, Estéban, or Diego? I have seen none of them since they were little ones. I remember Diego well. He had lightning in his little tongue, and the devil in his brain. I liked him, although he was the son of my enemy; and if he had been an Iturbi y Moneada I should have made a great man of him. Ay! but he was quick. One day in Monterey, he got under my feet and I fell flat, much imperiling my dignity, for it was on Alvarado Street, and I was a member of the Territorial Deputation. I could have beaten him, I was so angry; but he scrambled to his little feet, and helping me to mine, he said, while dodging my stick: ‘Be not angry, señor. I gave my promise to the

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earth that thou shouldst kiss her, for all the world has prayed that she should not embrace thee for ninety years to come.' What could I do? I gave him a cake. Thou smilest, my daughter; but thou wilt not commend the enemy of thy house, no? Ah, well, we grow less bitter as we grow old; and although I hated his father I liked Diego. Again, I remember, I was in Monterey, and he was there; his father and I were both members of the Deputation. Caramba! what hot words passed between us! But I was talking of Diego. I took a volume of Shakespeare from him one day. 'Thou art too young to read such books,' I said. 'A baby reading what the good priests allow not men to read! I have not read this heretic book of plays, and yet thou dost lie there on thy stomach and drink in its wickedness.' 'It is true,' he said, and how his steel eyes did flash; 'but when I am as old as you, señor, my stomach will be flat and my head will be big. You are the enemy of my father, but, have you noticed, your stomach is bigger than his, and he has conquered you in speech and in politics more times than you have found vengeance for. Ay!—your ranchos have richer soil and many more cattle, but he has a library, Don Guillermo, and you have not.' I spanked him then and there; but I never forgot what he said, and thou hast read what thou listed. I would not that the children of Alejandro Estenega should know more than those of Guillermo Iturbi y Moncada."

"You have cause to be proud of Reinaldo, for he sparkles like the spray of the fountain, and words are to him like a shower of leaves in autumn. And yet, and yet," she added, with angry candor, "he has not a brain like Diego Estenega. *He* is not a man, but a devil."

"A good brain has always a devil at the wheel; sharp eyes have sharper nerves behind; and lightning from a big soul flashes fear into a little one. Diego is not a devil—I remember once I had a headache, and he bathed my head, and the water ran down my neck and gave me a cold which put me to bed for a week—but he is the

devil's godson, and were he not the son of my enemy I should love him. His father was cruel and vicious—but clever, Holy Mary! Diego has his brain; but he has, too, the kind heart and gentle manner—Ay! Holy God!—Come, come; here are the horses. Call Prudencia, and we will go to the bark and see what the good captain has brought to tempt us.”

Four horses led by vaqueros had entered the courtyard.

“Prudencia!” called Chonita.

A door opened, and a girl of small figure, with solemn dark eyes and creamlike skin, her hair hanging in heavy braids to her feet, stepped upon the corridor, draping a pink reboso about her head.

“I am here, my cousin,” she said, walking with all the dignity of the Spanish woman, despite her plump and inconsiderable person. “You are rested, Doña Eustaquia? Do we go to the ship, my uncle? and shall we buy this afternoon? God of my life! I wonder has he a high comb to make me look tall, and flesh-colored stockings. My own are gone with holes. I do not like white——”

“Hush thy chatter,” said her uncle. “How can I tell what the captain has until I see? Come, my children.”

We sprang to our saddles, Don Guillermo mounted heavily, and we cantered to the beach, followed by the ox-cart which would carry the fragile cargo home. A boat took us to the bark, which sat motionless on the placid channel. The captain greeted us with the lively welcome due to eager and frequent purchasers.

“Now, curb your greed,” cried Don Guillermo, as the girls dropped down the companion-way, “for you have more now than you can wear in five years. God of my soul! if a bark came every day they would want every shred on board. My daughter could tapestry the old house with the shawls she has.”

When I reached the cabin I found the table covered with silks, satins, crêpe shawls, combs, articles of lacquer-

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ware, jewels, silk stockings, slippers, spangled tulle, handkerchiefs, fans, lace. The girls' eyes were sparkling. Chonita clapped her hands and ran round the table, pressing to her lips the beautiful white things she quickly segregated, running her hand eagerly over the little slippers, hanging the lace about her shoulders, twisting a rope of garnets in her yellow hair.

"Never have they been so beautiful, Eustaquia! Is it not so, my Prudencia?" she cried to the girl, who was curled on one corner of the table, gloating over the treasures she knew her uncle's generosity would make her own. "Look how these little diamonds flash! And the embroidery on this *crêpe*!—a dozen eyes went out, *ay!* *yi!* This satin is like a tile! These fans were made in Spain! This is as big as a windmill. God of my soul!"—she threw a handful of yellow sewing-silk upon a piece of white satin; "Ana shall embroider this gown—the golden poppies of California on a bank of mountain snow." She suddenly seized a case of topaz and a piece of scarlet silk, and ran over to me. I being a *Monterefia*, etiquette forbade me to purchase in Santa Barbara. "You must have these, my Eustaquia. They will become you well. And would you like any of my white things? Mary! but I am selfish. Take what you will, my friend."

To refuse would be to spoil her pleasure and insult her hospitality, so I accepted the topaz—of which I had six sets already—and the silk—whose color prevailed in my wardrobe—and told her that I detested white, which did not suit my weather-dark skin, and she was as blind and as pleased as a child.

"But come, come!" she cried. "My father is not so generous when he has to wait too long."

She gathered the mass of stuff in her arms and staggered up the companionway. I followed, leaving Prudencia raking the trove her short arms would not hold.

"Ay, my Chonita!" she wailed, "I cannot carry that big piece of pink satin and that vase. And I have only two pairs of slippers and one fan. Ay, Cho-n-i-i-ta, look

at those shawls! Mother of God, suppose Valencia Menendez comes——”

“Do not weep on the silk and spoil what you have,” called down Chonita from the top step. “You shall have all you can wear for a year.”

She reached the deck, and stood, panting and imperious, before her father. “All! All! I must have all!” she cried. “Never have they been so fine, so rich.”

“Holy Mary!” shrieked Don Guillermo. “Do you think I am made of doubloons that you would buy a whole ship’s cargo? You shall have a quarter; no more—not a yard!”

“I shall have all!” And the stately daughter of the Iturbi y Moncadas stamped her little foot upon the deck.

“A third—not a yard more. And diamonds! Holy Heaven! There is not gold enough in the Californias to feed the extravagance of the Señorita Doña Chonita Iturbi y Moncada.”

She managed to bend her body in spite of her burden, her eyes flashing sanely above the mass of tulle which covered the rest of her face.

“And not fine raiment enough in the world to accord with the state of the only daughter of the Señor Don Guillermo Iturbi y Moncada, the delight and the pride of his old age. Will you send these things to the North, to be worn by an Estenega? Your Chonita will cry her eyes so red that she will be known as the ugly witch of Santa Barbara, and Casa Grande will be like a tomb.”

“Oh, thou spoilt baby! Thou wilt have thy way——” At this moment Prudencia appeared. Nothing whatever could be seen of her small person but her feet; she looked like an exploded bale of goods. “What! what!” gasped Don Guillermo. “Thou little rat! Thou wouldst make a Christmas doll of thyself with satin that is too heavy for thy grandmother, and eke out thy dumpy inches with a train? Oh, Mother of God!” He turned to the captain, who was smoking complacently, assured of the issue. “I will let them carry these things home;

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but to-morrow, one-half, at least, comes back." And he stamped wrathfully down the deck.

"Send the rest," said Chorita to the captain, "and you shall have a bag of gold to-night."

CHAPTER XI

THE next morning Chonita, clad in a long gown of white wool, a silver cross at her throat, her hair arranged like a coronet, sat in a large chair in the dispensary. Her father stood beside a table, parceling drugs. The sick-poor of Santa Barbara passed them in a long line.

The Doomswoman exercised her power to heal, the birthright of the twin.

"I wonder if I can," she said to me in English, laying her white fingers on a knotted arm, "or if it is my father's medicines. I have no right to question this beautiful faith of my country, but I really don't see how I do it. Still, I suppose it is like many things in our religion, not for mere human beings to understand. This pleases my vanity, at least. I wonder if I shall have cause to exercise my other endowment."

"To curse?"

"Yes; I think I might do that with something more of sincerity."

The men, women, and children, native Californians and Indians, scrubbed for the occasion, filed slowly past her, and she touched all kindly and bade them be well. They regarded her with adoring eyes and bent almost to the ground.

"Perhaps they will help me out of purgatory," she said; "and it is something to be on a pedestal; I should not like to come down. It is a cheap victory, but so are most of the victories that the world knows of."

When she had touched nearly a hundred, they gathered about her, and she spoke a few words to them.

"My friends, go, and say, 'I shall be well.' Does not the Bible say that faith shall make ye whole? Cling to your faith! Believe! Believe! Else will you feel as if

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the world crumbled beneath your feet! And there is nothing, nothing to take its place. What folly, what presumption, to suggest that anything can—a mortal passion——” She stopped suddenly, and continued coldly: “Go, my friends; words do not come easily to me to-day. Go, and God grant that you may be well and happy.”

CHAPTER XII

WE sat in the sala the next evening, awaiting the return of the prodigal and his deliverer. The night was cool, and the doors were closed; coals burned in a roof-tile. The room, unlike most Californian salas, boasted a carpet, and the furniture was covered with green rep, instead of the usual black horse-hair.

Don Guillermo patted the table gently with his open palm accompanying the tinkle of Prudencia's guitar and her light monotonous voice. She sat on the edge of a chair, her solemn eyes fixed on a painting of Reinaldo which hung on the wall. Doña Trinidad was sewing as usual, and dressed as simply as if she looked to her daughter to maintain the state of the Iturbi y Moncadas. Above a black silk skirt she wore a black shawl, one end thrown over her shoulder. About her head was a close black silk turban, concealing, with the exception of two soft gray locks on either side of her face, what little hair she still may have possessed. Her white face was delicately cut; the lines of time indicated spiritual sweetness rather than strength.

Chonita roved between the sala and an adjoining room where four Indian girls embroidered the yellow poppies on the white satin. I was reading one of her books—the "Vicar of Wakefield."

"Will you be glad to see Reinaldo, my Prudencia?" asked Don Guillermo, as the song finished.

"Ay!" and the girl blushed.

"Thou wouldst make a good wife for Reinaldo, and it is well that he marry. It is true that he has a gay spirit and loves company, but you shall live here in this house, and if he is not a devoted husband he shall have no money to spend. It is time he became a married man

and learned that life was not made for dancing and flirting; then, too, would his restless spirit get him into fewer broils. I have heard him speak twice of no other women, save Valencia Menendez, and I would not have her for a daughter. I think he loves thee."

"Surely!" said Doña Trinidad.

"That is love, I suppose," said Chonita, leaning back in her chair and forgetting the poppies. "With her a placid contented hope, with him a calm preference for a malleable woman. If he left her for another she would cry for a week, then serenely marry whom my father bade her, and forget Reinaldo in the *donas* of the bridegroom. The birds do almost as well."

Don Guillermo smiled indulgently. Prudencia did not know whether to cry or not. Doña Trinidad, who never thought of replying to her daughter, said:

"Chonita mia, Liseta and Tomaso wish to marry, and your father will give them the little house by the creek."

"Yes, *mamacita*?" said Chonita absently. She felt no interest in the loves of the Indians.

"We have a new Father in the Mission," continued her mother, remembering that she had not acquainted her daughter with all the important events of her absence. "And Don Rafael Guzman's son was drafted. That was a judgment for not marrying when his father bade him. For that I shall be glad to have Reinaldo marry. I would not have him go to the war to be killed."

"No," said Don Guillermo. "He must be a *diputado* to Mexico. I would not lose my only son in battle. I am ambitious for him; and so art thou, Chonita, for thy brother. Is it not so?"

"Yes. I have it in me to stab the heart of any man who rolls a stone in his way."

"My daughter," said Don Guillermo, with the accent of duty rather than of reproof, "thou must love without vengeance. Sustain thy brother, but harm not his enemy. I would not have thee hate even an Estenega, although I cannot love them myself. But we will not talk of the Estenegas. Do you realize that our Reinaldo

will be with us this night? We must all go to confession to-morrow—your mother and myself, Eustaquia, Reinaldo, Prudencia, and yourself.”

Chonita's face became rigid. “I cannot go to confession,” she said. “It may be months before I can; perhaps never.”

“What?”

“Can one go to confession with a hating and an unforgiving heart! Ay! that I never had gone to Monterey! At least I had the consolation of my religion before. Now I fight the darkness by myself. Do not ask me questions, for I shall not answer them. But taunt me no more with confession.”

Even Don Guillermo was dumb. In all the twenty-four years of her life she never had betrayed violence of spirit before; even her hatred of the Estenegas had been a religion rather than a personal feeling. It was the first glimpse of her soul that she had accorded them, and they were aghast. What—what had happened to this proud, reserved, careless daughter of the Iturbi y Moncadas?

Doña Trinidad drew down her mouth. Prudencia began to cry. Then, for the moment, Chonita was forgotten. Two horses galloped into the courtyard.

“Reinaldo!”

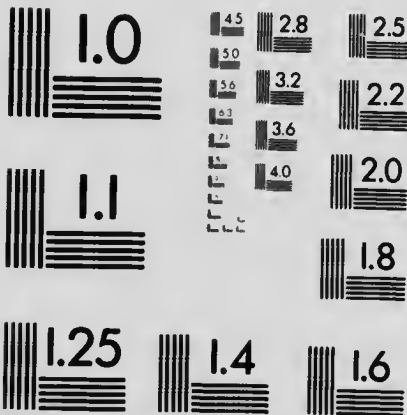
The door had but an inside knob; Don Guillermo threw it open as a young man sprang up the three steps of the corridor, followed by a little man who carefully picked his way.

“Yes, I am here, my father, my mother, my sister, my Prudencia! Ay, Eustaquia, thou too.” And the pride of the house kissed each in turn, his dark eyes wandering absently about the room. He was a dashing caballero, and as handsome as any ever born in the Californias. The dust of travel had been removed—at a saloon—from his blue velvet gold-embroidered serape, which he immediately flung on the floor. His short jacket and trousers were also of dark-blue velvet, the former decorated with buttons of silver filigree, the latter



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laced with silver cord over spotless linen. The front of his shirt was covered with costly lace. His long botas were of soft yellow leather stamped with designs in silver and gartered with blue ribbon. The clanking spurs were of silver inlaid with gold. The sash, knotted gracefully over his hip, was of white silk. His curled black hair was tied with a blue ribbon, and clung, clustering and damp, about a low brow. He bore a strange resemblance to Chonita, in spite of the difference of color, but his eyes were merely large and brilliant; they had no stars in their shallows. His mouth was covered by a heavy silken mustache, and his profile was bold. At first glance he impressed one as a perfect type of manly strength, aggressively decided of character. It was only when he cast aside the wide sombrero—which, when worn a little back, most becomingly framed his face—that one saw the narrow insignificant head.

For a time there was no conversation, only a series of exclamations. Chonita alone was calm, smiling a loving welcome. In the excitement of the first moments little notice was taken of the devoted bailer, who ardently regarded Chonita.

Don Juan de la Borrascosa was flouting his sixties, fighting for his youth as a parent fights for its young. His withered little face wore the complacent smile of vanity; his arched brows furnished him with a supercilious expression which atoned for his lack of inches; he was barely five feet two. His large curved nose was also a compensating gift from the god-mother of dignity, and he carried himself so erectly that he looked like a toy general. His small black eyes were bright as glass beads, and his hair was ribboned as bravely as Reinaldo's. He was clad in silk attire—red silk embroidered with butterflies. His little hands were laden with rings; carbuncles glowed in the lace of his shirt. He was moderately wealthy, but a staunch retainer of the house of Iturbi y Moncada, the devoted slave of Chonita.

She was the first to remember him, and held out her

hand for him to kiss. "You have the gratitude of my heart, dear friend," she said, as the little dandy curved over it. "I thank you a thousand times for bringing my brother back to me."

"Ay, Doña Chonita, thanks be to God and Mary that I was enabled so to do. Had my mission proved unsuccessful, I should have committed a crime and gone to prison with him. Never would I have returned here. Dueño adorado, ever at thy feet."

Chonita smiled kindly, but she was listening to her brother, who was now expatiating upon his wrongs to a sympathetic audience.

"Holy Heaven!" he exclaimed, striding up and down the room, "that an Iturbi y Moncada, the descendant of twenty generations, should be put to shame, to disgrace and humiliation, by being cast into a common prison! That an ardent patriot, a loyal subject of Mexico, should be accused of conspiring against the judgment of an Alvarado! Carillo was my friend, and had his cause been a just one, I had gone with him to the gates of death or the chair of state. But could I—I—conspire against a wise and great man like Juan Bautista Alvarado? No! not even if Carillo had asked me so to do. But, by the stars of heaven, he did not. I had been but the guest of his bounty for a month; the suspicious rascals who spied upon us, the poor brains who compose the Departmental Junta, took it for granted that an Iturbi y Moncada could not be blind to Carillo's plots and plans and intrigues, that, having been the intimate of his house and table, I must perforce aid and abet whatever schemes engrossed him. Ay, more often than frequently did a dark surmise cross my mind, but I brushed it aside as one does the prompting of evil desires. I would not believe that a Carillo would plot, conspire, and rise again, after the terrible lesson he had received in 1838. Alvarado holds California to his heart; Castro, the Mars of the nineteenth century, hovers menacingly on the horizon. Who, who, in sober reason, would defy that brace of frowning gods?"

His eloquence was cut short by respiratory interference, but he continued to stride from one end of the room to the other, his face flushed with excitement. Prudencia's large eyes followed him, admiration paralyzing her tongue. Doña Trinidad smiled upward with the self-approval of the modest barn-yard lady who has raised a magnificent bantam. Don Guillermo applauded loudly. Only Chonita turned away, the truth smiting her for the first time.

"Words! words!" she thought bitterly. "*He* would have said all that in two sentences. Is it true—*ay, triste de mi!*—what he said of my brother? I hate him, yet his brain has cut mine and wedged there. My head bows to him, even while all the Iturbi y Moncada in me arises to curse him. But my brother! my brother! he is so much younger. And if he had had the same advantages—those years in Mexico and America and Europe—would he not know as much as Diego Estenega? Oh, surely! surely!"

"My son," Don Guillermo was saying, "God be thanked that you did not merit your imprisonment. I should have beaten you with my cane, and locked you in your room for a month, had you disgraced my name. But, as it happily is, you must have compensation for unjust treatment. Prudencia, give me your hand."

The girl rose, trembling and blushing, but crossed the room with stately step and stood beside her uncle. Don Guillermo took her hand and placed it in Reinaldo's. "Thou shalt have her, my son," he said. "I have divined thy wishes."

Reinaldo kissed the small fingers fluttering in his, making a great flourish. He was quite ready to marry, and his pliant little cousin suited him better than any one he knew. "Day-star of my eyes!" he exclaimed, "consolation of my soul! Memories of injustice, discomfort, and sadness fall into the waters of oblivion rolling at thy feet. I see neither past nor future. The rose-hued curtain of youth and hope falls behind and before us."

"Yes, yes," assented Prudencia delightedly. "My Reinaldo! my Reinaldo!"

