

Guarica, the Charib Bride. A Legend of Hispaniola

Henry William Herbert

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Guarica, the Charib Bride. A Legend of Hispaniola

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ADVERTISEMENT.

It is several years since a little story bearing this title, and comprising a considerable portion of the text of this work, was published in one of the popular periodicals.

This, and some similar tales, first introduced to the world under the auspices of various periodicals of the day, having been so fortunate as to find favor with the reading public, I have been induced to rewrite and carry out some of the larger of these articles, for the purpose of publication in an independent form; and with a hope that they may be thought worthy of preservation in company with my larger works.

I believe that there is no occasion for any farther observations, concerning this little book, as the few historical persons introduced, and the anecdotes relating to them, are so generally known as to render comment needless.

It is my intention shortly to issue, in a form similar to this, enlarged and improved editions of "The Sisters," and "The Lord of the Manor;" and should their reception justify it, others will be successively produced in uniform style, and suitable to be bound up in good sized volumes.

HENRY WM. HERBERT.

Belmont Hall, Schooley's Mountain, – December, 1843.

CHAPTER I.

The heavy dew of the tropics was yet lying bright and unexhaled on every herb and flower; myriads of which, in most profuse variety of odor and bloom, strewed, like one gorgeous carpet, the beautiful savannahs, and wild forest glades of the fair province of Cahay. The sun had not fairly risen, although the warm and rosy light which harbingered his coming, was tinging, with its fairy dyes, the small and fleecy clouds that floated, like the isles of some enchanted sea, over the azure skies. The faint sea-breeze, which murmured still among the fresh green

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leaves, though it was fast subsiding, was laden with perfumes of such strange richness, that while they gratified they almost cloyed the senses; birds of the most superb and gorgeous plumage were glancing, meteor-like, among the boughs; but the innumerable insect tribes, which almost rival them in beauty, had not as yet been called forth to their life of a day, by the young sunbeams. The loveliness of those sequestered haunts, which had but recently been opened to the untiring and insatiate avarice of the Europeans, exceeded the most wild conceptions, the most voluptuous dreams, of the romancer or the poet. The solemn verdure of the mighty woods thick set with trees, more graceful than the shades of those ægean Isles, where the Ionian muse was born to witch the world for ages the light and feathery mimosas, the fan-like heads of the tall palms, towering a hundred feet above their humbler, yet still lofty brethren the giant oaks, their whole trunks overgrown with thousands of bright parasites, and their vast branches canopied with vines and creepers masses of tangled and impervious foliage the natural lawns, watered by rills of crystal the rocks, that reared themselves among the forests, mantled not as the crags of the cold northern climes, with dark and melancholy ivy, but with festoons of fruits and flowers that might have graced the gardens of the fabulous Hesperides. It was upon such a scene, as is but imperfectly and feebly shadowed forth, in the most glowing language, that the sweet dawn was breaking, when, from a distance, through the lovely woodlands, the mellow notes of a horn, clearly and scientifically winded, came floating on the gentle air; again it pealed forth its wild cadences, nearer and louder than before and then the deep and ringing bay of a full mouthed hound succeeded. Scarcely