We congratulated them severally and collectively, and, when the ceremony was over, Reinaldo cried, with even more enthusiasm than he had yet shown, "My mother, for the love of Mary give me something to eat—tamales, salad, chicken, dulces. Don Juan and I are as empty as hides."

Doña Trinidad smiled with the pride of the Californian housewife. "It is ready, my son. Come to the dining-room, no?"

She led the way, followed by the family, Reinaldo and Prudencia lingering. As the others crossed the threshold he drew her back.

"A lump of tallow, do you hear, my Prudencia?" he whispered hurriedly. "Put it under the green bench. I must have it to-night."

"Ay! Reinaldo——"

"Do not refuse, my Prudencia, if you love me. Will you do it?"

"Surely, my Reinaldo."

CHAPTER XIII

THE family retired early in its brief seasons of reclusion, and at ten o'clock Casa Grande was dark and quiet. Reinaldo opened his door and listened cautiously, then stepped softly to the green bench and felt beneath for the lump of tallow. It was there. He returned to his room and swung himself from his window into the yard, about which were irregularly disposed the manufactories of the Indians, a high wall protecting the small "town." All was quiet here, and had been for hours. He tiptoed to the wooden tower and mounted a ladder, lifting it from story to story until he reached the attic under the pointed roof. Then he lit a candle, and, removing a board from the floor, peered down into the room whose door was always so securely locked. The stars shone through the uncurtained windows, and were no yellower than the gold coins heaped on the large table and overflowing the baskets. Reinaldo took a long pole from a corner, and applied to one end a piece of the soft tallow. He lowered the pole and pressed it firmly into the pile of gold on the table. The pole was withdrawn, and this ingenious fisherman removed a large gold fish from the bait. He fished patiently for an hour, then filled a bag he had brought for the purpose, and returned as he had come. Not to his bed, however. Once more he opened his door and stole forth, this time to the town, to hold high revel round the gaming-table, where he was welcomed hilariously by his boon companions.

A wild fandango in a neighboring booth provided relaxation for the gamblers. In an hour or two Reinaldo found his way to this well-known haven. Black-eyed dancing-girls in short skirts of tawdry satin trimmed with cotton lace, mock jewels on their bare necks and

in their coarse black hair, flew about the room and screamed with delight as Reinaldo flung gold pieces among them. The excitement continued in all its variations until morning. Men bet and lost all the gold they had brought with them, then sold horse, serape, and sombrero to the men who neither drank nor gambled, but came prepared for close and profitable bargains. Reinaldo lost his purloins, won them again, stood upon the table and spoke with torrential eloquence of his wrongs and virtues, kissed all the girls, and when by easy and rapid stages he had succeeded in converting himself into a skin full of aguardiente, he was carried home and put to bed by such of his companions as were sober enough to make no noise.

CHAPTER XIV

CHONITA, clad in a black gown, walked slowly up and down the corridor of Casa Grande. The rain should have dripped from the eaves, beaten with heavy monotony upon the hard clay of the court-yard, to accompany her mood, but it did not. The sky was blue without fleck of cloud, the sun like the opening of a furnace of boiling gold, the air as warm and sweet and drowsy as if it never had come in shock with human care. Prudencia sat on the green bench, drawing threads in a fine linen camisa, her small face rosy with contentment.

"Why do you wear that black gown this beautiful morning?" she demanded suddenly. "And why do you walk when you can sit down?"

"I had a dream last night. Do you believe in dreams?" She had as much regard for her cousin's opinion as for the twittering of a bird, but she felt the necessity of speech at times, and at least this child never remembered what she said.

"Surely, my Chonita. Did not I dream that the good captain would bring pink silk stockings? and are they not my own this minute?" And she thrust a diminutive foot from beneath the hem of her gown, regarding it with admiration. "And did not I dream that Tomaso and Liseta would marry? What was your dream, my Chonita?"

"I do not know what the first part was; something very sad. All I remember is the roar of the ocean and another roar like the wind through high trees. Then a moment that shook and frightened me, but sweeter than anything I know of, so I cannot define it. Then a swift awful tragedy—I cannot recall the details of that, either. The whole dream was like a black mass of clouds,

cut now and again by a scythe of lightning. But then, like a vision within a dream. I seemed to stand there and see myself, clad in a black gown, walking up and down this corridor, or one like it, up and down, up and down, never resting, never daring to rest lest I should hear the ceaseless clatter of a lonely fugitive's horse. When I awoke I was as cold as if I had received the first shock of the surf. I cannot say why I put on this black gown to-day. I make no haste to feel as I did when I wore it in that dream—the desolation—the endlessness; but I did.”

“That was a strange dream, my Chonita,” said Prudencia, threading her needle. “You must have eaten too many dulces for supper, did you?”

“No,” said Chonita shortly, “I did not.”

She continued her aimless walk, wondering at her depression of spirits. All her life she had felt a certain mental loneliness, but a healthy body rarely harbors an invalid soul, and she had only to spring on a horse and gallop over the hills to feel as happy as a young animal. Moreover, the world—all the world she knew—was at her feet; nor had she ever known the novelty of an ungratified wish. Once in a while her father arose in an obdurate mood, but she had only to coax, or threaten, or weep—never had she been seen to shed one—or stamp her foot, to bring that doting parent to terms. It is true that she had had her cankered moments, an abrupt, impatient desire for something that was not all light and pleasure and gold and adulation; but, being a girl of will and sense, she had turned resolutely from the troublous demands of her deeper soul, regarding them as coals fallen from a mind that burned too hotly at times.

This morning, however, she let the black waters rise, not so much because they were stronger than her will, as because she wished to understand what was the matter with her. She was filled with a dull dislike of every one she had ever known, of every condition which had surrounded her from birth. She felt a deep disgust of placid contentment, of the mere enjoyment of sunshine and air.

She recalled drearily the clock-like revolutions of the year which brought bull-fights, races, rodeos, church celebrations; her mother's anecdotes of the Indians; her father's manifold interests, ever the theme of his tongue; Reinaldo's grandiloquent accounts of his exploits and intentions; Prudencia's infinite nothings. She hated the balls of which she was La Favorita, the everlasting serenades, the whole life of pleasure which made that period of California the one Arcadia the modern world has known. Some time during the past few weeks the girl had crossed her hands over her breast and lain down in her eternal tomb. The woman had arisen and come forth, blinded as yet by the light, her hands thrust out gropingly.

"It is that man," she told herself, with angry frankness. "I had not talked with him ten minutes before I felt as I do when the scene changes suddenly in one of Shakespeare's plays—as if I had been flung like a meteor into a new world. I felt the necessity for mental alertness for the first time in my life; always, before, I had striven to conceal what I knew. The natural consequences, of course, were first the desire to feel that stimulation again and again, then to realize the littleness of everything but mental companionship. I have read that people who begin with hate sometimes end with love; and if I were a book woman I suppose I should in time love this man whom I now so hate, even while I admire. But I am no lump of wax in the hands of a writer of dreams. I am Chonita Iturbi y Moncada, and he is Diego Estenega. I could no more love him than could the equator kiss the poles. Only, much as I hate him, I wish I could see him again. He knows so much more than any one else. I should like to talk to him, to ask him many things. He has sworn to marry me." Her lip curled scornfully, but a sudden glow rushed over her. "Had he not been an Estenega—yes, I could have loved him—that calm clear-sighted love that is born of regard; not a whirlwind and a collapse, like most love. I should like to sit with my hands in my lap and hear

him talk for ever. And we cannot even be friends. It is a pity."

The girl's mind was like a splendid castle only one wing of which had ever been illuminated. By the light of the books she had read, and of acute observation in a little sphere, she strove to penetrate the thick walls and carry the torch into broader halls and lofty towers. But superstition, prejudice, bitter pride, inexperience of life, conjoined their shoulders and barred the way. As Diego Estenega had discerned, under the thick Old-World shell of inherited impressions was a plastic being of all womanly possibilities. But so little did she know of herself, so futile was her struggle in the dark, with only sudden flashes to blind her and distort all she saw, that with nothing to shape that moulding kernel it would shrink and wither, and in a few years she would be but a polished shell, perfect of proportion, hollow at the core.

But if strong intellectual juices sank into that sweet pliant kernel, developing it into the perfected form of woman, establishing the current between the brain and the passions, finishing the work, or leaving it half completed, as circumstance vouchsafed—what then?

"Ay, señor!" exclaimed Prudencia, as two people, mounted on horses glistening with silver, galloped into the court-yard. "Valencia and Adan!"

I came out of the sala at that moment and watched them alight; Adan, that faithful dog-like adorer, of whose kind every beautiful woman has a half dozen or more, Valencia, the bitter-hearted rival of Chonita. She was a tall dazzling creature, with flaming black eyes, large and heavily lashed, and a figure so lithe that she seemed to sweep downward from her horse rather than spring to the ground. She had the dark rich skin of Mexico—another source of envy and hatred, for the Iturbi y Moncadas, like most of the aristocracy of the country, were of pure Castilian blood and as white as porcelain in consequence—and a red full mouth.

"Welcome, my Chonita!" she cried. "*Valgame Dios!* but I am glad to see you back!" She kissed Chonita ef-

fusively. "Ay, my poor brother!" she whispered hurriedly. "Tell him that you are glad to see him." And then she welcomed me with words that fell as softly as rose-leaves in a zephyr, and patted Prudencia's head.

Chonita, with a faint flush on her cheek, gave Adan her hand to kiss. She had given this faithful suitor little encouragement, but his unswerving and honest devotion had wrung from her a sort of careless affection; and she told me that first night in Monterey that if she ever made up her mind to marry she thought she should select Adan; he was more tolerable than any one she knew. It is doubtful if he had crossed her mind since; and now, with all a woman's unreason, she conceived a sudden and violent dislike for him because she had treated him too kindly in her thoughts. I liked Adan Menendez; there was something manly and sure about him—the latter a restful if not a fascinating quality. And I liked his appearance. His clear brown eyes had a kind direct regard. His chin was round, and his profile a little thick; but the gray hair brushed up and away from his low forehead gave dignity to his face. His figure was pervaded with the indolence of the Californian.

"At your feet, señorita mia," he murmured, his voice trembling.

"It gives me pleasure to see you again, Adan. Have you been well and happy since I left?"

It was a careless question, and he looked at her reproachfully.

"I have been well, Chonita," he said.

At this moment our attention was startled by a sharp exclamation from Valencia. Prudencia had announced her engagement. Valencia had refused many suitors, but she had intended to marry Reinaldo Iturbi y Moncada. Not that she loved him; he was the most brilliant match in three hundred leagues. Within the last year he had bent the knee to the famous coquette; but she had lost her temper one day—or, rather, it had found her—and after a violent quarrel he had galloped away, and

gone almost immediately to Los Angeles, there to remain until Don Juan went after him with a bushel of gold. She controlled herself in a moment, and swayed her graceful body over Prudencia, kissing her lightly on the cheek.

"You baby, to marry!" she said softly. "You took away my breath. You look no more than fourteen years. I had forgotten the grand merienda of your eighteenth birthday."

Prudencia's little bosom swelled with pride at the discomfiture of the haughty beauty who had rarely remembered to notice her. Prudencia was not poor; she owned a goodly rancho; but it was an hacienda to the state of a Menendez.

"You will be one of my bridesmaids, no, Doña Valencia?" she asked.

"That will be the proud day of my life," said Valencia graciously.

"We have a ball to-night," said Chonita. "You would have had word to-day. You will stay now, no? and not ride those five leagues twice again? I will send for your gown."

"Truly, I will stay, my Chonita. And you will tell me all about your visit to Monterey, no?"

"All? Ay! surely!"

Adan kissed both Prudencia's little hands in earnest congratulation. As he did so the door of Reinaldo's room opened, and the heir of the Iturbide y Moncadas stepped forth, gorgeous in black silk embroidered with gold. He had slept off the effects of the night's debauch, and cold water had restored his freshness. He kissed Prudencia's hand, his own to us, then bent over Valencia's with exaggerated homage.

"At thy feet, O loveliest of California's daughters! In the immensity of thought, going to and coming from Los Angeles, my imagination has spread its wings like an eagle. Thou hast been a beautiful day-dream, posing or reclining, dancing or swaying with grace superlative on thy restive steed. I have not greeted my good friend

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Adan. I can but look and look and keep on looking at his incomparable sister, the rose of roses, the queen of queens."

"Thy tongue carols as easily as a lark's," said Valencía, with but half-concealed bitterness. "Thou couldst sing all day—and the next forget."

"I forget nothing, beautiful señorita—neither the fair days of spring nor the ugly storms of winter. And I love the sunshine and flee from the tempest. Adan, brother of my heart, welcome as ever to Casa Grande—Ay! here is my father. He looks like Sancho Panza."

Don Guillermo's sturdy little mustang bore him into the court-yard, shaking his stout master not a little. The old gentleman's black silk handkerchief had fallen to his shoulders; his face was red, but covered with a broad smile.

"I have letters from Monterey," he said, as Reinaldo and Adan ran down the steps to help him alight. "Alvarado goes by sea to Los Angeles this month, but returns by land in the next, and will honor us with a visit of a week. I shall write to him to arrive in time for the wedding. Several members of the Junta come with him—and of their number is Diego Estenega."

"Who?" cried Reinaldo. "An Estenega? You will not ask him to cross the threshold of Casa Grande?"

"I always liked Diego," said the old man, somewhat confusedly. "And he is the friend of Alvarado. How can I avoid to ask him, when he is of the party?"

"Let him come," cried Reinaldo. "God of my life!—I am glad that he comes, this lord of redwood forests and fog-bound cliffs. It is well that he shall see the splendor of the Iturbi y Moneadas—our pageants and our gay diversions, our cavalcades of beauty and elegance under a canopy of smiling blue. Glad I am that he comes. Once for all shall he learn that, although his accursed family has beaten ours in war and politics, he can never hope to rival our pomp and state."

"Ah!" said Valencía to Chonita, "I have heard of this Diego Estenega. I, too, am glad that he comes. I

have the advantage of you this time, my friend. You and he must hate each other, and for once I am without a rival. He shall be my slave." And she tossed her spirited head.

"He shall not!" cried Chonita, then checked herself abruptly, the blood rushing to her hair. "I hate him so," she continued hurriedly to the astonished Valencia, "that I would see no woman show him favor. You will not like him, Valencia. He is not handsome at all—no color in his skin, not even white, and eyes in the back of his head. No mustache, no curls, and a mouth that looks—oh, that mouth, so grim, so hard!—no, it is not to be described. No one could; it makes you hate him. And he has no respect for women; he thinks they were made to please the eye, no more. I do not think he would look ten seconds at an ugly woman. You will not like him, Valencia; it would be impossible."

"Ay, but I think I shall. What you have said makes me wish to see him the more. God of my life! but he must be different from the men of the South. And I shall like that."

"Perhaps," said Chonita coldly. "At least, he will not break your heart, for no woman could love him. But come and take your siesta, no? and refresh yourself for the dance. I will send you a cup of chocolate." And, bending her head to Adan, she swept down the corridor, followed by Valencia.

CHAPTER XV

THOSE were two busy months before Prudencia's wedding. Twenty girls, sharply watched and directed by Doña Trinidad and the sometime mistress of Casa Grande, worked upon the marriage wardrobe. Prudencia would have no use for more house-linen; but enough fine linen was made into underclothes to last her a lifetime. Five keen-eyed girls did nothing but draw the threads for *deshalados*, and so elaborate was the openwork that the wonder was the bride did not have bands and stripes of rheumatism. Others fashioned *crêpes* and flowered silks and heavy satins into gowns, with long pointed waists and full flowing skirts, some with sleeves of lace, and high to the base of the throat, others cut to display the plump whiteness of the owner. Twelve *rebosos* were made for her; Doña Trinidad gave her one of her finest mantillas; Chonita, the white satin embroidered with poppies, for which she had conceived a capricious dislike. She also invited Prudencia to take what she pleased from her wardrobe; and Prudencia, who was nothing if not practical, helped herself to three gowns which had been made for Chonita at great expense in the city of Mexico, four shawls of Chinese *crêpe*, a roll of pineapple silk, an American hat.

The house until within two weeks of the wedding was full of visitors—neighbors whose ranchos lay ten leagues away or nearer, and the people of the town; all of them come to offer congratulations, chatter on the corridor by day and dance in the *sala* by night. The court was never free of prancing horses pawing the ground for eighteen hours at a time under their heavy saddles. Doña Trinidad's cooking-girls were as thick in the kitchen as ants on an anthill. The good things of Casa

Grande were as famous as its hospitality and not the least of the attractions to the merry visitors. When we did not dance at home we danced at the ranches of the neighbors or at the Presidio. During the last two weeks, however, every one went home to rest and prepare for the festivities to succeed the wedding, and the old house was as quiet as a cañon in the mountains.

Chonita took a lively concern in the preparations at first, but her interest soon evaporated, and she spent more and more time in the little library adjoining her bedroom. She did less reading than thinking, however. Once she came to me and tried for fifteen minutes to draw from me something in Estenega's dispraise; and when I finally admitted that he had a fault or two I thought she would scalp me. Still, at this time she was hardly more than fascinated, interested, tantalized by a mind she could appreciate but not understand. If they had never met again he gradually would have moved backward to the horizon of her memory, growing dim and more dim, hovered in a cloud-bank for a while, then disappeared into that limbo which must exist somewhere for discarded impressions, and all would have been well.

CHAPTER XVI

THE evening before the wedding Prudeneia covered her demure self with black gown and reboso, and accompanied by Chonita went up to the Mission to make her last maiden confession. Chonita did not go with her into the church, but paced up and down the long corridor of the wing, gazing absently upon the deep wild valley and peaceful ocean, seeing little beyond the images in her own mind.

That morning Alvarado and several members of the Junta had arrived, but not Estenega. He had come as far as the Rancho Temblor, Alvarado explained, and there, meeting some old friends, had decided to remain over night and accompany them the next day to the ceremony. As Chonita had stood on the corridor and watched the approach of the Governor's cavalcade, her heart had beaten violently, and she had angrily acknowledged that her nervousness was due to the fact that she was about to meet Diego Estenega again. When she discovered that he was not of the party, she turned to me with pique, resentment, and disappointment in her face.

"Even if I cannot ever like him," she said, "at least I might have the pleasure of hearing him talk. There is no harm in that, even if he is an Estenega, a renegade, and the enemy of my brother. I can hate him with my heart and like him with my mind. And he must have cared little to see us again, that he could linger for another day."

"I am mad to see Don Diego Estenega," said Valencia, her red lips pouting. "Why did he, of all others, tarry?"

"He is fickle and perverse," I said; "the most uncertain man I know."

"Perhaps he thought to make us wish to see him the more," suggested Valencia.

"No," I said; "he has no ridiculous vanities."

Chonita wandered back and forth behind the arches, waiting for Prudencia's long confession of sinless errors to conclude.

"What has a baby like that to confess?" she thought impatiently. "She could not sin if she tried. She knows nothing of the dark storms of rage and hatred and revenge which can gather in the breasts of stronger and weaker beings. I never knew, either, until lately; but the storm is so black I dare not face it and carry it to the priest. I am a sort of human chaos, and I wish I were dead. I thought to forget him, and I see him as plainly as on that morning when he told me that it was he who would send my brother to prison——"

She stopped short with a little cry. Diego Estenega stood before the Mission in the broad swath of moonlight. She had heard a horse gallop up the valley, but had paid no attention to the familiar sound. Estenega had appeared as suddenly as if he had risen from the earth.

"It is I, señorita." He ascended the Mission steps. "Do not fear. May I kiss your hand?"

She gave him her hand, but withdrew it hurriedly. Of the tremendous mystery of sex she knew almost nothing. Girls were brought up in such ignorance in those days that many a bride ran home to her mother on her wedding night; and books teach innocence little. But she was fully conscious that there was something in the touch of Estenega's lips and hand that startled while it thrilled and enthralled.

"I thought you stayed with the Ortegas to-night?" she said. Oh, blessed conventions!

"I did—for a few hours. Then I wanted to see you, and I left them and came on. At Casa Grande I found

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no one but Eustaquia; every one else had gone to the gardens; and she told me that you were here."

Chonita's heart was beating as fast as it had beaten that morning; even her hands shook a little. A glad wave of warmth rushed over her. She turned to him impetuously. "Tell me!" she exclaimed. "Why do I feel like this for you? I hate you; you know that. There are many reasons—five; you counted them. And yet I feel excited, almost glad, at your coming. This morning I was disappointed when you did not come. Tell me—you know everything, and I so little—why is it?"

Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes terrified and appealing. She looked very lovely and natural. Probably for the first time in his life Estenega resisted a temptation. He passionately wished to take her in his arms and tell her the truth. But he was too clever a man; there was too much at stake; if he frightened her now he might never even see her again. Moreover, she appealed to his chivalry. And it suddenly occurred to him that so sweet a heart would be warped in its waking if passion bewildered and controlled her first.

"Doña Chonita," he said, "like all women—all beautiful and spoiled women—you demand variety. I happen to be made of harder stuff than your caballeros, and you have not seen me for two months; that is all."

"And if I saw you every day for two months would I no longer care whether you came or went?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Is it sweet or terrible to feel this way?" thought the girl. "Would I regret if he no longer made me tremble, or would I go on my knees and thank the Blessed Virgin?" Aloud she said: "It was strange for me to ask you such questions; but it is as if you had something in your mind separate from yourself, and that *it* would tell me, and you could not prevent its being truthful. I do not believe in *you*; you look as if nothing were worth the while to lie or tell the truth about; but your mind

is quite different. It seems to me that it knows all things, that it is as cold and clear as ice."

"What a whimsical creature you are! My mind, like myself—I feel as if I were twins—is at your service. Forget that I am Diego Estenega. Regard me as a sort of archive of impressions which may amuse or serve you as the poorest of your books do. That they are catalogued under the general title of Diego Estenega is a mere detail; an accident, for that matter; they might be pigeon-holed in the skull of a Bandini or a Pico. I happened to be the magnet, that is all."

"If I could forget that you were an Estenega—just for a week, while you are here," she said wistfully.

"You are a woman of will and imagination—also of variety. Make an experiment; it will interest you. Of course, there will be times when you will be bitterly conscious that I am the enemy of your house; it would be idle to expect otherwise; but when we happen to be apart from disturbing influences, let us agree to forget that we are anything but two human beings, deeply congenial. As for what I said in the garden at Monterey, the last time we spoke together—I shall not bother you."

"You no longer care?" she exclaimed.

"I did not say that. I said I should not bother you—recognizing your hostility and your reasons. Be faithful to your traditions, my beautiful Doomswoman. No man is worth the sacrifice of those dear old comrades. What presumption for a man to require you to abandon the cause of your house, give up your brother, sacrifice your religious principles; one, too, who would open his doors to the Americans you hate! No man is worth such a sacrifice as that."

"No," she said; "no man." But she said it without enthusiasm.

"A man is but one; traditions are fivefold, and multiplied by duty. Poor grain of sand—what can he give, comparable to the cold serene happiness of fidelity to self? Love is sweet—horribly sweet—but so common a

madness can give but a tithe of the satisfaction of duty to pure and lofty ideals."

"I do not believe that." The woman in her arose in resentment. "A life of duty must be empty, cold, and wrong. It was not that we were made for."

"Let us talk little of love, señorita; it is a dangerous subject."

"But it interests me, and I should like to understand it."

"I will explain the subject to you fully, some day. I have a fancy to do that on my own territory—up in the red-woods——"

"Here is Prudencia."

A small black figure swept down the steps of the church. She bowed low to Estenega when he was presented, but mutely. The Indian servants brought the horses to the corridor, and they rode down the valley to Casa Grande.

CHAPTER XVII

THE guests of Casa Grande—there were many besides Alvarado and his party; the house was full again—were gathered with the family on the corridor, as Estenega, Chonita, and Prudencia dismounted at the extreme end of the court-yard. As Reinaldo saw the enemy of his house approach he ran down the step, advanced rapidly, and bowed low before him.

"Welcome, Señor Don Diego Estenega," he said—"welcome to Casa Grande. The house is yours. Burn it if you will. The servants are yours; I myself am your servant. This is the supreme moment of my life, suppler even than when I learned of my acquittal of the foul charges laid to my door by scheming and jealous enemies. It is long—alas!—since an Estenega and an Iturbi y Moneada have met in the court-yard of the one or the other. Let this moment be the seal of peace, the death of feud, the unification of the North and the South."

"You have the hospitality of the true Californian, Don Reinaldo. It gives me pleasure to accept it."

"Would, then, your pleasure equal mine!"

"Curse him!" he added to Chonita, as Estenega went up the steps to greet Don Guillermo and Doña Trinidad, "I have just received positive information that it was he who kept me from distinguishing myself and my house in the Departmental Junta, he who cast me in a dungeon. It poisons my happiness to sleep under the same roof with him."

"Ay!" exclaimed Chonita. "Why can you not be more sincere, my brother? Hospitality did not compel you to say so much to your enemy. Could you not have

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spoken a few simple words like himself, and not blackened your soul?"

"My sister! you never spoke to me so harshly before. And on my marriage eve!"

"Forgive me, my most beloved brother. You know I love you. But it grieves me to think that even hospitality could make you false."

When they ascended the steps, not a woman was to be seen; all had followed Prudencia to her chamber to see the *donas* of the groom, which had arrived that day from Mexico. Chonita tarried long enough to see that her father had forgotten the family grievance in his revived susceptibility to Estenega, then went to Prudencia's room. There women, young and old, crowded each other, jabbering like monkeys. The little iron bed, the chairs and tables, every article of furniture, in fact, but the altar in the corner, displayed to advantage exquisite materials for gowns, a mass of elaborate underclothing, a white lace mantilla to be worn at the bridal, lace flounces fine and deep, crêpe shawls, sashes from Rome, silk stockings by the dozen. On a large table were the more delicate and valuable gifts; a rosary of topaz, the cross a fine piece of carving; a jeweled comb; a string of pearls; diamond hoops for the ears; a large pin painted with a head of Guadalupe, the patron saint of California; and several fragile fans. Quite apart, on a little table, was the crown and pride of the *donas*—six white cobweb-like camisas, embroidered, hemstitched, and deshaladoed. Did any Californian bridegroom forget that dainty item he would be repudiated on his wedding-eve.

"God of my life!" murmured Valencia, "he has taste as well as gold. And all to go on that round white doll!"

There was little envy among the other girls. Their eyes sparkled with good-nature as they kissed Prudencia and congratulated her. The older women patted the things approvingly; and, between religion, a *donas* to

satisfy an angel, and prospective bliss, Prudencia was the happiest little bride-elect in all the Californias.

"Never were such *camisas*!" cried one of the girls. "Ay! he will make a good husband. That sign never fails."

"You must wear long long trains now, my Prudencia, and be as stately as Chonita."

"Ay!" exclaimed Prudencia. Did not every gown already made have a train longer than herself?

"You need never wear a mended stocking with all these to last for years," said another; never had silk stockings been brought to the Californias in sufficient plenty for the dancing feet of its daughters.

"I shall always mend my stockings," said Prudencia, "I myself."

"Yes," said one of the older women, "you will be a good wife and waste nothing."

Valencia laid her arm about Chonita's waist. "I wish to meet Don Diego Estenega," she said. "Will you not present him to me?"

"You are very forward," said Chonita coldly. "Can you not wait until he comes your way?"

"No, my Chonita; I wish to meet him now. My curiosity devours me."

"Very well; come with me and you shall know him. Will you come, too, Eustaquia? There are only men on the corridor."

We found Diego and Don Guillermo talking politics in a corner, both deeply interested. Estenega rose at once.

"Don Diego Estenega," said Chonita, "I would present you to the Señorita Doña Valencia Menendez, of the Rancho del Fuego."

Estenega bowed. "I have heard much of Doña Valencia, and am delighted to meet her."

Valencia was nonplussed for a moment; he had not given her the customary salutation, and she could hardly murmur the customary reply. She merely smiled, and

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looked so handsome that she could afford to dispense with words.

"A superb type," said Estenega to me, as Don Guillermo claimed the beauty's attention for a moment. "But only a type; nothing distinctive."

Nevertheless, ten minutes later, Valencia, with the maneuvering of the general of many a battle, had guided him to a seat in the sala under Doña Trinidad's sleepy wing, and her eyes were flashing the language of Spain to his. I saw Chonita watch them for a moment, in mingled surprise and doubt, then saw a sudden look of fear spring to her eyes as she turned hastily and walked away.

Again I shared her room—the thirty rooms and many in the out-buildings were overflowing with guests who had come a hundred leagues or less—and after we had been in bed a half hour, Chonita, overcome by the insinuating power of that time-honored confessional, told me of her meeting with Estenega at the Mission. I made few comments, but sighed; I knew him so well. "It will be strange even to seem to be friends with him," she added, "to hate him in my heart and yet delight to talk with him, and perhaps to regret when he leaves."

"Are you sure that you still hate him?"

She sat up in bed. The solid wooden shutters were closed, but over the door was a small square aperture, and through this a stray moonbeam drifted and fell on her. Her hair was tumbling about her shoulders, and she looked decidedly less statuesque than usual.

"Eustaquia," she said solemnly, "I believe I can go to confession."

CHAPTER XVIII

AT sunrise the next morning the guests of Casa Grande were horsed and ready to start for the Mission. The valley between the house and the Mission was alive with the immediate rancheros and their families, and the people of the town, aristocrats and populace.

At Estenega's suggestion, I climbed with him to the attic of the tower, much to the detriment of my frock. But I made no complaint after Diego had removed the dusty little windows on both sides, and I looked through the apertures at the charming scene. The rising sun gave added fire to the bright red tiles of the long white Mission, threw a pink glow on its noble arches and towers, and on the white massive aqueduct. The bells were crashing their welcome to the bride. The deep valley, wooded and rocky, was pervaded by the soft glow of the awakening, but was as lively as mid-day. There were horses of every color the Lord has decreed that horses shall wear. The saddles upon them were of embossed leather or rich embroidered silk heavily mounted with silver. Above all this gorgeousness sat the caballeros and the doñas, in velvet and silk, gold lace and Spanish, jewels and mantillas, and silver-weighted sombreros; a confused mass of color and motion; a living picture, shifting like a kaleidoscope. Nor was this all; brown, soberly dressed old men and women in satin-padded carretas—heavy ox-carts on wheels made from solid sections of trees, and driven by a gañan seated on one of the animals; the populace in cheap finery, some on foot, others astride old mules or broken-winded horses, two or three on one lame old hack; all chattering, shouting, eager, interested, impatiently awaiting the bride and a week of pleasure.

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In the court-yard and plaza before it, the guests of the house were mounted on a caponera of palominas—horses peculiar to the country: beautiful creatures, golden-bronze and burnished, with luxuriant manes and tails, which waved and shone like the sparkling silver of a waterfall. A number were riderless, awaiting the pleasure of the bridal party. One alone was white as a Californian fog. He lifted his head and pranced as if aware of his proud distinction. The aquera and saddle which embellished his graceful beauty were of pink silk, worked with delicate leaves in gold and silver thread. The stirrups, cut from blocks of wood, were elaborately carved. The glistening reins were made from the long crystal hairs of his mane, and linked with silver. A strip of pink silk, joined at the ends with a huge rosette, was hung from the high silver pommel of the saddle, depending on the left side—a stirrup for my lady's foot.

A deeper murmur, a sudden lifting of sombreros and waving of little hands, proclaimed that the bridal party had appeared, and we hastened down.

Prudencia, the mantilla of the *donas* depending from a comb six inches high, was attired in a white satin gown with a train of portentous length, and looked like a kitten with a long tail. Reinaldo was dazzling. He wore white velvet embroidered with gold; his linen and lace were more fragile than cobwebs; his white satin slippers were clasped with diamond buckles, the same in which his father had married; his jacket was buttoned with diamonds. His white velvet sombrero was covered with plumes. Never have I seen so splendid a bridegroom. I saw Estenega grin; but I maintain that, whatever Reinaldo's deficiencies, he was a picture to be thankful for that morning.

Doña Trinidad wore a quiet gown of gray satin, but Don Guillermo was as picturesque in his way as his son. His black silk handkerchief had been knotted hurriedly about his head, and the four corners hung upon his neck. His short breeches were of red velvet, his jacket of blue cloth was trimmed with large silver buttons and

gold lace; his vest was of yellow damask, his linen embroidered. Attached to his slippers were enormous silver spurs inlaid with gold, the rowels so long that they scratched more trains than one that day.

The bridesmaids stood in a group apart, a large bouquet; each wore a gown of a different color. Valencia blazed forth in yellow, and flashed triumphant glances at Estenega, now and again one of irrepressible envy and resentment at Reinaldo. Chonita looked like a water-witch in pale green covered with lace that stirred with every breath of air; her mantilla was as delicate as sea-spray. About her was something subtle, awakened, restive, that I noticed for the first time. Once she intercepted one of Valencia's lavish glances, and her own eyes were extremely wicked and dangerous for a moment. I looked at Estenega. He was regarding her with a fierce intensity which made him oblivious for the moment of his surroundings. I looked at Valencia. Thunder-clouds were those heavy brows, lowered to the lightning which sprang from depths below. I looked again at Chonita. The pink color was in her marble face; pinker were her earven lips.

"God of my soul!" I said to Estenega. "Go home."

"My Prudencia!" said Don Guillermo. He lifted her to the pink saddle, adjusted her foot in the pink ribbon, climbed up behind her, placed one arm about her waist, took the bridle in his other hand, and cantered out of the court-yard. Reinaldo sprang to his horse, lifted his mother in front of him, and followed. Then went the bridesmaids; and the rest of us fell into line as we listed. As we rode up the valley, those awaiting us joined the cavalcade, the populace closing it, spreading out like a fan attached to the tail of a snake. The bells rang out a joyful discordant peal; the long undulating line of many colors wound through the trees, passed the long corridor of the Mission, to the stone steps of the church.

The ceremony was a long one, for communion was given the bride and groom; and during the greater part

of it I do not think Estenega removed his gaze from Chonita. I could not help observing her too, although I was deeply impressed with the solemnity of the occasion. Her round womanly figure had never appeared to greater advantage than in that close-fitting gown; her hips being rather wide, she wore fewer gathers than was the fashion. Her faultless arms had a warmth in their whiteness; the filmy lace of her mantilla caressed a throat so full and round and white and firm that it seemed to invite other caresses; even the black pearls clung lovingly about it. Her graceful head was bent forward a little, and the soft black lashes brushed her cheeks. The pink flush was still in her face, like the first tinge of color on the chill desolation of dawn.

"Is she not beautiful?" whispered Estenega eagerly. "Is not that a woman to make known to herself? Think of the infinite possibilities, the sublimation of every——"

Here I ordered him to keep quiet, reminding him that he was in church, a fact he had quite forgotten. I inferred that he remembered it later, for he moved restlessly more than once and looked longingly toward the door.

It was over at last, and as the bride and groom appeared in the door of the church and descended the steps, a salute was fired from the Presidio. On the long corridor a table had been built from end to end, and a goodly banquet provided by the padres. We took our seats at once, the populace gathering about a feast spread for them on the grass.

Padre Ximeno, the priest who had officiated at the ceremony, sat at the head of the table; the other priests were scattered among us, and good company all of them were. We were a very lively party. Prudencia was toasted until her calm important head whirled. Reinaldo made a speech as full of flowers as the occasion demanded. Alvarado made one also, five sentences of plain well-chosen words, to which the bridegroom listened with scorn. Now and again a girl swept the strings of a guitar or a caballero sang. The delighted

shrieks of the people came over to us; at regular intervals cannons were fired.

Estenega found himself seated between Chonita and Valencia. I was opposite, and beginning to feel profoundly fascinated by this drama developing before my eyes. I saw that he was amused by the situation and not in the least disconcerted. Valencia was nervous and eager. Chonita, whose pride never failed her, had drawn herself up and looked coldly indifferent.

"Señor," murmured Valencia, "you will tarry with us long, no? We have much to show you in Santa Barbara, and on our ranchos."

"I fear that I can stay but a week, señorita. I must return to Los Angeles."

"Would nothing tempt you to stay, Dan Diego?"

He looked into her rich Southern face and approved of it; when had he ever failed to approve of a pretty woman? "Thine eyes, señorita, would tempt a man to forget more than duty."

"And thou wilt stay?"

"When I leave Santa Barbara, what I take of myself will not be worth leaving."

"Ay! and what thou leavest thou never shalt have again."

"There is my hope of heaven, señorita."

He turned from this glittering conversation to Chonita.

"You are a little tired," he said, in a low voice. "Your color has gone, and the shadows are coming about your eyes."

The suspicion was borne home to her that he must have observed her closely to detect those shades of difference which no one else had noted.

"A little, señor. I went to bed late and rose early. Such times as these tax the endurance. But after a siesta I shall be refreshed."

"You look strong and very healthy."

"Ay, but I am! I am not delicate at all. I can ride all day, and swim—which few of our women do. I even

like to walk; and I can dance every night for a week. Only, this is an unusual time."

Her supple elastic figure and healthy whiteness of skin betokened endurance and vitality, and he looked at her with pleasure. "Yes, you are strong," he said. "You look as if you would *last*—as if you never would grow brown or stout."

"What difference, if the next generation be beautiful?" she said lightly. "Look at Don Juan de la Borrasa. See him gaze upon Panchita Lopez, who is just sixteen. What does he care that the women of his day are coffee-colored and stringy, or fat? You will care as little when you too are brown and dried up, afraid to eat dulces, and each month seeking a new parting for your hair."

"You are a hopeful seer! But you—are you resigned to the time when even the withered old beau will not look at you—you who are the loveliest woman in the Californias?"

It was the first compliment he had paid her, and she looked up with a swift blush, then lowered her eyes again. "With truth, I never imagine myself except as I am now; but I should have always my books, and no husband to teach me that there were other women more fair."

"And books will suffice, then?"

"Surely." She said it a little wistfully. Then she added abruptly: "I shall go to confession this week."

"Ah!"

"Yes; for although I hate you still—that is, I do not like you—I have forgiven you. I believe you to be kind and generous, although the enemy of my brother; that if you did oppose him and east him into prison, you did so from a loyal motive. You cannot help making mistakes, for you are but human. And I do not forget that if it were not for you he would not be a bridegroom to-day. Also, you are not responsible for being an Estenega; so, although I do not forgive the blood in you—how could I, and be worthy to bear the name of Iturbi

y Moncada?—I forgive you, yourself, for being what you cannot help and for what you have unwittingly and mistakenly done. Do you understand?"

"I understand. Your subtleties are magnificent."

"You must not laugh at me. Tell me how do you like my friend Valencia?"

"Well enough. I want to hear more about your confession. You fall back into the bosom of your Church with joy, I suppose?"