had the first echo of the woods replied to the unwonted sounds, before a beautiful, slight hind, forcing her way through a dense thicket of briers, dashed with the speed of mortal terror into the centre of a small savannah, through which stole almost silently a broad bright rivulet of very limpid water. Pausing for a second's space upon the brink, the delicate creature stood, with its swan-like neck curved backward, its thin ear erect, its full black eye dilated, and its expanded nostrils snuffing the tainted breeze. It was but for a second that she stood; for the next moment a louder and more boisterous crash arose from the direction whence she had first appeared the blended tongues of several hounds running together on a hot and recent trail. Tossing her head aloft, she gathered her slight limbs under her, sprung at one vigorous and elastic bound over the rivulet, and was lost instantly to view among the thickets of the further side. A few minutes elapsed during which the fierce baying of the hounds came quicker and more sharply on the ear; and then, from the same brake out of which the hind had started, rushed, with his eyes glowing like coals of fire, his head high in the air, and his long feathery tail lashing his tawny sides, a formidable blood hound, of that savage breed which was, in after times, so brutally employed against the hapless Indians by their Christian conquerors. Another, and another, and a fourth succeeded, making the vaulted woods to bellow with the deep cadences of their continuous cry. Hard on the blood hounds, crashing through the tangled branches with reckless and impetuous ardor, a solitary huntsman followed splendidly mounted on a fiery Andalusian charger, of a deep chestnut color, with four white legs, and a white blaze down his face, whose long thin mane, and the large cord-like veins that might be seen meandering over his muscular, sleek limbs, attested, as surely as the longest pedigree, the purity of his blood. The rider was a young man of some four or five-and-twenty years, well, and rather powerfully made than otherwise, though not above the middle stature; his long dark hair, black eye, and swarthy skin told of a slight admixture of the Moorish blood; while the expression of his features, though now excited somewhat by the exhilaration of the chase, grave, dignified and noble, bespoke him without a doubt a polished cavalier of Spain. His dress, adapted to the occupation which he so gallantly pursued, was a green doublet belted close about his waist by a girdle of Cordovan leather, from which swung, clinking at every stride of his horse, against the stirrup, a long and basket-hilted bilboa blade, in a steel scabbard, which was the only weapon that he wore, except a short two-edged stiletto, thrust into the belt at the left side. A broad sombrero hat, with a drooping feather, breeches and gloves of chamois leather, laced down the seams with silver, and russet buskins drawn up to the knee, completed his attire. He sat his horse gracefully and firmly; and the ease with which he supported him, and wheeled him to and fro among the fallen trees and rocks, notwithstanding the fiery speed at which he rode, bespoke him no less skillful than intrepid as a horseman. The chase continued for above an hour, during which every species of scenery that the level portions of the isle contained was traversed by the hunter; the open forest, the dense swampy brake, the wide luxuriant savannah and each at such hot speed, that though he turned aside neither for bush, nor bank, though he plunged headlong down the steepest crags, and dashed his charger, without hesitation, over every fallen tree that barred his progress, and every brook or gully that opposed him, still it was with no little difficulty that he contrived to keep the hounds in hearing. And now the hapless hind, worn out by the

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sustained exertions which had at first outstripped the utmost pace of her pursuers, but which availed her nothing to escape from foes against whose most sagacious instinct and unerring scent she had but fleetness to oppose was sinking fast, and must, as the rider judged by the redoubled speed and shriller baying of his hounds, soon turn to bay, or be run down without resistance. Her graceful head was bowed low toward the earth; big tears streamed down her hairy cheeks; her arid tongue lolled from her frothing jaws; her coat, of late so sleek and glossy, was all embossed with sweat and foam, and wounded at more points than one by the sharp thorns and prickly underwood through which she had toiled so fruitlessly. Still she strove on, staggering and panting in a manner pitiful to witness, when the deep bay of the blood hounds was changed suddenly into a series of sharp and savage yells, as they caught view of their destined prey.

Just at this moment the hind had reached the verge of a piece of dense and tangled woodland, through which she had toiled for several miles, when the low range of hillocks which it overspread sank suddenly by a steep and craggy declivity of twelve or fourteen feet, having at its base a rapid stream, brawling and fretting over many a rocky ledge, down to a wide and lovely meadow. Situated nearly in the centre of this flower-sprinkled lawn, half circled by a deep bight of the streamlet, and perfectly embowered by the canopy which a close group of waving palms spread over it, there stood an Indian dwelling. It was of larger size than were most of the native cottages, thatched neatly with the broad leaves of the palm, and ornamented in front by a portico of wooden columns, quaintly, and not ungracefully adorned by carvings wrought by the flint-edged chisel of the yet unsophisticated savage. A mat, woven with tasteful skill, from many-colored and sweet-scented rushes, was spread upon the floor; while several stools of ebony, inlaid with shells, and sculptured with grotesque devices, were ranged along the walls. On a projecting slab, which apparently supplied the want of a table, stood several gourds, ingeniously manufactured into cups and trenchers; some bowls of hard wood, even more highly finished than the other articles of furniture, and many ornaments of gold and strings of pearl scattered in rich profusion, lay among the humbler vessels of the household. From three columns were suspended large wicker cages, beautifully interlaced with intricate and quaint devices, containing paroquets and other birds of rare and splendid plumage; while from the others hung carved war-clubs of the ponderous iron-wood, flint-headed javelins, and several bows not the short, ill-strung, worthless weapons used by the Africans, but long, tough, and admirably made, and scarcely, if at all, inferior to the tremendous long bow which had gained so much renown, and wrought so much scathe to their foes, in the hands of the English archery. Under the shadow of the portico, sheltered by it from the warm beams of the sun, there sat an Indian youth, tall and slightly framed, and not above sixteen or seventeen years of age at the utmost, polishing with a chisel the shaft of a long javelin. On the lawn in front of the cottage a bright fire was blazing, and several native females were collected round it, preparing their morning meal, with cakes of the cassava baking among the hot wood-embers, and fish broiling on small spits of aromatic wood. But at a little distance to the left of these, at the extreme end of the building, nearest to the steep bank which terminated the forest, outstretched in a light grass hammock, which was suspended at the height of two or three feet from the ground, between two stately palm trees, and swaying gently to and fro in the light currents of the morning breeze, there lay the loveliest girl eyes ever looked upon; her rich black hair, braided above her brow, and fastened with one string of pearls, was passed behind her ears, whence it fell in a profusion of glossy curls, so wondrously luxuriant that had she stood erect, it would have flowed quite downward to her ankles; her eyes large, dark, and liquid as those of a Syrian antelope, were curtained by the longest and most silky lashes that ever fringed a human eyelid; her features classically regular and even, were redeemed from the charge of inspidity by the sly dimple at the angles of that exquisitely arched and rosy mouth, which Aphrodite, fresh from her ocean cradle, might have envied; and by the voluptuous curve of the soft chin. Her complexion was of a warm and sunny hue half brown and half golden through which the eloquent blood mantled at every motion, like the last flush of sunset upon the darkening sky. Beautiful, however, as was the countenance, and enchanting the expression of this Indian beauty, it yet was not until the second or third glance that the eye could stray from the matchless symmetry, the untaught graces, and the voluptuous and wavy motions of her form, to notice the less striking charms of face and features. Her beautiful arms, bare to the shoulder, were adorned with massy rings of virgin gold, so flexible, from the purity of the metal, that they were twisted and untwisted with as much ease as though they had been silken cords; the right hung over the edge of the hammock, its small and graceful hand resting upon a little stand or table at her side while the left, folded beneath her head, was half veiled beneath her abundant hair. Her dress, a single robe

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of soft, fine muslin, was clasped on the right shoulder by a golden stud, whence it passed under her left arm, leaving her bosom half exposed, and was girt around her slender waist by a cord of gaily colored cotton, covering the rest of her person down to the tiny feet although its slight folds clung so closely to the rich contour of her limbs that not a single charm but wooed the eye of the observer.

Such was the scene, and such the occupants of it, into which, darting with a momentary energy, that gained convulsive strength from the near presence of her dreaded foes, the hunted hind leaped suddenly. The craggy bank and stream were cleared by one tremendous bound, the level lawn was traversed with speed that seemed almost miraculous, yet scarce two spears' length from her haunches the furious blood-hounds followed. Whether it was that her eyes were cast backward toward her dreaded foes, and that every sense was engrossed by agonizing terror, so that she marked not anything before her, or whether a strange instinct told her that no danger was to be apprehended from that quarter, the shy, timid creature dashed straight across the meadow, passing within ten paces of the fire from the vicinity of which the women fled, fearful of the savage hounds and sank down with a deep, heart-broken sob, close to the hammock of the Indian beauty.