"Ay!"

"And you would never disobey one of her mandates?"

"Holy God! No!"

"Why?"

"Why? Because I am a Catholic."

"That is not what I asked you. Why are you a Catholic? if I must make myself more plain. Why are you afraid to disobey? Why do you cling to the Church with your back braced against your intelligence? It is hope of future reward, I suppose—or fear?"

"Assuredly. I want to go to the heaven of the good Catholic."

"Do not waste this life, particularly the youth of it, preparing for a legendary hereafter. Granting, for the sake of argument, that this existence is supplemented by another: you have no knowledge of what elements you will be composed when you lay aside your mortal part to enter there. Your power of enjoyment may be very thin indeed, like the music of a band without brass; the sort of happiness one can imagine a human being to experience out of whose anatomy the nervous system has by some surgical triumph been removed, and in whom love of the arts alone exists, abnormally cultivated. But one thing we of earth do know; you do not, but I will tell you: we have a slight capacity for happiness and a large capacity for enjoyment. There is not much in life, God knows, but there is something. One can extract a reasonable amount out of it with a due exercise

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of philosophy. Of that we are sure. Of what comes after we are absolutely unsure."

She had endeavored to interrupt him once or twice, and did so now, her eyes flashing. "Are you an atheist?" she demanded. "Are you not a Catholic?"

"I am neither an atheist nor a Catholic. The question of religion has no interest for me whatever. I wish it had none for you."

She looked at him sternly. For a moment I thought the Doomswoman would annihilate the renegade. But her face softened suddenly. "I will pray for you," she said, and turned to the man at her right.

Estenega's face turned the chalky hue I always dreaded, and he bent his lips to her ear. "Pray for me many times a day; and at other times recall what I said about the relative value of possible and improbable heavens. You are a woman who thinks."

"Don Diego," exclaimed Valencia, unable to control her impatience longer, and turning sharply from the caballero who was talking to her in a fiery undertone, "you have not spoken to me for ten minutes."

"For ten hours, señorita. You have treated me with the scorn and indifference of one weary of homage."

She blushed with gratification. "It is you who have forgotten me."

"Would that I could!"

"Dost thou wish to?"

"When I am away from thee, or thou talkest to other men—surely."

"It is thy fault if I talk to other men."

"You make me feel the Good Samaritan."

"But I care not to talk to them."

"Thy heart is a comb of honey, señorita. On my knees I accept the little morsel the queen bee—thy swift messenger—brings me. Truly, never was sweet so sweetly sweet."

"It is thou who hast the honey on thy tongue, although I fear there may be a stone in thy heart."

"Ah? Why? No stone could sit so lightly in my breast as my heart when those red lips smile to me."

Chonita listened to this conversation with mingled amazement and anger. She did not doubt Estenega's sincerity to herself; neither did Valencia appear to doubt him. But his present levity was manifest to her. Why should he care to talk so to another woman? How strange were men! She gave up the problem.

After the long banquet concluded, the cavalcade formed once more, and we returned to the town. Prudencia rode her white horse alone this time, her husband beside her. Leading the cavalcade was the Presidio band. Its members wore red jackets trimmed with yellow cord, Turkish trousers of white wool, and red Polish caps. With their music mingled the regular detonations of the Presidio cannon. After we had wound the length of the valley we made a progress through the town for the benefit of the populace, who mounted the corridors to watch us, and shouted with delight. But the sun was hot, and we were all glad to be between the thick adobe walls once more.

We took a long siesta that day, but hours before dark the populace was crowded in the court-yard under the booth which had been erected during the afternoon. After the early supper the guests of Casa Grande and our neighbors of the town filled the sala, the large bare rooms adjoining, and the corridors. The old people of both degrees seated themselves in rows against the wall, the fiddles scraped, the guitars twanged, the flutes cooed, and the dancing began.

In the court-yard a small space was cleared, and changing couples danced El Jarabe and La Jota—two stately jigs—while the spectators applauded with wild and impartial enthusiasm, and Don Guillermo from the corridor threw silver coins at the dancers' feet. Now and again a pretty girl would dance alone, her gay skirt lifted with the tips of her fingers, her eyes fixed upon the ground. A man would approach from behind and place his hat on her head. Perhaps she would toss it

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saucily aside, perhaps let it rest on her coquettish braids—a token that its owner was her accepted gallant for the evening.

Above, the slender men and women of the aristocracy, the former in black and white, the latter in rich and vivid gowns, danced the contradanza, the most graceful dance I have ever seen; and since those Californian days I have lived in almost every capital of Europe. The music is so monotonous and sweet, the figures so melting and harmonious, that to both spectator and dancer comes a dreaming languid contentment, as were the senses swimming on the brink of sleep. Chonita and Valencia were famous rivals in its rendering, always the salaried stars to those not dancing. Valencia was the perfection of grace, but it was the grace now of the snake, again of the cat. She suggested fangs and claws, a repressed propensity to sudden leaps. Chonita's grace was that of rhythmical music imprisoned in a woman's form of proportions so perfect that she seemed to dissolve from one figure into another, swaying, bending, gliding. The soul of grace emanated from her, too evanescent to be seen, but felt as one feels perfume, or the something that is not color in the heart of a rose. Her star-like eyes were open, but the brain behind them was half asleep; she danced by instinct.

I was watching the dancing of these two—the poetry of promise and the poetry of death—when suddenly Don Guillermo entered the room, stamped his foot, pulled out his rosary, and instantly we all went down on our knees. It was eight of the clock, and this ceremony was never omitted in Casa Grande, be the occasion festive or domestic. When we had told our beads, Don Guillermo rose, put his rosary in his pocket, trotted out, and the dancing was resumed.

As the contradanza and its ensuing waltz finished, Estenega went up to Chonita. "You are too tired to dance any more to-night," he said. "Let us sit here and talk. Besides, I do not like to see you whirling about the room in men's arms."

"It is nothing to you if I dancee with other men," she said rebelliously, although she took the seat he indicated. "And to dancee is not wrong."

"Nothing is wrong. In some countries the biggest liar is king. We know as little of ethics—except, to be sure, the ethics of civilization—as one sex knows of another. So we fall back on instinct. I have not a prejudice, but I feel it disgusting to see a woman who is somewhat more to me than other women, embraced by another man. It would infuriate me if done in private; why should it not at least disgust me in public? I care as little for the approving seal of the conventions as I care whether other women—including my own sisters—waltz or not."

And, alas! from that night Chonita never waltzed again. "It is not that I care for his opinion," she assured me later; "only he made me feel that I never wanted a man to touch me again."

Valencia used every art of flashing eyes and pouting lips and gay sally—there was nothing subtle in her methods—to win Estenega to her side; but the sofa on which he sat with Chonita might have been the remotest star in the firmament. Then, prompted by pique and determination to find ointment for her wounded vanity, she suddenly opened her batteries upon Reinaldo. That beautiful young bridegroom was bored to the verge of dissolution by his solemn and sleepy Prudencia, who kept her wide eyes upon him with an expression of rapt adoration, exactly as she regarded the Stations in the Mission when performing the Via Crucis. Valencia, to his mind, was the handsomest woman in the room, and he felt the flattery of her assault. Besides, he was safely married. So he drifted to her side, danced with her, flirted with her, devoted himself to her caprices, until everyone was noting and I thought that Prudencia would bawl outright. Just at the moment, however, when our nerves were humming, Don Guillermo thumped on the door with his stick and ordered us all to go to bed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE next morning we started at an early hour for the Rancho de las Rocas, three leagues from Santa Barbara. The populace remained in the booth, but we were joined by all our friends of the town, and once more were a large party. We were bound for a merienda and a carnesada, where bullocks would be roasted whole on spits over a bed of coals in a deep excavation. It took a Californian only a few hours to sleep off fatigue, and we were as fresh and gay as if we had gone to bed at eight the night before.

Valencia managed to ride beside Estenega, and I wondered if she would win him. Woman's persistence, allied to man's vanity, so often accomplishes the result intended by the woman. It seemed to me the simplest climax for the unfolding drama, although I should have been sorry for Diego.

It was Reinaldo's turn to look black, but he devoted himself ostentatiously to Prudencia, who beamed like a child with a stick of candy. Chonita rode between Don Juan de la Borrascosa and Adan. Her face was calm, but it occurred to me that she was growing careless of her sovereignty, for her manner was abstracted and indifferent; she seemed to have discarded those little coquetries that had sat so gracefully upon her. Still, as long as she concealed the light of her mind under a bushel, her beauty and Lorelean fascination would draw men to her feet and keep them there. Every man but Estenega and Alvarado was as gay of color as the wild flowers had been, and the girls, as they cantered, looked like full-blown roses. Chonita wore a dark-blue gown and reboso of thin silk, which became her fairness marvelously well.

"Doña Chonita light of my eyes," said Don Juan, "thou art not wont to be so quiet when I am by thee."

"You usually have enough to say for two."

"Ay, thou canst appreciate the art of speech. Hast thou ever known any one who could converse with lighter ease than I and thy brother?"

"I never have heard any one use more words."

"Ay! they roll from my tongue—and from Reinaldo's—like wheels downhill."

She turned to Adan: "They will be happy, you think—Reinaldo and Prudencia?"

"Ay!"

"What a beautiful wedding, no?"

"Ay!"

"Life is always the same with you, I suppose—smoking, riding, swinging in the hammock?"

"Ay!"

"You would not exchange your life for another? You do not wish to travel?"

"No—surely."

She wheeled suddenly and galloped over to her father and Alvarado, her caballeros staring helplessly after her.

When we arrived at the rancho the bullocks were already swinging in the pits, the smell of roast meat was in the air. We dismounted, throwing our bridles to the vaqueros in waiting; and while Indian servants spread the table, the girls joined hands and danced about the pit, throwing flowers upon the bullocks, singing and laughing. The men watched them, or amused themselves in various ways—some with cockfights and impromptu races; others began at once to gamble on a large flat stone; a group stood about a greased pole and jeered at two rival vaqueros endeavoring to mount it for the sake of the gold piece on the top. One buried a rooster in the ground, leaving its head alone exposed; others, mounting their horses, dashed by at full speed, snatching at the head as they passed. Reinaldo distinguished himself by twisting it off with facile wrist while urging his horse to the swiftness of the east wind.

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"I am going to dare more than Californian has ever dared before," said Estenega to me, as we gathered at length about the table-cloth. "I am going to get Doña Chonita off by herself in that little cañon, and have a talk with her. Now, do you stand guard."

"I shall not!" I exclaimed. "It is understood that when Doña Trinidad stays at home Chonita is in my charge. I shall not permit such a thing."

"You shall, my Eustaquia. Doña Chonita is no padding-brained girl. She needs no dueña."

"I know that; but it is not that I am thinking of. Suppose some one sees you; you know the inflexibility of our conventions."

"You forget that we are *comadre* and *compadre*. Our privileges are many."

"True; I had forgotten. But whither is all this tending, Diego? She neither will nor can marry you."

"She both can and will. Will you help me, or not? Because if not I shall proceed without you. Only you can make it easier."

I always gave way to him; everybody did.

He was as good as his word. How he managed, Chonita never knew, but not a half hour after dinner she found herself alone in the cañon with him, seated among the huge stones cataclysms had hurled there.

"Why have you brought me here?" she asked.

"To talk with you."

"But this would be most severely censured."

"Do you care?"

"No."

She looked at him with a curious feeling she had had before; there was something inside of his head that she wanted to get at—something that baited and teased and allured her. She wanted to understand him, and she was oppressed by the weight of her ignorance; she had no key to unlock a man like that. With one of her swift impulses she told him of what she was thinking.

He smiled, his eyes lighting. "I am more than willing you should know all that you would be curious

about " he said. "Ask me a hundred questions; I will answer them."

She meditated a moment. She never had taken sufficient interest in a man before to desire to fathom him, and the arts of the Californian belle were not those of the tactfully and impartially interested woman of to-day. She did not know how to begin.

"What have you read?" she asked, at length.

He gave her some account of his library—a large one—and mentioned many books of many nations, of which she had never heard.

"You have read all those books?"

"There are many long winter nights and days in the redwood forests of the northern coast."

"That does not tell me much—what you have read. I feel that it is but one of the many items which went to the making up of you. You have traveled everywhere, no? Was it like living over again the books of travel?"

"Not in the least. Each man travels for himself."

"Madame de Staël said that traveling was sad. Is it so?"

"To the lover of history, it is like food without salt. Imagination has painted an historical city with the panorama of a great time; it has been to us a stage for great events. We find it a stage with familiar paraphernalia, and actors as commonplace as ourselves."

"It is more satisfactory to stay at home and read about it?"

"Infinitely, though less expanding."

"Then is anything worth while except reading?"

"Several things; the pursuit of glory, for one thing, and the active occupied life necessary for its achievement."

She leaned forward a little; she felt that she had stumbled nearer to him. "Are you ambitious?" she asked.

"For what it compels life to yield; abstractly, not. Ambition is the looting of hell in chase of biting flames

swirling above a desert of ashes. As for posthumous fame, it must be about as satisfactory as a draught of ice-water poured down the throat of a man who has died on Sahara. And yet, even if in the end it all means nothing, if from hour to hour we ripe and ripe, and then from hour to hour we rot and rot, still for a quarter century or so the nettle of ambition flagellating our brain may serve to make life less torpid and more satisfactory. The turmoil of and absorption in the fight, the stinging fear of rivals, the murmur of acknowledgment, the shout of compelled applause—they fill the blanks.”

“Tell me,” she said imperiously, “what do you want.”

“Shall I tell you? I never have spoken of it to a living soul but Alvarado. Shall I tell it to a woman—and an Iturbi y Moneada? Could the folly of man further go?”

“If I am a woman, I am an Iturbi y Moneada, and if I am an Iturbi y Moneada, I have the honor of its generations in my veins.”

“Very good. I believe you would not betray me, even in the interest of your house. Would you?”

“No.”

“And I love to talk to you, to tell you what I would tell no other. Listen, then. An envoy goes to Mexico next week with letters from Alvarado, desiring that I be the next Governor of the Californias, and containing the assurance that the Departmental Junta will endorse me. I shall follow next month to see Santa Ana personally; I know him well, and he was a friend of my father’s. I wish to be invested with peculiar powers; that is to say, I wish California to be practically overlooked while I am Governor, and I wish it understood that I shall be Governor as long as I please. Alvarado will hold no office under the Americans, and is as ready to retire now as a few years later. Of course my predilection for the Americans must be carefully concealed both from the Mexican government and the mass of the people here; Santa Ana and Alvarado know what is bound to come; the Mexicans, generally, retain enough

interest in the Californias to wish to keep them. I shall be the last Governor of the Department, and I shall employ that period so to amalgamate the native population that they will make a strong contingent in the new order of things, and be completely under my domination. I shall establish a college with American professors, so that our youth will be taught to think, and to think in English. Alvarado has done something for education, but not enough; he has not enforced it, and the methods are very primitive. I intend to be virtually dictator. With as little delay as possible I shall establish a newspaper—a powerful weapon in the hands of a ruler, as well as a factor of development. Then I shall organize a superior court for the punishment of capital crimes. There can be no subservience to authority in a country where murder is practically licensed. American immigration will be more than encouraged, and it shall be distinctly understood by the Americans that I encourage it. Everything, of course, will be done to promote good-will between the Californians and the new-comers. Then, when the United States make up their mind to take possession of us, I shall waste no blood, but hand over a country worthy of capture. In the meantime it will have been carefully drilled into the Californian mind that American occupation will be for their ultimate good, and that I shall go to Washington to protect their interests. There will then be no foolish insurrections. Do you care to hear more?"

Her face was flushed, her chest was rising rapidly.

"I hardly know what to think—how I feel. You interest me so much as you talk that I wish you to succeed; I picture your success. And yet it maddens me to hear you talk of the Americans in that way—also to know that your house will be greater than ours—that we will be forgotten. But—yes, tell me all. What will you do then?"

"I shall have California, in the first place, scratched for the gold that I believe lies somewhere within her. When that great resource is located and developed I

shall publish in every American newspaper the extraordinary agricultural resources of the country. In a word, my object is to make California a great State, and its name synonymous with my own. As I told you before, for fame as fame I care nothing; I do not care if I am forgotten on my death-bed; but with my blood biting my veins I must have action while living. Shall I say that I have a worthier motive in wishing to aid in the development of civilization? But why worthier? Merely a higher form of selfishness. The best and the worst of motives are prompted by the same instinct."

"I should advise you," she said slowly, "never to marry. Your wife would be very unhappy."

"But no one has greater scorn than you for the man who spends his life with his lips at the chalice of the poppy."

"True; I had forgotten them." She rose abruptly. "Let us go back," she said. "It is better not to stay too long."

As they walked down the cañon she looked at him furtively. The men of her race were almost all tall and finely proportioned, but they did not suggest strength as this man did. And his face—it was so grimly determined at times that she shrank from it, then drew near, fascinated. It had no beauty at all—according to Californian standards; she could not know that it represented all that intellect, refinement, and civilization generally, would do for the human race for a century to come—but it had a subtle power, an absolute audacity, an almost contemptuous fearlessness in its bold fine outline, a dominating intelligence in the keen deeply set eyes, and a hint of weakness, where and what she could not determine, that mystified and magnetized her.

"I know you a little better," she said, "just a little—enough to make my curiosity ache and jump. At the same time, I know now what I did not before—that I might climb, and mine, and study, and watch, and you would always be beyond me. There is something subtle

and evasive about you—something I seem to be close to always, yet never can see nor grasp.”

“It is merely the barrier of sex. A man can know a woman fairly well, because her life, consequently the interests which mold her mind and conceive her thoughts, are more or less simple. A man’s life is so complex, his nature so inevitably the sum and work of it—much of it lies so far outside of woman’s sphere: his mind spiked with a thousand magnets, each pointing to a different possibility—that she would need divine wisdom to comprehend him in his entirety, even if he made her a diagram of every cell in his brain—which he never would, out of consideration for both her and his own vanity. But within certain restrictions there can be a magnificent sense of comradeship.”

“But a woman, I think, would never be happy with that something in the man always beyond her grasp—that something to which she could be nothing. She would be more jealous of that independence of her in man than of another woman.”

“That was pure insight,” he said. “You could not know that.”

“No,” she said, “I had not thought of it before.”

I had made a martyr of myself on a three-cornered stone at the entrance of the cañon, waiting to dueña them out. “Never will I do this again!” I exclaimed, with that virtue born of discomfort, as they came in sight.

“My dearest Eustaquia,” said Diego, kissing my hand gallantly, “thou hast given me pleasure so often, most charming and clever of women, thou hast but added one new art to thy overflowing store.”

We mounted almost immediately upon returning, and I was alone with Chonita for a moment. “Do you realize that you are playing with fire?” I said warningly. “Estenega is a dangerous man; the most successful man with women I have ever known.”

“I do not deny his power,” she said. “But I am safe for the many reasons you know of. And, being safe,

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why should I deny myself the pleasure of talking to him? I shall never meet his like again. Let me live for a little while."

"Ay, but do not live too hard! It hurts down into the core and marrow."

CHAPTER XX

WHILE we were eating supper, a dozen Indian girls were gathered about a table in one of the large rooms behind the house, busily engaged in blowing out the contents of several hundred eggs and filling the hollowed shells with cologne, flour, tinsel, bright scraps of paper. Each egg was then sealed with white wax, and ready for the cascaron frolic of the evening.

We had been dancing, singing, and talking for an hour after rosario, when the eggs were brought in. In an instant every girl's hair was unbound, a wild dive was made for the great trays, and eggs flew in every direction. Dancing was forgotten. The girls and men chased one another about the room, the air was filled with perfume and glittering particles, the latter looking very pretty on black floating hair. Etiquette demanded that only one egg should be thrown by the same hand at a time, but quick turns of supple wrists followed one another very rapidly. Really to accomplish a feat the egg must crash on the back of the head, and each occupied in attack was easy prey.

Chonita was like a child. Two priests were of our party, and she made a target of their shaven crowns, shrieking with delight. They vowed revenge, and chased her all over the house; but not an egg had broken on that golden mane. She was surrounded at one time by caballeros, but she whirled and doubled so swiftly that every cascaron flew afield.

The pelting grew faster and more furious; every room was invaded; we chased one another up and down the corridors. The people in the court had their cascarones also, and the noise must have been heard at the Mission. Don Guillermo hobbled about delightedly, covered with

tinsel and flour. Estenega had tried a dozen times to hit Chonita, but as if by instinct she faced him each time before the egg could leave his hand. Finally he pursued her down the corridor to her library, where I, fortunately, happened to be resting, and both threw themselves into chairs, breathless.

"Let us stay here," he said. "We have had enough of this."

"Very well," she said. She bent her head to lift a book which had fallen from a shelf, and felt the soft blow of the casearon.

"At last!" said Estenega contentedly. "I was determined to conquer, if I waited until morning."

Chonita looked vexed for a moment—she did not like to be vanquished—then shrugged her shoulders and leaned back in her chair. The little room was plainly furnished. Shelves covered three sides, and the window-seat and the table were littered with books. There were no curtains, no ornaments; but Chonita's hair, billowing to the floor, her slender voluptuous form, her white skin and green irradiating eyes, the candlelight half revealing, half concealing, made a picture requiring no background. I caught the expression of Estenega's face and determined to remain if he murdered me.

Peals of laughter, joyous shrieks, screams of mock terror, floated in to us. I broke a silence which was growing awkward:

"How happy they are! Creatures of air and sunshine! Life in this Arcadia is an idyl."

"They are not happy," said Estenega contemptuously; "they are gay. They are light of heart through endless sources of enjoyment and absence of material cares, which in turn have bred a careless order of mind. But did each pause long enough to look into his own heart, would he not find a stone somewhere in its depths?—perhaps a skull graven on the stone—who knows?"

"Oh, Diego!" I exclaimed impatiently, "this is a party, not a funeral."

"Then is no one happy?" asked Chonita wistfully.

"How can he be, when in each moment of attainment he is pricked by the knowledge that it must soon be over? The youth is not happy, because the shadow of the future is on him. The man is not happy, because the knowledge of life's incompleteness is with him."

"Then of what use to live at all?"

"No use. It is no use to die either, so we live. I will grant that there may be ten completely happy moments in life—the ten conscious moments preceding certain death—and oblivion."

"I will not discuss the beautiful hope of our religion with you, because you do not believe, and I should only get angry. But what are we to do with this life? You say nothing is wrong nor right. What would you have the stumbling and unanchored do with what has been thrust upon him?"

"Man, in his gropings down through the centuries, has concocted, shivered, and patched certain social conditions well enough calculated to develop the best and the worst that is in us, making it easier for us to be bad than good, that good might be the standard. We feel a deeper satisfaction if we have conquered an evil impulse and done what is accepted as right, because we have groaned and stumbled in the doing—that is all. Temptation is sweet only because the impulse comes from the depths of our being, not because it is difficult to be tempted. If we overcome, the satisfaction is deep and enduring—which only goes to show that man is but a petty egoist, always drawing pictures of himself on a pedestal. The man who emancipates himself from traditions and yields to his impulses is debarred from happiness by the blunders of the blindfolded generations preceding him, which arranged that to yield was easy and to resist difficult. Had they reversed the conditions and conclusions, the majority of the human race would have fought each other to death, but the selected remnant would have had a better time of it."

"Let us suppose a case as conditions now exist," he continued after a moment, as Chonita made no reply.

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"Assume, for the sake of argument, that you loved me and that you plucked from your nature your religion, your fidelity to your house, your love for your brother, and gave yourself to me. You would stand appalled at the sacrifice until you realized that you had come to me only because it would have been more difficult to stay away. You conquer the passionate cry of love—the mightiest in the human compound—and you are miserably happy for the rest of your life, no attitude being so pleasing to the soul as the attitude of martyrdom. Many a man and woman looks with some impatience for the last good-bye to be said, so sweet is the prospect of sadness, of suffering, of resignation."

I was aghast at his audacity, but I saw that Chonita was fascinated. Her egoism was caressed, and her womanhood thrilled. "Are we all such shams as that?" was what she said. "You make me despise myself."

"Not yourself, but a great structure—of which you are but a grain—with a faulty foundation. Don't despise yourself. Curse the builders that shoveled those stones together."

He left her then, and she told me to go to bed; she wanted to sit a while and think.

"He makes you think too much," I said. "Better forget what he says as soon as you can. He is a very disturbing influence."

But she made no reply, and sat there staring at the floor. She began to feel a sense of helplessness, like a creature caught in a net. It was more the man's personality than his words which made her feel as if he were pouring himself throughout her, taking possession of brain and every sense, as though he were a sort of intellectual drug.

"I believe I was made from his rib," she thought angrily, "else why can he have this extraordinary power over me? I do not love him. I have read somewhat of love, and seen more. This is different, quite. I only feel that there is something in him that I want. Sometimes I feel that I must dig my nails into him and tear him

apart until I find what I want—something that belongs to me. Sometimes it is as if he promised it, at others as if he were unconscious of its existence; always it is evanescent. Is he going to make my mind his own? And yet he always seems to leave mine free. He never has snubbed me. He makes me think; there is the danger."

An hour later there was a tap on her door. Casa Grande was asleep. She sat upright, her heart beating rapidly. Estenega was audacious enough for anything. But it was her brother who entered.

"Reinaldo!" she exclaimed, horrified to feel an unmistakable stab of disappointment.

"Yes, it is I. Are you alone?"

"Surely."

"I have something to say to you."

He drew a chair close to her and sat down.

"You know, my sister," he began haltingly, "how I hate the house of Estenega. My hatred is as loyal as yours; every drop of blood in my veins is true to the honor of the house of Iturbi y Moncada. But, my sister, is it not so that one can sacrifice himself, his mere personal feelings, upon the altar of his country? Is it not so, my sister?"

"What is it you wish me to understand, Reinaldo?"

"Do not look so stern, my Chonita. You have not yet heard me; and, although you may be angry then, you will reason later. You are devoted to your house, no?"

"You have come here in the night to ask me such a question as that?"

"And thou lovest thy brother?"

"Reinaldo, you have drunken more mescal than Angelica. Go back to your bride." But although she spoke lightly, she was uneasy.

"My sister, I never drank a drop of mescal in my life! Listen. It is our father's wish, thy wish, my wish, that I become a great and distinguished man, an ornament to the house of Iturbi y Moncada, a star on the brow of

California. How can I accomplish this great and desirable end? By the medium of politics only; our wars are so insignificant. I have been debarred from the Departmental Junta by the enemy of our house, else would it have rung with my eloquence, and Mexico have known me to-day. Yet I care little for the Junta. I wish to go as diputado to Mexico; it is a grander arena. Moreover, in that great capital I shall become a man of the world—which is necessary to control men. That is *his* power—curse him! And he—he will not let me go there. Even Alvarado listens to him. The Departmental Junta is under his thumb. I will never be anything but a caballero of Santa Barbara—I, an Iturbi y Moncada, the last scion of a line illustrious in war, in diplomacy, in politics—until he is either dead—do not jump, my sister; it is not my intention to murder him and ruin my career—or becomes my friend.”

“Can you not say your meaning in fewer words?”

“My sister, he loves thee, and thou lovest thy brother and thy house.”

Chonita rose to her full height, and although he rose too, and was taller, she seemed to look down upon him.

“You would have me marry him? Is that your meaning?”

“Ay.” His voice trembled. Under his swagger he was always a little afraid of the Doomswoman.

“You ask perjury and disloyalty and dishonor of an Iturbi y Moncada.”

“An Iturbi y Moncada asks it of an Iturbi y Moncada. If the man is ready to bend his neck in sacrifice to the glory of his house is it for the woman to think?”

Chonita stood grasping the back of her chair convulsively; it was the only sign of emotion she betrayed. She knew that what he said was true; that Estenega, for public and personal reasons, never would let him go to Mexico; he would permit no enemy at court. But this knowledge drifted through her mind and out of it at the moment; she was struggling to hold down a hot wave of contempt rushing upward within her. She

clung to her traditions as frantically as she clung to her religion.

"Go!" she said, after a moment.

"Thou wilt think of what I have said?"

"I shall pray to forget it."

"Chonita!" his voice rang out so loud that she placed her hand on his mouth. He dashed it away. "Thou wilt!" he cried, like a spoiled child. "Thou wilt! I shall go to the city of Mexico, and only thou canst send me there. All my father's gold and leagues will not buy me a seat in the Mexican Congress, unless this accursed Estenega lifts his hand and says, 'You may.' Holy God! how I hate him! Would that I had the chance to murder him! I would cut his heart out tomorrow. And my father likes him, and has outlived rancor. And thou—thou are not indifferent."

"Go!"

He threw his arms about her, kissing and caressing her. "My sister! My sister! Thou wilt! Say that thou wilt!" But she flung him off as if he were a snake.

"Will you go?" she asked.

"Ay! I go. But he shall suffer. I swear it! I swear it!" And he rushed from the room.

Chonita sat there, staring more fixedly at the floor than when Estenega had left her.

CHAPTER XXI

REINALDO did not go to his Prudencia. He went down to the booths in the town and joined the late revelers. Don Guillermo, rising before dawn, and walking up and down the corridor to combat the pangs of Doña Trinidad's dulces, noticed that the door of his son's room was ajar. He paused before it, and heard slow, regular, patient sobs. He opened the door and went in. Prudencia, alone, curled up in a far corner of her bed, the clothes over her head, was bemoaning many things incidental to matrimony. As she heard the sound of heavy steps she gave a little shriek.

"It is I, Prudencia," said her uncle. "Where is Reinaldo?"

"I—do—not—know."

"Did he not come from the ballroom with thee?"

"N-o-o-o-o."

"Dost thou know where he has gone?"

"N-o-o-o, señor."

"Art thou afraid?"

"Ay! God—of—my—life!"

"Never mind," said the old gentleman. "Go to sleep. Thy uncle will protect thee, and this shall not happen again."

He seated himself by the bedside. Prudencia's sobs ceased gradually, and she fell asleep. An hour later the door opened softly, and Reinaldo entered. In spite of the mescal in him, his knees shook as he saw the indulgent but stern arbiter of the Iturbi y Moncada destinies sitting in judgment at the bedside of his wife.

"Where have you been, sir?"

"To take a walk—to see to——"

"No lying! It makes no difference where you have

been. What I want to know is this: Is it your duty to gallivant about town? or is your place at this hour beside your wife?"

"Here, señor."

The old man rose, and, seizing the bridegroom by the shoulders, shook him until his teeth clattered together.

"Then see that you stay here with her in future, or you shall no longer be a married man." And he stamped out and slammed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXII

WE spent the next day at the race-field. Many of the caballeros had brought their finest horses, and Reinaldo's were famous. The vaqueros threw off their black glazed sombreros and black velvet jackets, wearing only the short black trousers laced with silver, a shirt of dazzling whiteness, a silk handkerchief twisted about the head, and huge spurs on their bare brown heels. Some of us stood on a platform, others remained on their horses; all were wild with excitement, and screamed themselves hoarse. The great dark eyes of the girls flashed, their red mouths trembled with the flood of eager exclamations; the lace mantilla or flowered reboso fluttered against hot cheeks, to be torn off, perhaps, and waved in the enthusiasm of the moment. They forgot the men, and the men forgot them. Even Chonita was oblivious to all else for the hour. She was a famous horsewoman, and keenly alive to the enchantment of the race-field. The men bet their ranchos, whole caponeras of their finest horses, herds of cattle, their saddles and their jewels. Estenega won largely, and, as it happened, from Reinaldo particularly. Don Guillermo was rather pleased than otherwise, holding his son to be in need of further punishment; but Reinaldo was obliged to call upon all the courtesy of the Spaniard and all the falseness of his nature to help him remember that his enemy was his guest.

We went home to siesta and a long gay supper, where the races were the only topic of conversation; then to dance and sing and flirt until midnight, the people in the booths as tireless as ourselves. Valencia's attentions to Estenega were as conspicuous as usual, but he managed to devote most of his time to Chonita.

That night Chonita had a dream. She dreamed that she awoke without a soul. The sense of vacancy was awful, yet there was a singular undercurrent of consciousness that no soul ever had been within her—that it existed, but was yet to be found.

She arose, trembling, and opened her door. Santa Barbara was as quiet as all the world is in the chill last hours of night. She half expected to see something hover before her, a will-o'-the-wisp, alluring her over the rocky valleys and towering mountains until death gave her weary feet rest. She remembered vaguely that she had read legends of that purport.

But there was nothing—not even the glow of a late cigarito nor the flash of a falling star. Still she seemed to know where the soul awaited her. She closed her door softly and walked swiftly down the corridor, her bare feet making no sound on the boards. At a door on the opposite side she paused, shaking violently, but unable to pass it. She opened the door and went in. The room, like all the others in that time of festivity, had more occupants than was its wont; a bed was in each corner. The shutters and windows were open, the moonlight streamed in, and she saw that all were asleep. She crossed the room and looked down upon Diego Estenega. His night garment, low about the throat, made his head, with his sharply cut profile, look like the heads on old Roman medallions. The pallor of night, the extreme refinement of his face, the deep repose, gave him an immortal appearance. Chonita bent over him fearfully. Was he dead? His breathing was regular, but very quiet. She stood gazing down upon him, the instinct of seeking vanished. What did it mean? Was this her soul? A man? How could it be? Even in poetry she never had read of a man being a woman's soul—a man with all his frailties and sins, for the most part unrepented. She felt, rather than knew, that Estenega had trampled many laws, and that he cared too little for any law but his own will to repent. And yet, there he lay, looking, in the gray light and the impersonality of sleep,

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as sinless as if he had been created within the hour. He looked, not like a man, but a spirit—a soul; and the soul was hers.

Again she asked herself, what did it mean? Was the soul but brain? She and he were so alike in elements, yet he so immeasurably beyond her in experience and knowledge and the stronger fiber of a man's mind——

He awoke suddenly and saw her. For a moment he stared incredulously, then raised himself on his hand.

"Chonita!" he whispered.

But Chonita, with the long glide of the Californian woman, vanished from the room.

When she awoke the next morning she was assailed by a distressing fear. Had she been to Estenega's room the night before? The memory was too vivid, the details too practical, for a sleep-vagary. At breakfast she hardly dared to raise her eyes. She felt that he was watching her; but he often watched her. After breakfast they were alone at one end of the corridor for a moment, and she compelled herself to raise her eyes and look at him steadily. He was regarding her searchingly.

She was not a woman to endure uncertainty.

"Tell me," she cried, trembling from head to foot, the blood flying over her face, "did I go to your room last night?"

"Doña Chonita!" he exclaimed. "What an extraordinary question! You have been dreaming."

CHAPTER XXIII

WE went to a bull-fight that day, danced that night, meriendaed and danced again; a siesta in the afternoon, a few hours' sleep in the night refreshing us all. Chonita alone looked pale, but I knew that her pallor was not due to weariness. And I knew that she was beginning to fear Estenega; the time was almost come when she would fear herself more. Estenega had several talks apart with her. He managed it without any apparent maneuvering; but he always had the devil's methods. Valencia avenged herself by flirting desperately with Reinaldo, and Prudencia's honeymoon was seasoned with gall.

On Saturday night Chonita stole from her guests, donned a black gown and reboso, and, attended by two Indian servants, went up to the Mission to confession. As she left the church half an hour later, and came down the steps, Estenega rose from a bench beneath the arches of the corridor and joined her.

"How did you know that I came?" she asked; and it was not the stars that lit her face.

"You do little that I do not know. Have you been to confession?"

"Yes."

"I walked slowly down the valley.

And you forgave and were forgiven?"

"Yes. Ay! but my penance is heavy!"

"But when it is done you will be at rest, I suppose."

"Oh, I hope! I hope!"

"Have you begun to realize that your Church cannot satisfy you?"

"No! I will not say that."

"But you know it. Your intelligence has opened a window somewhere, and the truth has crept through it."

"Do not take my religion from me, señor!" Her eyes and voice appealed to him, and he accepted her first confession of weakness with a throb of exulting tenderness.

"My love!" he said, "I would give you more than I took from you."

"No! never!— Even if we were not enemies, and I had not made that terrible vow, my religion has been all in all to me. Just now I have many things that torment me; and I have asked so little of religion before—my life has been so calm—that now I hardly know how to ask for so much more. I shall learn. Leave me peace."

"Do you want me to go?" he asked. "If you did—if I troubled you by staying here—I believe I would go. Only I know it would do no good; I should come back."

"No! no! I do not want you to go. I should feel—I will admit to you—like a house without its foundation. And yet sometimes I pray that you will go. Ay! I do not like life. I used to have pride in my intelligence. Where is my pride now? What good has the wisdom in my books done me, when I confess my dependence upon a man, and that man my enemy—and the acquaintance of a few weeks?" She was speaking incoherently, and Estenega chafed at the restraint of the servants so close behind them. "Tell me," she exclaimed, "what is it in you that I want?—that I need? It is something that belongs to me. Give it to me, and go away."

"Chonita, I give it to you gladly, God knows. But you must take me, too. You want in me what is akin to you and what you will find nowhere else. But I cannot tear my soul out of my body. You must take both or neither."

"Ay! I cannot! You know that I cannot!"

"I ignore your reasons."

"But I do not."

"You shall, my beloved. Or if you do not ignore you shall forget them."

"When I am dead—would that I were!" She was excited and trembling. The confession had been an ordeal, and Estenega was never tranquilizing. She wished to cling to him, but was still mistress of herself. He divined her impulse, and drew her arm through his and across his breast. He opened her hand and pressed his lips to the palm. Then he bent his face above hers. She was trembling violently; her face was wild and white. His own was ashen, and the heart beneath her arm beat rapidly.

"I love you devotedly," he said. "You believe that, Chonita?"

"Ah! Mother of God! do not! I cannot listen."

"But you shall listen. Throw off your superstitions and come to me. Keep the part of your religion that is not superstition; I would be the last to take it from you; but I will not permit its barnacles to stand between us. As for your traditions, you have not even the excuse of filial duty; your father would not forbid you to become my wife. And I love you very earnestly and passionately. Just how much, I might convey to you if we were alone."

He was obliged to exercise great self-restraint, but there was no mistaking his seriousness. When such scientific triflers do find a woman worth loving, they are too deeply sensible of the fact not to be stirred to their depths; and their depths are likely to be in large disproportion to the lightness of their ordinary mood. "Come to me," he continued. "I need you; and I will be as tender and thoughtful a husband as I will be ardent as a lover. You love me; don't blind yourself any longer. Do you picture, in a life of solitude and cold devotion to phantoms, any happiness equal to what you would find here in my arms?"