Roused suddenly from the half-dozing dreamy languor in which she had been so luxuriously indulging, the maiden started from the couch, and, without thinking of the peril, by an involuntary impulse stooped down, and lifting up the head of the dying hind, wiped away the foam from its sobbing lips, and gazed with wistful pity upon its glazing eyes. All this had passed with almost the speed of light for not ten seconds had intervened between the first appearance of the trembling fugitive and the compassionate movement of the young girl. It happened, too, as will oftentimes occur, when hounds are running at the utmost of their speed, the blood-hounds, since they had viewed for the first time their quarry, had given no tongue, chasing solely by the eye so that until his attention was called to what was passing, by the flight of the terrified and trembling menials, the youth had remained quietly engaged at his occupation, unconscious of the peril to which his sister for such was the relationship between them was exposed. Diverted, however, from his occupation, by the tumultuous flight of the girls, he looked up quickly, and at a glance beheld the hind fall dying at his sister's feet, the fierce hounds dashing forward to glut their savage instinct in the life-blood of the quarry; and the girl, by her own act, thrown, as it were, into the very jaws of the literally blood-thirsty brutes which, with hair erect and bristling, as if instinct with sentient life and fury, the white foam flying from their tushes, and their eyes glaring with the frantic light of their roused natures, were bounding toward her, scarce three paces distant.

At the same point of time the Spanish cavalier, who had, while they were running mute, lost the direction of the chase, made his appearance at the top of the abrupt descent; and seeing, as if by intuition, all that was going on, lifted his blooded horse hard with the Moorish bit, on which he rode him, and pricking him at the same time sharply with the spur, undismayed by the sheer fall of the ground, compelled him to take the fearful leap. The horse sprung nobly at it, and, aided by the great fall of the surface, landed his hind feet well upon the level ground beyond the rivulet; but even then he would have fallen, such was the shock of so steep a drop leap, had he not been met by the quick support of a master hand; so that, recovering himself with a heavy flounder, he dashed on after scarce a moment's pause. Still, had there been no readier aid than his, the maiden must have perished beneath the fangs of the infuriate bloodhounds; for though the hunter shouted in the loudest tones of his clear, powerful voice, rating the dogs, and calling them by name, their fierceness was so thoroughly aroused that they paid not the least regard to his commanding accents, and probably would not have been restrained had he been interposed himself between them and the object of their stanch pursuit, from springing on the master who had fed them, and to whose slightest gesture, under more favorable circumstances, they were implicitly obedient. But as he saw them already well nigh darting at her throat, that stripling leaped upon his feet, and snatching from the nearest pillar a bow which fortunately happened to be strung, and two long arrows, in less time than is needed to describe it, notched a shaft on the sinew, drew the tough bow-string to his ear, and drove the whirring missile with almost the speed of light toward the leading dog.

It was not till the whistling shaft hurtled close past her ear, that the maid was aware of her own danger; for, engrossed by the faint struggles and waning breath of the poor deer, she had not raised her eyes, till startled by the

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passing weapon; and now, as she lifted them, and met the red glare shot from the angry orbs of the foremost hound, and almost felt the warmth of his quick panting breath against her brow, hope left her; and her senses yielding to the sudden terror, she sank down upon the body of the dead hind, as helpless and as innocent. But even as light left her eyes, the well aimed shaft reached its mark; directed at the throat of the animal, it flew correctly, and the keen flint-head, cutting a little way below the ear, clove through and through the neck, piercing the jugular vein. The blood gushed in a torrent from the wound; nor from that only, but from the throat and nostrils, likewise; and, with one savage yell he leaped into the air, and fell quite dead within a yard of the Indian girl, whose snow-white dress was actually sprinkled with large gouts of the crimson gore. Still she was far from safe; for, unchecked and undaunted by their leader's death, the others of the little pack, baying tremendously, were close at hand.

Again the bow was raised, and the string drawn to the utmost, but with a jerking and irregular tension, which snapped the tendon of which it was framed! With a sharp twang the bow recoiled, and the shaft fell harmless, close at the archer's feet; but, unarmed as he was, he bounded forward, and grasping the staff of the unstrung and useless bow, he gallantly bestrode the body of the damsel, and with a calm and resolute expression in his clear eye and comely features, awaited fearlessly the onset of the approaching savages. And now the first was close upon him, and with his bristles all erect, like quills upon the porcupine, and a deep stifed growl, dashed at his face. Still he blenched not, but made a desperate lunge with the tough horn tipped bow, full at the open mouth and yawning throat of his assailant. And well for him it was that his eye was true, and his hand steady, for nothing else could have availed, even though now the cavalier was within three strides of the spot, to save his life. The thrust took effect, and though the weapon was but ineffective, and the beast not materially affected by the blow, it still had force enough to check, in some degree, the violence of his assault, and to hinder him from using his fangs for a moment. Yet, notwithstanding, such was the weight of his sinewy lythe body, and such the terrible impetuosity of his attack, that checked and foiled as he was, he still plunged so violently against the breast of his young antagonist, that he dashed him to the ground; and, himself falling, they rolled over and over, with a stern grapple and fierce cries, on the ensanguined greensward. But at this critical moment a new and more important aider came up in the young Spaniard; who, dashing his spurs into the flanks of his Ahdalusian, with his long two-edged sword unsheathed, and brandished in the air, as he stood upright in his stirrups, purposely galloped over one of the hounds, sending it cowed and howling to a respectful distance, then pulling up his horse close to the confused group, well knowing the tremendous fury of the animal with which he had to deal, when it was thoroughly aroused, he smote the other which was struggling with the boy, and which had just got free from his gripe, exactly at the junction of the neck and skull. So true and steady was the blow, and so keen was the temper of that thin two-edged blade, that it shore right through muscle, bone and sinew, severing entirely the head, except where a small portion of the skin remained uninjured, at the farther side. This done he hastily dismounted, and striking the fourth and last dog a heavy blow with the flat of his sword, rating him at the same moment, by his name, succeeded in asserting his ascendancy over his crest-fallen vassal. The boy had, in the mean time, risen from the ground, still grasping in his hand the bow, which during all the progress of that tremendous struggle, he had never let go and gazed, half doubtful of the stranger's purpose, into his eyes till re-assured by the grave smile which played upon the features of the Spaniard, and by perceiving how effectual had been his aid, when earthly aid seemed hopeless; he suffered the tense muscles of his dark visage to relax, and stretching out his hand to his preserver, uttered a few words in the Spanish language, not strictly true in the pronunciation, but in a voice of most melodious richness, thanking him for his timely aid.

But little heed did the young gallant pay to his addresses, for he had thrown aside his blood-stained weapon, and raising the slight body of the maiden from the earth, for she had not as yet recovered from her fainting fit, bore her as easily as though she had been but a feather's weight, with her head leaning upon his shoulder, and her long tresses flowing in dark luxuriance over his arms, into the sheltered portico. Placing her on one of the low cotton cushioned stools, and supporting her against his breast, he called aloud in the Indian tongue, which he spoke fluently and well, for water; and having sprinkled her lovely face, and set about restoring her with a degree of eagerness that savored not a little of the gallantry of knightly courtship. Nor was it long before his efforts were crowned with complete success; for in a moment or two the fringed lashes partially arose, revealing the dark eyes,

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still swimming in unconscious languor. Dazzled by the full light, she once again suffered the lids to fall, and remained for a few moments perfectly passive in his arms; although he felt, by the increased pulsation of her heart, which throbbed almost against his own, that life and sense were speedily returning. Again she raised her eyes, and gazed for an instant with an air of simple wonderment into his face; then, while the warm blood rushed back in a crimson flush to the pale features, she attempted to start from the half embrace in which he held her.

"Fear nothing, gentle one," he said, in her own liquid tongue, with a calm placid smile, which did more to reassure her than the words which fell half unheard on her ear, yet confused and giddy.

"Fear nothing, gentle one, from me. Not for the wealth of the whole Indies not to be monarch of Castile, would I work aught of harm to thee or thine!"

While he was speaking her eye wandered from his face, and falling on the blood-stained group, which lay confusedly piled on each other the lifeless limbs of the dead hind and fierce hounds, one transfixed by the unerring arrow of the brother, the other slain by the sharp rapier, which yet lay beside them on the turf the panting charger, which stood, although unfastened, in the cool shade of the palm trees; and the two dogs which had survived their fellows crouched humbly on the grass before the portice, their tongues lolling from their jaws, their sides panting from their late exertion, and their eyes closed listlessly. She saw the truth intuitively, and, with a quiet smile, sank back again upon his breast, unable yet to rise, and lay there until her brother had brought forth the females of the household to attend her.