"Oh, hush! hush! You could make me do what you wished. I have no will. I feel no longer myself. What is this terrible power?"

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"It is the magnetism of love; that is all. I am not exercising any diabolical power over you. Listen; I will not trouble you any more now. I am obliged to go to Los Angeles the day after to-morrow. On my way back to Monterey—in about two weeks—I shall come here again. Then we will talk together; but I warn you, I shall accept only one answer. You are mine, and I shall have you."

They reached Casa Grande a moment later, and she escaped from him and ran to her room. But she dared not remain alone. Hastily changing her black gown for the first her hand touched—it happened to be vivid red, and made her look as white as wax—she returned to the sala, not to dance even the square contradanza, but to stand surrounded by worshiping caballeros with curling hair tied with gay ribbons, and jewels in their laces. Valencia regarded her with a bitter jealousy that was rising from red heat to white. How dared a woman with hair of gold wear the color of the brunette? It was a theft. It was the last indignity. And once more she chained Reinaldo, in default of Estenega, to her side. And deep in Prudencia's heart wove a scheme of vengeance; the loom and warp had been presented unwittingly by her chivalrous father-in-law.

Estenega remained in the sala a few moments after Chonita's reappearance, then left the house and wandered through the booth in the court, where the people were dancing and singing and eating and gambling as if with the morrow an eternal Lent would come, and thence through the silent town to the pleasure-grounds of Casa Grande, which lay about half a mile from the house. He had been there but a short while when he heard a rustle, a light footfall. Turning, he saw Chonita, unattended, her bare neck and gold hair gleaming against the dark, her train dragging. She was advancing swiftly toward him. His pulses bounded, and he sprang toward her, his arms outstretched; but she waved him back.

"Have mercy," she said. "I am alone. I brought no

one, because I have that to tell you which no one else must hear."

He stepped back and looked at the ground.

"Listen," she said. "I could not wait until to-morrow, because a moment lost might mean—might mean the ruin of your career, and you say your envoy has not gone yet. Just now—I will tell you the other first. Mother of God! that I should betray my brother to my enemy! But it seems to me right, because you placed your confidence in me, and I should feel that I betrayed you if I did not warn you. I do not know—oh, Mary!—I do not know—but this seems to me right. The other night my brother came to me and asked me—ay! do not look at me—to marry you, that you would balk his ambition no further. He wishes to go as diputado to Mexico, and he knows that you will not let him. I thought my brain would crack—an Iturbi y Moncada!—I made him no answer—there was no answer to a demand like that—and he went from me in a fury, vowing vengeance upon you. To-night, a few moments ago, he whispered to me that he knew of your plans, your intentions regarding the Americans; he had overheard a conversation between you and Alvarado. He says that he will send letters to Mexico to-morrow, warning the government against you. Then their suspicions will be roused, and they will inquire—— Ay, Mary!"

Estenega brought his teeth together. "God!" he exclaimed.

She saw that he had forgotten her. She turned and went back more swiftly than she had come.

Estenega was a man whose resources never failed him. He returned to the house and asked Reinaldo to smoke a cigarito and drink a bottle of wine with him in his room. Then, without a promise or a compromising word, he so flattered that shallow youth, so allured his ambition and pampered his vanity and watered his hopes, that fear and hatred wondered at their existence, closed their eyes, and went to sleep. Reinaldo poured forth his aspirations, which under the influence of the truth-

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provoking vine proved to be an honest yearning for the pleasures of Mexico. As he rose to go he threw his arm about Estenega's neck.

"Ay! my friend! my friend!" he cried, "thou art all-powerful. Thou alone canst give me what I want."

"Why did you never ask me for what you wanted?" asked Estenega. And he thought, "If it were not for Her, you would be on your way to Los Angeles to-night under charge of high treason. I would not have taken this much trouble with you."

CHAPTER XXIV

A RODEO was held the next day—the last of the festivities—Don Guillermo taking advantage of the gathering of the rancheros. It was to take place on the Cerros Rancho, which adjoined the Rancho de las Rocas. We went early, most of us dismounting and taking to the platform on one side of the circular rodeo-ground. The vaqueros were already galloping over the hills, shouting and screaming to the cattle, that ran to them like dogs; soon a herd came rushing down into the circle, where they were thrown down and branded, the stray cattle belonging to neighbors separated and corralled. This happened again and again, the interest and excitement growing with each round-up.

Once a bull, seeing his chance, darted from his herd and down the valley. A vaquero started after him; but Reinaldo, anxious to display his skill in horsemanship, and being still mounted, called to the vaquero to stop, dashed after the animal, caught it by its tail, spurred his horse ahead, let go the tail at the right moment, and, amid shouts of "Coliar!" "Coliar!" the bull was ignominiously rolled in the dust, then meekly preceded Reinaldo back to the rodeo-ground.

After the dinner under the trees most of the party returned to the platform; but Estenega, Adan, Chonita, Valencia, and myself strolled about the rancho. Adan walked at Chonita's side, more faithful than her shadow. Valencia's black eyes flashed their language so plainly to Estenega's that he could not have deserted her without rudeness; and Estenega never was rude.

"Adan," said Chonita abruptly, "I am tired of you. Sit down under that tree until I come back. I wish to walk alone with Eustaquia for a while."

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Adan sighed and did as he was bidden, consoling himself with a cigarito. Taking a different path from the one the others followed, we walked some distance, talking of ordinary matters, both avoiding the subject of Diego Estenega by common consent. And yet I was convinced that she carried on a substratum of thought of which he was the object, even while she talked coherently to me. On our way back the conversation died for want of bone and muscle, and, as it happened, we were both silent as he approached a small adobe hut. As we turned the corner we came upon Estenega and Valencia. He had just bent his head and kissed her.

Valencia fled like a hare. Estenega turned the hue of chalk, and I knew that blue lightning was flashing in his disconcerted brain. I could feel the chill of Chonita as she lifted herself to the rigidity of a statue and swept slowly down the path.

"Diego, you are a fool!" I exclaimed, when she was out of hearing.

"You need not tell me that," he said savagely. "But what in Heaven's name—— Well, never mind. For God's sake, straighten it out with her. Tell her—explain to her—what men are. Tell her that the present woman is omnipresent—no, don't tell her that. Tell her that history is full of instances of men who have given one woman the devoted love of a lifetime and been unfaithful to her every week in the year. Explain to her that a man to love one woman must love all women. Tell her that a man often marries a woman out of politeness, or absent-mindedly, when he is thinking of another woman. And she has sufficient proof that I love her and no other woman; I want to marry her, not Valencia Menendez. Heaven knows I will be true to her when I have her. I could not be otherwise. But I need not explain to you. Set it right with her. She has brain; she can be made to understand."

I shook my head. "You cannot reason with inexperience; and when it is allied to jealousy—God of my soul! Her ideal, of course, is perfection, and does not

take human weakness into account. You have fallen short of it to-day. I fear your cause is lost."

"It is not! Do you think I will give her up for a trifle like that?"

"But why not accept this break? You cannot marry her——"

"Oh, do not return to that nonsense!" he exclaimed harshly. "I shall peel off her traditions when the time comes, as I would strip off the outer hulls of a nut. Go! Go, Eustaquia!"

Of course I went. Chonita was not at the rodeo-ground, but, escorted by her father, had gone home. I followed immediately, and when I reached Casa Grande I found her sitting in her library. I never saw a statue look more like marble. Her face was locked; only the eyes betrayed the soul in torment. But she looked as immutable as a fate.

"Chonita," I exclaimed, hardly knowing where to begin, "be reasonable. Men of Estenega's brain and passionate affectionate nature are always weak with women, but it means nothing. He cares nothing for Valencia Menendez. He is madly in love with you. And his weakness, my dear, springs from the same source as his charm. He would not be the man he is without it. His heart would be less kindly, his impulses less generous, his brain less virile, his sympathies less instinctive and true. The strong impregnable man, the man whom no vice tempts, no weakness assails, who is loyal without effort—such a man lacks breadth and magnetism and the power to read the human heart and sympathize with both its noble impulses and its terrible weaknesses. Such men—I never have known it to fail—are full of petty vanities and egoisms and contemptible weaknesses, the like of which Estenega could not be capable of. No man can be perfect, and it is the man of great strength and great weakness who alone understands and sympathizes with human nature, who is lovable and magnetic, and who has the power to rouse the highest as well as the most passionate love of a woman. Such men

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cause infinite suffering, but they can give a happiness that makes the suffering worth while. You will never meet another man like Diego Estenega. Do not cast him lightly aside."

"Do I understand," said Chonita, in a perfectly unmoved voice, "that you are counseling me to marry an Estenega and the man who would send me to hell hereafter? Do you forget my vow?"

I came to myself with a shock. In the enthusiasm of my defense I had forgotten the situation.

"At least forgive him," I said rather lamely.

"I have nothing to forgive," she said. "He is nothing to me."

I knew that it was useless to argue with her.

"I have a favor to ask of you," she said. "Most of our guests leave this afternoon; will you let me sleep alone to-night?"

I should have liked to put my arm about her and give her a woman's sympathy, but I did not dare. All I could do was to leave her alone.

CHAPTER XXV

CASA GRANDE held three jealous women. The drama had its comic interpolations, but was tragic enough to the actors.

In the evening the lingering guests of the house and the neighbors of the town assembled as usual for the dance. Only Estenega absent himself. Valencia stood her ground; she would not give while Estenega remained in Santa Barbara. Chouma sat idly among her guests, and never had been more jealous. Valencia dared not meet her eyes or move, but, seeing that Prudencia was watching her, avenged her own disquiet by enhancing the glaze of the ride. Never did she flirt so imperiously with Reinaldo as she did that fateful night, and Reinaldo, who was man's vanity collected and compounded, devoted himself to the dashing beauty. Her cheeks burned with excitement, her eyes were restless and flashing.

The music stopped. The women were eating the dulces passed by the Indian servants. The men had not yet gone into the dining-room. Valencia dropped her handkerchief, Reinaldo, kneeling to recover it, kissed her hand behind its flimsy shelter.

Then Prudencia arose. She trailed her long gown down the room between the two rows of people staring at her grim eyes and pressed lips; her little head, with its high comb stiffly erect. She walked straight up to Reinaldo, and boxed his ears before the assembled company.

"Thou wilt flirt no more with other women," she said, in a loud clear voice. "Thou art my husband, and thou wilt not forget it again. Come with me."

And, amid the silence of mountain-tops in a snow-

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storm, he stumbled to his feet and followed her from the room.

I could not sleep that night. In spite of the amusement I had felt at Prudencia's *coup-d'état*, I was oppressed by the chill and foreboding which seemed to emanate from Chonita and pervade the house. I knew that terrible calm was like the menacing stillness of the hours before an earthquake. What would she do in the coming convulsion? I shuddered and tormented myself with many imaginings.

I became so nervous that I rose and dressed, and went out upon the corridor and walked up and down. It was very late, and the moon was risen, but the corners were dark. Figures seemed to start from them, but my nerves were strong; I never had given way to fear.

My thoughts wandered to Estenega. Who shall judge the complex heart of a man? the deep intense lasting devotion he may have for the one woman he recognizes as his soul's own, and yet the strange wayward wanderings of his fancy, the nomadic assertion of the animal; the passionate love he may feel for this woman of all women, yet the reserve in which he always holds her, never knowing her quite as well as he has known other women; the last test of highest love, passion without sensuality? And yet the regret that she does not gratify every side of his nature, even while he would not have her; regret for the terrible incongruity of human nature, the mingling of the beast and the divine, which cannot find satisfaction in the same woman; whatever the fire in her, she cannot gratify the instincts which rage below passion in man without losing the purity of mind that he adores in her. She, too, feels a vague regret that some part of his nature is a sealed book to her, for ever beyond her ken. But her regret is nothing to his; he knows, and she does not.

My meditations were interrupted suddenly. I heard a door stealthily opened. I knew before turning that the door was Chonita's, the last at the end of

the right wing. It opened, and she came out. It was as if a face alone came out. She was shrouded from head to foot in black, and her face was as white as the moon. Possessed by a nameless but overwhelming fear, I turned the knob of the door nearest me and almost fell into the room. I close^d the door behind me, but there was no key. By the strip of white light which entered through the crevice between the half-open shutters I saw that I was in the room of Valencia Menendez; but she slept soundly and had not heard me.

I stood still, listening for many minutes. At first there was no sound; I evidently had startled her, and she was waiting for the house to be still again. At last I heard some one gliding down the corridor. Then, suddenly, I knew that she was coming to this room, and, possessed by a horrible curiosity and growing terror, I sank on my knees in a corner.

The door opened noiselessly, and Chonita entered. Again I saw only her white face, rigid as death, but the eyes flamed with the terrible passions that her soul had flung up from its depths at last. Then I saw another white object—her hand. But there was no knife in it. Had there been, I think I should have shaken off the spell that controlled me; I never would see murder done. It was the awe of the unknown that paralyzed my muscles. She bent over Valencia, who moved uneasily and cast her arms above her head. I saw her touch her finger to the sleeping woman's mouth, inserting it between the lips. Then she moved backward and stood by the head of the bed, facing the window. She raised herself to her full height, and extended her arms horizontally. The position gave her the form of a cross—a black cross, topped and pointed with malevolent white; one hand was spread above Valencia's face. She was the most awful sight I ever beheld. She uttered no sound; she scarcely breathed. Suddenly, with the curve of a panther, her figure glided above the unconscious woman, her open hand describing a strange motion; then she melted from the room.

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Valencia awoke, shrieking.

"Some one has cursed me!" she cried. "Mother of God! Some one has cursed me!"

I fled from the room, to faint upon my own bed.

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE next morning Casa Grande was thrown into consternation. Valencia Menendez was in a raging fever, and had to be held in her bed.

After breakfast I sent for Estenega and told him of what I had seen. In the first place I had to tell some one, and in the second I thought to end his infatuation and avert further trouble. "You firebrand!" I exclaimed, in conclusion. "You see the mischief you have worked! You will go, now, thank heaven—and go cured."

"I will go—for a time," he said. "This mood of hers must wear itself out. But, if I loved her before, I worship her now. She is magnificent!—a woman with the passions of hell and the sweetness of an angel. She is the woman I have waited for all my life—the only woman I have ever known. Some day I will take her in my arms and tell her that I understand her."

"Diego," I said, divided between despair and curiosity, "you have fancied many women; wherein does your feeling for Chonita differ? How can you be sure that this is love? What is your idea of love?"

He sat down and was silent for a moment, then spoke thoughtfully: "Love is not passion, for one may feel that for many women; not affection, for friendship demands that. Not even sympathy and comradeship; one can find either with men. Nor all, for I have felt all, yet something was lacking. Love is the mysterious turning of one heart to another with the promise of a magnetic harmony, a strange original delight, a deep satisfaction, a surety of permanence, which did either heart roam the world it never would find again. It is the knowledge that did the living body turn to corruption,

the spirit within would still hold and sway the steel that had rushed unerringly to its magnet. It is the knowledge that weakness will only arouse tenderness, never disgust, as when the fancy reigns and the heart sleeps; that faults will clothe themselves in the individuality of the owner and become treasures to the loving mind that sees, but worships. It is the development of the highest form of selfishness, the passionate and abiding desire to sacrifice one's self to the happiness of one beloved. Above all, it is the impossibility to cease to love, no matter what reason, or prudence, or jealousy, or disapproval, or terrible discoveries may dictate. Let the mind sit on high and argue the soul's mate out of doors, it will rebound, when all is said and done, like a rubber ball when the pressure of the finger is removed. As for Chonita, she is the lost part of me."

He left that day, and without seeing Chonita again. Valencia was in wildest delirium for a week; at the end of the second every hair on her head, her brows, and her eyelashes had fallen. She looked like a white mummy, a ghastly pitiful caricature of the beautiful woman whose arrows quivered in so many hearts. They rolled her in a blanket and took her home; and then I sought Chonita, who had barely left her room and never gone to Valencia's. I told her that I had witnessed the curse, and described the result.

"Have you no remorse?" I asked.

"None."

"You have ruined the beauty, the happiness, the fortune, of another woman."

"I have done what I intended."

"Do you realize that again you have raised a barrier between yourself and your religion? You do not look very repentant."

"Revenge is sweeter than religion."

Then in a burst of anger I confessed that I had told Estenega. For a moment I thought her terrible hatred was about to hurl its vengeance at me; but she only asked:

"What did he say?"

Unwillingly, I repeated it, but word for word. And as I spoke, her face softened, the austerity left her features, an expression of passionate gratitude came into her eyes.

"Did he say that, Eustaquia?"

"He did."

"Say it again, please."

I did so. And then she put her hands to her face, and cried, and cried, and cried.

CHAPTER XXVII

AT the end of the week Doña Trinidad died suddenly. She was sitting on the green bench, dispensing charities, when her head fell back gently, and the light went out. No death ever had been more peaceful, no soul ever had been better prepared; but wailing grief went after her. Poor Don Guillermo sank in a heap as if some one had felled him, Reinaldo wept loudly, and Prudencia was not to be consoled. Chonita was away on her horse when it happened, galloping over the hills. Servants were sent for her immediately, and met her when she was within an hour or two of home. As she entered the sala, Don Guillermo, Reinaldo, and Prudencia literally flung themselves upon her; and she stood like a rock and supported them. She had loved her mother, but it had always been her lot to prop other people; she never had had a chance to lean.

All that night and next day she was closely engaged with the members of the agonized household, even visiting the grief-stricken Indians at times. On the second night she went to the room where her mother lay with all the pomp of candles and crosses, and bade the Indian watchers, crouching like buzzards about the corpse, to go for a time. She sank into a chair beside the dead, and wondered at the calmness of her heart. She was not conscious of any feeling stronger than regret. She tried to realize the irrevocableness of death—that the mother who had been so kindly an influence in her life had gone out of it. But the knowledge brought no grief. She felt only the necessity for alleviating the grief of others; that was her part.

The door opened. She drew her breath suddenly. She knew that it was Estenega. He sat down beside her and

took her hand and held it, without a word, for hours. Gradually she leaned toward him, although without touching him. And after a time her own tears came.

He went his way the next morning, but he wrote to her before he left, and again from Monterey, and then from the North. She answered only once, and then with but a line.

But the line was this:

"Write to me until you have forgotten me."

CHAPTER XXVIII

BEFORE going to Mexico, Estenega remained for some weeks at his ranchos in the North, overlooking the slaughtering of his cattle; an important yearly event, for the trade in hides and tallow with foreign shippers was the chief source of the Californian's income. He also was associated with the Russians at Fort Ross and Bodega in the fur-trade. But he was far from being satisfied with these desultory gains. They sufficed his private wants, but with the great schemes he had in mind he needed gold by the bushel. How to obtain it was a problem which sat on the throne of his mind side by side with Chonita Iturbi y Moneada. He had reason to believe that gold lay under California; but where? He determined that upon his return from Mexico he would take measures to discover, although he objected to the methods which alone could be employed. But, like all born rulers of men, he had an impatient scorn for means with a great end in view. There was no intermediate way to make the money. It would be a hundred years before the country would be populous enough to give his vast ranchos a reasonable value; and although he had twenty thousand head of cattle, the market for their disposal was limited, and barter was the principle of trade, rather than coin.

Toward the end of the month he hurried to Monterey to catch a bark about to sail for Mexico. The important preliminaries of the future he had planned could no longer be delayed, the treacherous revengeful nature of Reinaldo might at any moment awake from the spell in which he had locked it; had a ship sailed before, he would have left his commercial interests with his majordomo and gone to the seat of government at once.