Leaning on these, the fair girl left them, with the gesture of farewell as dignified, yet easy, as though she had been the lineal scion of a hundred European monarchs. She was not absent long, however, for she had returned ere the Spaniard learned from his host, while he was busily employed in wiping and returning to its scabbard his trusty rapier, in picketing his charger, and securing his two hounds that the girl whom he had so bravely rescued from a terrible and painful death, was in good truth of royal birth a Caribbean princess the niece of that peerless queen Anacaona, who though the sister of that most dauntless foeman of the white invaders, the valiant Caonabo, lord of the Golden House, had proved herself from first to last the friend and patroness of the pale stranger; who, in after days, returned her kindness with ingratitude so base and barbarous.

In a short time, then, the Guarica returned, and thanking her preserver with the most feminine and easy grace, pressed him to stay and share their morning meal; and he, half captivated at the first by her artless beauty, assented willingly and lingered there, enchanting the simple mind of the Indian beauty by all the rich stores of his cultivated intellect; and listening, in turn, to the sweet native ballads which she sang to him, in her rich melodious tongue, not till the morning meal alone was ended, but through the heat of the high noon, and even till the dewy twilight; and when he said adieu, a tear swam in the dark eye of the maiden, and her small hand trembled in his grasp; and he rode pensively away beneath the broad light of a moon, a thousand times more pure and brilliant than that which silvers the skies of his own bright land, bearing along with him, far in his heart of hearts, deep thoughts and high warm feelings, blended with doubts and cares, and the engrossing impulses of interest conflicting with the wilder passions of a hot and impetuous nature. Nor did he leave behind him, in the breast of the young Guarica, sentiments less novel, or feelings less tumultuous. Truly, to them, that day was the hinge whereon the doors revolved of future happiness or misery! For, from that day, each dated a new life, fraught with new wishes, and regulated by new destinies and to each was it the harbinger of many strange adventures, of many joys and many sorrows! and, whether for evil or for good, or of their doom here, and it may be, hereafter.

CHAPTER II.

Days, months and seasons held their course, yet there was no change in the deep azure of the glowing skies no alteration in the green luxuriance of the forest no falling of the woods "into the sear, the yellow leaf" no fast succeeding variation from the young floweriness of spring-tide to the deep flush of gorgeous summer, and thence

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to the mature but melancholy autumn to the grim tyrant, winter. In that delicious island nature had lavished on the earth, in her most generous mood, the mingled attributes of every clime and region. The tender greenery of the young budding leaf was blent at one and the same moment, and that moment, as it seemed, eternal, with the broad verdant foliage, the smiling bud, the odoriferous and full-blown flower, the rich fruit might be seen side by side on the same tree on the same bough. Nothing was there to mark the flight of time the gradual advance of the destroyer over the lovely land; nothing to warn the charmed spectator, that for him, too, as for the glowing landscape, maturity but leads to decay decay which ends in death! Verily but it is a paradise for the unthinking!

And who were more unthinking than the young Spaniard and his Indian love? Who were more happy? Morn after morn beheld Hernando de Leon threading the pathless forest now with horse, horn and hound, sweeping the tangled thickets now skirring in pursuit of his falcon over the watery vegas; and now, with keen observant eye, and cat-like pace, wandering, arbalast in hand, in silent search after the timid deer; but still in one direction, and still with one intent, to join the fair Guarica! Day after day they loitered, side by side, among the cool shades of the mighty woods, while the fierce sun was scourging the clear champaigne with intolerable heat or sat reclined by the cold head of some streamlet, fuller to them of inspiration and of love than were those fabled founts of Gadura, whence Eros rose of yore, twinborn with the dark Anteros, to greet the rapt eyes of Iamblichus.