He arrived in Monterey one evening after hard riding. The city was singularly quiet. It was the hour when the indefatigable dancers of that gay town should have flitted past the open windows of the salas, when the air should have been vocal with the flute and guitar, song and light laughter. But the city might have been a living tomb. The white rayless houses were heavy and silent as sepulchres. He rode slowly down Alvarado Street, and saw the advancing glow of a cigar. When the cigar was abreast of him he recognized Mr. Larkin.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Small-pox," replied the consul succinctly. "Better get on board at once. And steer clear of the lower quarter. Your vaquero arrived yesterday, and I instructed him to put your baggage in the custom-house. He dropped it and fled to the country."

Estenega thanked him and proceeded on his way. He made a circuit to avoid the lower quarter, but saw that it was not abandoned; lights moved here and there. "Poor creatures!" he thought, "they are probably dying like poisoned rats."

On the side of the hill by the road was a solitary hut. He was obliged to pass it. A candle burned beyond the open window, and he set his lips and turned his head; not from fear of contagion, however. His eyes were drawn to the window in spite of his resolute will. He looked once, and looked again, then checked his horse. On the bed lay a girl in the middle stages of the disease, her eyes glittering with delirium, her black hair matted and wet. She was evidently alone. Estenega spurred his horse and galloped round to the back of the hut. In the kitchen, the only other room, huddled an old crone, brown and gnarled like an old apple. She was sleeping; by her side was a bottle of aguardiente. Estenega called loudly to her:

"Susana!"

The creature stirred, but did not open her eyes. He called twice again, and awakened her. She stared

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through the open door, her lower jaw falling, showing the yellow stumps.

"Who is?"

"Is Anita alone with you?"

"Ay, yi! Don Diego! Yes, yes. All run from the house like rats from a ship that burns. Ay, yi! Ay, yi! and she so pretty before! A-y, y-i!—" Her head fell forward; she relapsed into stupor.

Estenega rode round to the window again. The girl was sitting on the edge of the bed, mechanically pulling the long matted strands of her hair.

"Water! water!" she cried faintly. "Ay, Mary!" She strove to rise, but fell back, clutching at the bed-clothing.

Estenega rode to a deserted hut near by, concealed his saddle in a corner under a heap of rubbish, and turned his horse loose. He returned to the hut where the sick girl lay, and entered the room. She recognized him in spite of her fever.

"Don Diego! Is it you?—you?" she said, half raising herself. "Ay, Mary! is it the delirium?"

"It is I," he said. "I will take care of you. Do you want water?"

"Ay, water. Ay, thou wert always kind, even though thy love did last so little a while."

He brought the water, and did what he could to relieve her sufferings. Like all the rancheros, he had some knowledge of medicine. He held the old crone under the pump, gave her an emetic, broke her bottle, and ordered her to help him care for the girl. Between awe of him and promise of gold, she gave him some assistance.

Estenega watched the vessel sail the next morning, and battled with the impulse to leap from the window, hire a boat, and overtake it. The delay of a month might mean the death of his hopes. For all he knew, the bark carried the letters of his undoing; Reinaldo himself might be on it. He set his lips with an expression of bitter contempt—the expression directed at his own im-

potence in the hands of circumstance—and went to the bedside of the girl. She was hopelessly ill; even medical skill, were there such a thing in the country, could not save her; but he could not leave to die like a dog a woman who had been his mistress, even if only the fancy of a few months, as this poor girl had been. She had loved him, and never annoyed him; they had maintained friendly relations, and he had helped her whenever she had appealed to him. But in this hour of her extremity she had further rights, and he recognized them. He had cut her hair close to her head, and she looked more comfortable, although an unpleasant sight. As he regarded her, he thought of Chonita, and the tide of love rose in him as it had not done before. In the beginning he had been hardly more than infatuated with her originality and her curious beauty; at Santa Barbara her sweetness and kinship had stolen into him, and the momentous fusion of passion and spiritual love had given new birth to a torpid soul, and stirred and shaken his manhood as lust had never done; now in her absence and exaltation above common mortals he revered her as an ideal. Even in the bitterness of the knowledge that months must elapse before he could see her again, the tenderness she had drawn to herself from the serious depths of his nature throbbed throughout him, and made him more than gentle to the poor creature whose ignorance could not have comprehended the least of what he felt for Chonita.

She died within three days. The good priest, who stood to his post and made each of his afflicted poor a brief daily visit, prayed by her as she fell into stupor, but she was incapable of receiving extreme unction. Estenega was alone with her when she died. The priest returned a few moments later.

“Don Thomas Larkin wishes me to say to you, Don Diego Estenega,” said the Father, “that he would be glad to have you stay with him until the next vessel arrives. As two members of his family have the disease,

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he has nothing to fear from you. I will care for the body."

Estenega handed him money for the burial, and looked at him speculatively. The priest must have heard the girl's confessions, and he wondered why he did not embrace the opportunity to reprove a man whose indifference to the Church was a matter of indignant comment among the clergy. The priest appeared to divine his thoughts, for he said:

"You have done more than your duty, Don Diego. And to the frailties of men I think the good God is merciful. He made them. Go in peace."

Estenega accepted Mr. Larkin's invitation, but, in spite of the genial society of the consul, he spent in his house the most wretched three weeks of his life. He dared not leave Monterey until he had passed the time of incubation, having no desire to spread the disease; he dared not write to Chonita, for the same reason. What must she think? She supposed him to have sailed, of course, but he had promised to write her from Monterey, and again from San Diego. And the uncertainty regarding his Mexican affairs was intolerable to a man of his active impatient mind. His only comfort lay in Mr. Larkin's assurance that the national bark, *Joven Guipuzcoana*, was due within the month and would return at once. Early in the fourth week the assurance was fulfilled, and by the time he was ready to sail again his danger from contagion was over. But he embarked without writing to Chonita.

The voyage lasted a month, tedious and monotonous, more trying than his delay on land, for there, at least, he could recover some serenity by violent exercise. He divided his time between pacing the deck, when the weather permitted, and writing to Chonita: long, intimate, possessing letters, which would reveal her to herself as nothing else, short of his own dominant contact, could do. At San Blas he posted his letters, and welcomed the rough journey overland to the capital; but under a calm exterior he was possessed of the spirit of

disquiet. As so often happens, however, his fears proved to have been vagaries of a morbid state of mind, and of that habit of thought which would associate with every cause an effect of similar magnitude. Santa Ana welcomed him with friendly enthusiasm, and was ready to listen to his plans. That wily and astute politician, who was always abreast of progress and never in its lead, recognized in Estenega the coming man, and, knowing that the seizure of Alta California by the United States was only a question of time, was keenly desirous to make an ally of the man who, he foresaw, would control it as long as he chose, both at home and in Washington. For the matter of that, he recognized the impotence of Mexico to interfere, beyond bluster, with plans any resolute Californian might choose to pursue; but it was important to Estenega's purpose that the Governorship should be assured to him by the central government, and the eyes of the Mexican Congress directed elsewhere. He knew the value of the moral effect which its apparent sanction would have upon rebellious southerners.

"I am at your service," said Santa Ana; "and the Governorship is yours. But take heed lest no rumor of your ultimate intentions reach the ears of Congress until you are firmly established. If it opposed you relentlessly—and it keeps its teeth on California like a dog on a bone bigger than himself—I should have to yield; I have too much at stake myself. I will look out that any communications from enemies, including Iturbide and Moncada, are opened first by me."

Estenega wrote to Chonita again by the ship that left during his brief stay in the capital, and it was his intention to go directly to Santa Barbara upon arriving in California. But when he landed in Monterey—disinfected and careless as of old—he learned that she was about to start, perhaps already had started, for Fort Ross, to pay a visit to the Rotchevs. The news gave him pleasure; it had been his wish to say what he had yet to say in his own forests.

And then the plan which had been stirring restlessly

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in his mind for many months took imperative shape: he determined that if there was gold in California he would wring the secret out of its keeper, by gentle means or violent, and that within the next twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER XXIX

ESTENEGA drew rein the next night before the neglected Mission of San Rafael. The valley, surrounded by hills dark with the silent redwoods, bore not a trace of the populous life of the days before secularization. The padre lived alone, lodge-keeper of a valley of shadows.

He opened the door of his room on the corridor as he heard the approach of the traveler, squinting his bleared yellow-spotted eyes. He was surly by nature, but he bowed low to the man whose power was so great in California, and whose generosity had sent him many a bullock. He cooked him supper from his frugal store, piled the logs in the open fireplace—November was come—and, after a bottle of wine, produced from Estenega's saddle-bag, expanded into a hermit's pale imitation of good fellowship. Late in the night they still sat on either side of the table in the dusty desolate room. The Forgotten had been entertained with vivid and shifting pictures of the great capital in which he had passed his boyhood. He smiled occasionally; now and again he gave a quick impatient sigh. Suddenly Estenega leaned forward and fixed him with his powerful gaze.

"Is there gold in these mountains?" he asked abruptly.

The priest was thrown off his guard for a moment; a look of meaning flashed into his eyes, then one of cunning displaced it.

"It may be, Señor Don Diego; gold is often in the earth. But had I the unholy knowledge, I would lock it in my breast. Gold is the canker in the heart of the world. It is not for the Church to scatter the evil broadcast."

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Estenega shut his teeth. Fanaticism was a more powerful combatant than avarice.

"True, my father. But think of the good that gold has wrought. Could these Missions have been built without gold?—these thousands of Indians Christianized?"

"What you say is not untrue; but for one good, ten thousand evils are wrought with the metal which the devil mixed in hell and poured through the veins of the earth."

Estenega spent a half hour representing in concrete and forcible images the debt which civilization owed to the fact and circulation of gold. The priest replied that California was a proof that commerce could exist by barter; the money in the country was not worth speaking of.

"And no progress to speak of in a hundred years," retorted Estenega. Then he expatiated upon the unique future of California did she have gold to develop her wonderful resources. The priest said that to cut California from her Arcadian simplicity would be to start her on her journey to the devil along with the corrupt nations of the Old World. Estenega demonstrated that if there was vice in the older civilizations there was also a higher state of mental development, and that Religion held her own. He might as well have addressed the dark forest without. He tempted with the bait of one of the more central Missions. The priest had only the dust of ambition in the cellar of his brain.

He lost his patience at last. "I must have gold," he said shortly; "and you shall show me where to find it. You once betrayed to my father that you knew of its existence in these hills; and you shall give me the key."

The priest looked into the eyes of steel and at the contemptuously determined face, and shut his lips. He was alone with a desperate man; he had not even a servant; he could be murdered, and his murderer go unsuspected. But the heart of the fanatic was in him. He made no reply.

"You know me," said Estenega. "I owe half my power in California to the fact that I do not make a threat to-day and forget it to-morrow. You will show me where that gold is, or I shall kill you."

"The servant of God dies when his hour comes. If I am to die by the hand of the assassin, so be it."

Estenega leaned forward and placed his strong hand about the priest's baggy throat, pushing the table against his chest. He pressed his thumb against the throttle, his second finger hard against the jugular, and the tongue rolled over the teeth, the congested eyes bulged.

"It may be that you scorn death, but will not fancy the mode of it. I have no desire to kill you. Alive or dead, your life is of no more value than that of a worm. But you shall die, and die with much discomfort, unless you do as I wish." His hand relaxed its grasp, but still pressed the rough dirty throat.

"Accursed heretic!" said the priest.

"Spare your curses for the superstitious."

He saw a gleam of cunning come into the priest's eyes.

"Very well; if I must, I must. Let me rise, and I will conduct you."

Estenega took a piece of rope from his saddle-bag and tied it about the priest's waist and his own.

"If you have any holy pitfall in view for me, I shall have the pleasure of your company. And if I am led into labyrinths to die of starvation, you at least will have a meal; I could not eat you."

If the priest was disconcerted, he did not show it. He took a lantern from a shelf, lit the fragment of candle, and, opening a door at the back, walked through the long line of inner rooms. All were heaped with rubbish. In one he found a trap-door with his foot, and descended rough steps cut out of the earth. The air rose chill and damp, and Estenega knew that the tunnel of the Mission was below, the secret exit to the hills which the early Fathers built as a last recourse in case of defeat by savage tribes. When they reached the bot-

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tom of the steps the tallow dip illumined but a narrow circle; Estenega could form no idea of the workmanship of the tunnel, except that it was not more than six feet and a few inches high, for his hat brushed the top, and that the floor and sides appeared to be of pressed clay. There was ventilation somewhere, but no light. They walked a mile or more, and then Estenega had a sense of stepping into a wider and higher excavation.

"We are no longer in the tunnel," said the priest. He lifted the lantern and swung it above his head. Estenega saw that they were in a circular room, hollowed probably out of the heart of a hill. He also saw something else.

"What is that?" he exclaimed sharply.

The priest handed him the lantern. "Look for yourself," he said.

Estenega took the lantern, and, holding it just above his head and close to the walls, slowly traversed the room. It was belted with three strata of crystal-like quartz, sown thick with glittering yellow specks and nuggets. Each stratum was about three feet wide.

"There is a fortune here," he said. He felt none of the greed of gold, merely a recognition of its power.

"Yes, señor; enough to pay the debt of a nation."

"Where are we? Under what hill? I am sorry I had not a compass with me. It was impossible to make any accurate guess of direction in that slanting tunnel. Where is the outlet?"

The priest made no reply.

Estenega turned to him peremptorily. "Answer me. How can I find this place from without?"

"You never will find it from without. When the danger from Indians was over, a pious Father closed the opening. This gold is not for you. You could not find even the trap-door by yourself."

"Then why have you brought me here?"

"To tantalize you. To punish you for your insult to the Church through me. Kill me now, if you wish. Better death than hell."

Estenega made a rapid circuit of the room. There was no mode of egress other than that by which they had entered, and no sign of any previously existing. He sprang upon the priest and shook him until the worn stumps rattled in their gums.

"You dog!" he said, "to balk me with your ignorant superstition! Take me out of this place by its other entrance at once, that I may remain on the hill until morning. I would not trust your word. You shall tell me, if I have to torture you."

The priest made a sudden spring and closed with Estenega, hugging him like a bear. The lantern fell and went out. The two men stumbled blindly in the blackness, striking the walls, wrestling desperately, the priest using his teeth and panting like a beast. But he was no match for the virility and science of his young opponent. Estenega threw him in a moment and bound him with the rope. Then he found the lantern and lit the candle again. He returned to the priest and stood over him. The latter was conquered physically, but the dogged light of bigotry still burned in his eyes, although Estenega's were not agreeable to face.

Estenega was furious. He had twisted Santa Ana, one of the most subtle and self-seeking men of his time, round his finger as if he had been a yard of ribbon; Alvarado, the wisest man ever born in the Californias, was swayed by his judgment; yet all the arts of which his intellect was master fell blunt and useless before this clay-brained priest. He had more respect for the dogs in his kennels, but unless he resorted to extreme measures the creature would defeat him through sheer brute ignorance. Estenega was not a man to stop in sight of victory or to give his sword to an enemy he despised.

"You are at my mercy. You realize that now, I suppose. Will you show me the other way out?"

The priest drew down his under-lip like a snarling dog, revealing the discolored stumps. But he made no other reply.

Estenega lit a match, and, kneeling beside the priest, held it to his stubbled beard. As the flame licked the flesh the man uttered a yell like a kicked brute. Estenega sprang to his feet with an oath. "I can't do it!" he exclaimed, with bitter disgust. "I haven't the iron of cruelty in me. I am not fit to be a ruler of men." He untied the rope about the prisoner's feet. "Get up," he said, "and conduct me back as we came."

The priest scrambled to his feet and hobbled down the long tunnel. They ascended the steps beneath the Mission and emerged into the room.

Estenega turned swiftly to prevent the closing of the trap-door, but only in time to hear it shut with a spring and the priest kick rubbish above it. He cut the rope which bound the other's hands.

"Go!" he said, "I have no further use for you. And if you report this, I need not explain to you that it will fare worse with you than it will with me."

The priest fled, and Estenega, hanging the lantern on a nail, pushed aside the rubbish with his feet, purposing to pace the room until dawn. In a few moments, however, he discovered that the despised hermit was not without his allies; ten thousand fleas, the pest of the country, assaulted every part of his body they could reach. They swarmed down the legs of his riding-boots, up his trousers, up his sleeves, down his neck. "There is no such thing in life as tragedy," he thought. He hung the lantern outside the door to mark the room, and paced the yard until morning. But there were dark hours yet before the dawn, and during one of them a figure, when his back was turned, crept to the lantern and hung it before another room. When light came—and the fog came first—all Estenega's efforts to find the trap-door were unavailing, although the yard was littered with the rubbish he flung into it from the room. He suspected the trick, but there were ten rooms exactly alike, and although he cleared most of them he could discover no trace of the trap-door. He looked at the hills surrounding the Mission. They were many, and

beyond there were others. He mounted his horse and rode round the buildings, listening carefully for hollow reverberations. The tunnel was too far below; he heard nothing.

He was defeated. For the first time in his life he was without resource, overwhelmed by a force stronger than his own will; and his spirit was savage within him. He had no authority to dig the floors of the Mission, for the Mission and several acres about it were the property of the Church. The priest never would take him on that underground journey again, for he had learned the weak spot in his armor, nor had he fear of death. Unless accident favored him, or some one more fortunate, the golden heart of the San Rafael hill would pulse unrifled for ever.

CHAPTER XXX

HE turned his back upon the Mission and rode toward his home, sixty miles in a howling November wind. At Bodega Bay he learned that Governor Rotsehev had passed there two days before with a party of guests that he had gone down to Sausalito to meet. Chonita awaited him in the North. A softer mood pressed through the somberness of his spirit, and the candle of hope burned again. Gold must exist elsewhere in California, and he swore anew that it should yield itself to him. The last miles of his ride lay along the cliffs. Sometimes the steep hills covered with redwoods rose so abruptly from the trail that the undergrowth brushed him as he passed; on the other side but a few inches stood between himself and death amid the surf pounding on the rocks five hundred feet below. The sea-gulls screamed about his head, the sea-lions barked with the hollow note of consumptives on the outlying rocks. On the horizon was a bank of fog, outlined with the crests and slopes and gullehes of the mountain beside him. It sent an advancee wraek scudding gracefully across the ocean to puff among the redwoods, capriciously clinging to some, ignoring others. Then came the vast white mountain, rushing over the roaring ocean, up the cliffs and into the gloomy forests, blotting the lonely horseman from sight.

He arrived at his house—a big structure of logs—late in the night. His servants came out to meet him, and in a moment a fire leaped in the great fireplace in his library. He lived alone; his parents and brothers were dead, and his sisters married; but the fire made the low long room, covered with bear-skins and lined with books, as cheerful as a bachelor could expect. He found a note

from the Princess Hélène Rotschev, the famous wife of the Governor, asking him to spend the following week at Fort Ross; but he was so tired that even the image of Chonita was dim; the note barely caused a throb of anticipation. After supper he flung himself on a couch before the fire and slept until morning, then went to bed and slept until afternoon. By that time he was himself again. He sent a vaquero ahead with his evening clothes, and an hour or two later started for Fort Ross, spurring his horse with a lighter heart over the cliffs. His ranchos adjoined the Russian settlement; the journey from his house to the military enclosure was not a long one. He soon rounded the point of a sloping hill and entered the spreading cove formed by the mountains receding in a semicircle above the cliffs, and in whose shelter lay Fort Ross. The fort was surrounded by a stockade of redwood beams, bastions in the shape of hexagonal towers at diagonal corners. Cannon, mounted on carriages, were at each of the four entrances, in the middle of the enclosure, and in the bastions. Sentinels paced the ramparts with unremitting vigilance.

Within were the long low buildings occupied by the Governor and officers, the barracks, and the Russian church, with its belfry and cupola. Beyond was the "town," a collection of huts accommodating about eight hundred Indians and Siberian convicts, the working-men of the company. All the buildings were of redwood logs or planed boards, and made a very different picture from the white towns of the South. The curving mountains were sombre with redwoods, the ocean growled unceasingly.

Estenega threw his bridle to a soldier and went directly to the house. A servant met him on the verandah and conducted him to his room; it was late, and everyone else was dressing for dinner. He changed his riding-clothes for the evening dress of modern civilization, and went at once to the drawing-room. Here all was luxury, nothing to suggest the privations of a new country. A thick red carpet covered the floor, red arras

the walls; the music of Mozart and Beethoven was on the grand piano. The furniture was rich and comfortable; the large carved table was covered with French novels and European periodicals.

The candles had not been brought in, but logs blazed in the open fireplace. As Estenega crossed the room, a woman, dressed in black, rose from a deep chair, and he recognized Chonita. He sprang forward impetuously and held out his arms, but she waved him back.

"No, no," she said hurriedly. "I want to explain why I am here. I came for two reasons: First, I could refuse the Princess Hélène no longer; she goes so soon. And then—I wanted to see you once more before I leave the world."

"Before you do what?"

"I am not going into a convent; I cannot leave my father. I am going to retire to the most secluded of our ranchos, to see no more of the world or its people. I shall take my father with me. Reinaldo and Prudencia will remain at Casa Grande."

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Do you suppose I shall let you do anything of the sort? How little you know me, my love! But we will discuss that question later. We shall be alone only a few moments now. Tell me of yourself. How are you?"

"I will tell you that, also, at another time."

And at the moment a door opened, and the Governor and his wife entered and greeted Estenega with cordial hospitality. The Governor was a big red-bearded Russian, with a spontaneous warmth of manner; the princess a woman who possessed both elegance and vivacity, both coquetry and dignity; she could sparkle and chill, allure and suppress in the same moment. Even here, rough and wild as her surroundings were, she gave much thought to her dress; to-night her blonde harmonious loveliness was properly framed in a toilette of mignonne greens fresh from Paris. A moment later Reinaldo and Prudencia appeared, the former as splendid a caballero as ever, albeit wearing the chastened air of matri-

mony, the latter pre-maternally consequential. Then came the officers and their wives, all brilliant in evening dress; and a moment later dinner was announced.

Estenega sat at the right of his hostess, and that trained daughter of the salon kept the table in a light ripple of conversation, sparkling herself, without striking terror to the hearts of her guests. She and Estenega were old friends, and usually indulged in lively sallies, ending sometimes in a sharp war of words, for she was a very clever woman; but to-night he gave her absent attention; he watched Chonita furtively, and thought of little else.

Her eyes had darker shadows beneath them than those cast by her lashes; her face was pale and slightly hollowed. She had suffered, and not for her mother. "She shall suffer no more," he thought.

"We hunt bear to-night," he heard the Governor say, at length.

"I should like to go," said Chonita quickly. "I should like to go out to-night."

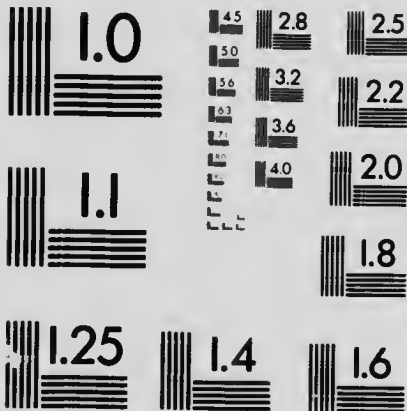
Immediately there was a chorus from all the other women, save the Princess Hélène and Prudencia; they would go too. Rotschev, who would much rather have left them at home, consented with good grace, and Estenega's spirits rose at once. He would have a talk with Chonita that night, something he had not dared to hope for, and he suspected that she had promoted the opportunity.

The men remained in the dining-room after the ladies had withdrawn, and Estenega, restored to his normal condition, and in his natural element among these people of the world, expanded into the high spirits and convivial interest in masculine society, which made him as popular with men as he was fascinating, through the exercise of more subtle faculties, to women. Reinaldo watched him with jealous impatience; no one cared to hearken to his eloquence when Estenega talked; and he had come to Fort Ross only to have a conversation with his one-time enemy. As he listened to Estenega, shorn,



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for the time being, of his air of dictator and watchful ambition, a man of the world taking an enthusiastic part in the hilarity of the hour, but never sacrificing his dignity by assuming the rôle of chief entertainer, there grew within him a dull sense of inferiority; he felt, rather than knew, that neither the city of Mexico nor gratified ambitions would give him that assured ease, that perfection of breeding, that calm sense of power, concealing so gracefully the relentless will and the infinite resource, which made this most un-Californian of Californians seem to his Arcadian eyes a being of a higher star. And hatred blazed forth anew.

As the men rose, finally, to go to the drawing-room, he asked Estenega to remain for a moment. "Thou wilt keep thy promise soon, no?" he said, when they were alone.

"What promise?"

"Thy promise to send me as diputado to the next Mexican Congress."

Estenega looked at him reflectively. He had little toleration for the man of inferior brain, and, although he did not underrate his power for mischief, he relied upon his own wit to circumvent him. He had disposed of this one by warning Santa Ana, and he concluded to be annoyed by him no farther. Besides, as a brother-in-law, he would be insupportable except at the long range of mutual unamiability.

"I made you no promise," he said deliberately; "and I shall make you none. I do not wish you in the city of Mexico."

Reinaldo's face grew livid. "You dare to say that to me, and yet would marry my sister?"

"I would, and I shall."

"And yet you would not help her brother?"

"Her brother is less to me than any man with whom I have sat to-night. Build no hope on that. You will stay at Santa Barbara and play the grand seigneur, which suits you very well, or become a prisoner in your own house." And he left the room.

CHAPTER XXXI

AN hour later they assembled in the plaza to start for the bear hunt. Reinaldo was not of the party.

Estenega lifted Chonita to her horse and stood beside her for a moment while the others mounted. He touched her hand with his:

"We could not have a more beautiful night," he said significantly. "And I have often wished that my father had included this spot when he applied for his grant. I should like to live with you here. Even when the winds rage and hurl the rain through the very window pane, I know of no more enchanting spot than Fort Ross. The Russians are going; some day I will buy it for you."

She made no reply, but she did not withdraw her hand, and he held it closely and glanced slowly about him. Always, despite his bitter intimacy with life, in kinship with nature, perhaps in that moment it had a deeper meaning, for he saw with double vision. She was there: and, with him, sensible not only of the beauty of the night, but of the indefinable mystery which broods over California the moment the sun falls. Perhaps, too, he was troubled by a vague foreboding, such as comes to mortals sometimes in spite of their limitations. He never saw Fort Ross again.

On the horizon the fog crouched and moved; marched like a battalion of ocean's ghosts; suddenly cohered and sent out light puffs of smoke, as from the crater of a spectral volcano. The moon, full and bright and cold, hung low in the dark sky; one hardly noted the stars. The vast sweep of water was as calm as a lake, dark and metallic like the sky, barely reflecting the silver

light between. But although calm it was not quiet. It greeted the forbidding rocks beyond the shore, the long irregular line of stark storm-beaten cliffs, with ominous mutter, now and again throwing a cloud of spray high in the air, as if in derisive proof that even in sleep it was sensible of its power. Occasionally it moaned, as if sounding a dirge along the mass of stones which storms had hurled or waves had wrenched from the crags above—a dirge for beheaded Russians, for him who had walked the plank, or for the lover of Natalie Ivanhov.

Here and there the cliffs were intersected by deep straggling gulches, out of whose sides grew low woods of brush; but the three tables rising successively from the ocean to the forest on the mountain were almost bare. On the highest, between two gulches, on a knoll so bare and black and isolated that its destiny was surely taken into account at creation, were a tall rude cross and half a hundred neglected graves. The forest seemed blacker just behind it, the shadows thicker in the gorges that embraced it, the ocean grayer and more illimitable before it.

"Natalie Ivanhov is there in her copper coffin," said Estenega, "forgotten already."

The curve of the mountain was so perfect that it seemed to reach down a long arm on either side and grasp the cliffs. The redwoods on its crown and upper slopes were a mass of rigid shadows, the points, only, sharply etched on the night sky. They might have been a wall about an undiscovered country.

"Come," cried Rotshev, "we are ready to start." And Estenega sprang to his horse.

"I don't envy you," said the Princess Hélène from the verandah, her blonde head barely visible above the furs that enveloped her. "I prefer the fire."

"You are warmly clad?" asked Estenega of Chonita. "But you have the blood of the South in your veins."

They climbed the steep road between the levels, slowly, the women chattering and asking questions, the men

explaining and advising. Estenega and Chonita, having much to say, said nothing.

A cold volume of air, the muffled roar of a mountain torrent, rushed out of the forest, startling with the suddenness of its impact. Once a panther uttered its human cry.

They entered the forest. It was so dark here that the horses wandered from the trail and into the brush again and again. Conversation ceased; save for the muffled footfalls of the horses and the speech of the waters there was no sound. Chonita had never known a stillness so profound; the giant trees crowding together seemed to resent intrusion, to menace an eternal silence. She moved her horse close to Estenega's and he took her hand. Occasionally there was an opening, a well of blackness, for the moon had not yet come to the forest.

They reached the summit, and descended. Halfway down the mountain they rode into a farm in a valley formed by one of the many basins.

The Indians were waiting, and killed a bullock at once, placing the carcass in a conspicuous place. Then all retired to the shade of the trees. In less than half an hour a bear came prowling out of the forest and began upon the meal so considerately provided for him. When his attention was fully engaged, Rotschev and the officers, mounted, dashed down upon him, swinging their lassos. The bear showed fight and stood his ground, but this was an occasion when the bear always got the worst of it. One lasso caught his neck, another his hind foot, and he was speedily strained and strangled to death. No sooner was he dispatched than another appeared, then another, and the sport grew very exciting, absorbing the attention of the women as well as the energies of the men.

Estenega lifted Chonita from her horse. "Let us walk," he said. "They will not miss us. A few yards farther, and you will be on my territory. I want you there."

She made no protest, and they entered the forest. The

moon shone down through the lofty redwoods that seemed to scrape its crystal; the monotone of the distant sea blended with a faint roar in the tree-tops. The vast gloomy aisles were unbroken by other sound.

He took her hand and held it a moment, then drew it through his arm. "Now tell me all," he said. "They will be occupied for a long while. The night is ours."

"I have come here to tell you that I love you," she said. "Ah, can *I* make *you* tremble? It was impossible for me not to tell you this; I could not rest in my retreat without having the last word with you, without having you know me. And I want to tell you that I have suffered horribly; you may care to know that, for no one else in the world could have made me, no one else ever can. Only your fingers could twist in among my heart-strings and tear my heart of my body. I suffered first because I doubted you, then because I loved you, then the torture of jealousy and the pangs of parting, then those dreadful three months when I heard no word. I could not stay at Casa Grande; everything associated with you made my heart shake my body. Oh, I have gone through all varieties! But the last was the worst, after I heard from you again, and all other causes were removed, and I knew that you were well and still loved me: the knowledge that I never could be anything to you—and I could be so much! The torment of this knowledge was so bitter that there was but one refuge—imagination. I shut my eyes to my little world and lived with you; and it seemed to me that I grew into absolute knowledge of you. Let me tell you what I divined. You may tell me that I am wrong, but I do not believe that you will. I think that in the little time we were together I absorbed you.

"It seemed to me that your soul reached always for something just above the attainable, restless in the moments which would satisfy another, fretted with a perverse desire for something different when an ardent wish was granted, steeped, under all wanton determined enjoyment of life, with the bitter knowing of life's sure

impotence to satisfy. Could the dissatisfied darting mind loiter long enough to give a woman more than the promise of happiness?—but never mind that.

“With this knowledge of you my own restless desire for variety left me; my nature concentrated into one paramount wish—to be all things to you. What I had felt vaguely before and stifled—the nothingness of life, the inevitableness of satiety—I repudiated utterly, now that they were personified in you; I would not recognize the fact of their existence. I could make you happy. How could imagination shape such scenes, such perfection of union, of companionship, if reality were not? I might exaggerate; but, even stripped of its halo, the substance must be sweeter and more fulfilling than anything else on this earth at least. And I knew that you loved me. Oh, I had *felt* that! And the variousness of your nature and desires, although they might madden me at times, would give an extraordinary zest to life. I was the Doomswoman no longer. I was a supplementary being who could meet you in every mood and complete it; who would so understand that I could be man and woman and friend to you. A delusion? But so long as I shall never know, let me believe. An extraordinary tumultuous desire that rose in me like a wave and shook me often at first, had, in those last sad weeks, less part in my musings. It seemed to me that that was the expression, the poignant essence, of love; but there was so much else! I do not understand that, however, and never shall. But I wanted to tell you all. I could not rest until you knew me as I am and as you had made me. And I will tell you this too,” she cried, breaking suddenly, “I wanted you so! Oh, I needed you so! It was not I, only, who could give. And it is so terrible for a woman to stand alone!”

He made no reply for a moment. But he forgot every other interest and scheme and idea stored in his impatient brain. He was thrilled to his soul, and filled with the exultant sense that he was about to take to his heart

the woman compounded for him out of his own elements.

"Speak to me," she said.

"My love, I have so much to say to you that it will take all the years we shall spend together to say it in."

"No, no! Do not speak of that. There I am firm. Although the misery of the past months were to be multiplied ten hundred times in the future, I would not marry you."

Estenega, knowing that their hour of destiny was come, and that upon him alone depended its issues, was not the man to hesitate between such happiness as this woman alone could give him, and the gray existence which she in her blindness would have meted to both; his bold will had already taken the future in its relentless grasp. But, knowing the mental habit of women, he thought it best to let Chonita free her mind, that there might be the less in it to protest for hearing when his heart and passion spoke to hers.

"It seems absurd to argue the matter," he said, "but tell me the reasons again, if you choose, and we will dispose of them once for all. Do not think for a moment, my darling, that I do not respect your reasons; but I respect them only because they are yours; in themselves they are not worthy of consideration."

"Ay, but they are. There has been an unwritten law for three generations that an Estenega and an Iturbi y Moncada should not marry; the enmity began, as you should know, when a member of each family was an officer in a detachment of troops sent to protect the Missions in their building. And my father—he told me lately—loved your father's sister for many years—that was the reason he married so late in life—and would not ask her because of her blood, and of cruel wrongs her father had done his. Shall his daughter be weak where he was strong? You cast aside traditions as if they were the seeds of an apple; but remember that they are blood of my blood. And the vow I made—do you forget that? And the words of it? The Church stands between us. I will tell you all. The priest has forbidden me to marry

you; he forbade it every time I confessed; not only because of my vow, but because you had aroused in me a love so terrible that I almost took the life of another woman. Could I bring you back to the Church, it might be different; but you rule others; no one could remold you. You see, it is hopeless. It is no use to argue."

"I have no intention of arguing. Words are too good to waste on such an absurd proposition that because our fathers hated, we, who are independent and intelligent beings, should not marry when every drop of our heart's blood demands its rights. As for your vow—what is a vow? Hysterical egotism, nothing more. Were it the promise of man to man, the subject would be worth discussing. But we will settle the matter in our own way." He took her suddenly in his arms and kissed her. She put her arms about him and clung to him, trembling, her lips pressed to his. In that supreme moment he felt not happiness, but a bitter desire to bear her out of the world into some higher sphere where the conditions of happiness might possibly exist. "On the highest pinnacle we reach," he thought, "we are granted the tormenting and chastening glimpse of what might be, had God, when He compounded His victims, been in a generous mood and completed them."

And she? she was a woman.

"You will resist no longer," he said, in a few moments.

"Ay, more surely than ever now." Her voice was faint, but crossed by a note of terror. "In that moment I forgot my religion and my duty. And what is so sweet—it cannot be right."

"Do you so despise your womanhood, the most perfect thing about you?"

"Oh, let us return! I wanted to kiss you once. I meant to do that. But I should not— Let us go! Oh, I love you so! I love you so!"

He drew her closer and kissed her until her head fell forward and her body grew heavy. "I shall think and act now, for both," he said unsteadily, although there

was no lack of decision in his voice. "You are mine. I claim you, and I shall run no further risk of losing you. Oh, you will forgive me—my love——"

Neither saw a man walking rapidly up the trail. Suddenly the man gave a bound and ran toward them. It was Reinaldo.

"Ah, I have found you!" he cried. "Listen, Don Diego Estenega, lord of the North, American, and would-be dictator of the Californias. Two hours ago I dispatched a vaquero with a circular letter to the priests of the Department of the Californias, warning them each and all to write at once to the Archbishop of Mexico, and protest that the success of your ambitions would mean the downfall of the Catholic Church in California, and telling them your schemes. You are mighty, O Don Diego Estenega, but you are powerless against the enmity of the Church. They are mightier than you, and you will never rule in California. Unhand my sister! You shall not have her, either. You shall have nothing. Will you unhand her?" he cried, enraged at Estenega's cold reception of his damnatory news. "You should not have her if I tore your heart from your body."

Estenega looked contemptuously across Chonita's shoulder, although his heart was lead within him. "The last resource of the mean and down-trodden is revenge," he said. "Go! To-morrow I shall horsewhip you in the court-yard of Fort Ross."

Reinaldo, hot with excitement and thirst for further vengeance, uttered a shriek of rage and sprang upon him. Estenega saw the gleam of a knife, and flung Chonita aside, catching the driving arm, the fury of his heart in his muscles. Reinaldo had the soft muscles of the caballero, and panted and writhed in the iron grasp of the man who forgot that he grappled with the brother of a woman passionately loved, remembered only that he rejoiced to fight to the death the man who had ruined his life. Reinaldo tried to thrust the knife into his back; Estenega suddenly threw his weight on the arm

that held it, nearly wrenching it from its socket, snatched the knife, and drove it to the heart of his enemy.

Then the hot blood in his body turned cold. He stood like a stone regarding Chonita, whose eyes, fixed upon him, were expanded with horror. Between them lay the dead body of her brother.

He turned with a groan and sat down on a fallen log, supporting his chin with his hand. His profile looked grim and worn and old. He stared unseeingly at the ground. Chonita stood, still looking at him. The last act of her brother's life had been to lay the foundation of her lover's ruin; his death had completed it; all the South would rise did the slayer of an Iturbi y Moncada seek to rule it. She felt vaguely sorry for Reinaldo; but death was peace; this was hell in living veins. The memory of the world beyond the forest grew indistinct. She recalled her dream and turned in loathing from the bloodless selfishness of which it was the allegory. Superstition and tradition slipped into some inner pocket of her memory, there to rattle their dry bones together and fall to dust. She saw only the figure, relaxed for the first time, the profile of a man with his head on the block. She stepped across the body of her brother, and, kneeling beside Estenega, drew his head to her breast.

THE END