The powerful mind of the young soldier had been cultured, from his earliest youth, to skill in all those liberal arts and high accomplishments by which the gallant cavaliers of Spain had gained such honorable eminence above the ruder aristocracy of every other land. To his hands no less familiar were the harp and gittern than the Toledo or the lance. To his well-tutored voice, the high heroic ballads of his native land, the plaintive elegies of Moorish Spain, the wildly musical areytos of the Indian tongue, were equally adapted. Nor did its accents sound less joyously in the clear hunting holloa, or less fearfully in the shrill war-shout, that it was oft attuned to the peaceful cadences of a lady's lute. His foot, firm in the stirrup, whether in the warlike tilt, in the swift race, or in the perilous leap, was no less graceful in the rapid dance, or agile in the wrestler's struggle on the greensward. He was, in short, a gentleman of singular accomplishment of a mind well and deeply trained; shrewd, polished, courteous, yet keen and energetical, withal, and brave as his own trusty weapon. Like every dweller of a mountain land, he possessed that high and romantic adoration of the charms of nature, that exquisite appreciation of the picturesque and beautiful whether embodied in the mute creations of wood, wild and water or in the animated dwellers of earth's surface which, in the breasts of others, is rather an acquired taste, nurtured by delicate and liberal education, than an intuitive and innate sense. Handsome, moreover, eloquent and young, it would have been no great marvel had the brightest lady of the proudest European court, selected Don Hernando as the ennobled object of a fresh heart's holiest aspirations. What wonder, then, that the untutored Indian girl, princess although she was, revered almost to adoration by her own simple people, secluded, from her earliest childhood, from aught of mean or low association, removed from any contact with the debasing influences of the corrupt and contaminating world, secured from any need of groveling and sordid labor voluptuous and luxurious as the soft climate of her native isle, yet pure as the bright skies that overhang it romantic and poetical, as it would seem by necessity, arising from her lonely musing what wonder that Guarica should have surrendered, almost on the instant, to one who seemed to her artless fancy, not merely one of a superior mortal race, but as a god in wisdom, worth and beauty a heart which had been sought in vain by the most valiant and most proud of her nation's young nobility. His grace, his delicate and courteous bearing, so different from the coarse wooing of the Charib lovers, who seemed to fancy that they were conferring, rather than imploring an honor, when they sought her hand; his eloquent and glowing conversation these would alone have been sufficient to secure the wondering admiration of the forest maiden; but when to these was added the deep claim which he now possessed on her gratitude, for the swift aid which he had borne to her when in extremity of peril, and the respectful earnestness of pure, self-denying love which he displayed toward her, it would in truth have been well nigh miraculous had she resisted the impression of her youthful fancy.

Nor were such unions between the dusky maidens of the west, and the hidalgos of Spain, by any means unfrequent, or surprising. Among the earliest of those bold adventurers who had been sharers, in his first and second voyages, of the great toils and mighty perils which had been undergone by that wise navigator who, in the

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quaint parlance of the day, gave a new world to Leon and Castile. On the contrary, it was rather the policy of that great and good discoverer, who, in almost all his dealings with the rude natives, showed higher sentiments of justice and of honor than could have been expected from the fierce and turbulent age in which he lived, to encourage such permanent and indissoluble alliances between the best and bravest of his own followers, and the daughters of the Caciques and nobles of the land, as would assuredly tend, more than any other means, to bind in real amity the jarring races brought into close and intimate contact by his discoveries and conquests.

There was not any thing, therefore, to deter Guarica from lavishing her heart's gem on the handsome cavalier who had so singularly introduced himself to her favor, and who so eagerly nay, devotedly followed up that chance-formed acquaintance. For several months, despite the ancient adage, the course of true love did, in their case, run smooth. No day, however stormy for heavy falls of rain, accompanied by sudden gusts of wind, with thunder claps, and the broad fearful lightning of the tropics, were by no means unfrequent prevented the adventurous lover from threading the tangled brake, scaling the steep, precipitous ascent, fording the swollen river straight as the bird flies to his distant nest. No turn of duty hindered him the imposed task performed from hurrying through the hot glare of noon, or through the moonless night, to visit his beloved. At first, his well-known ardor in the chase accounted to his comrades for his protracted and continual absences from their assemblies; whether convened for woodland sports or wild adventure but when it was observed that, though he never went abroad, save with the hawk and hound, or arbalast and bird bolts, he brooked no longer any comrade in his sportive labors; that, though renowned above all his compeers for skill and courage in the mimicry of war, he often now returned jaded indeed, and overspent with toil, but either altogether empty-handed, or at least so ill provided with the objects of his unwearying pursuits, that it was utterly impossible to suppose that a hunter so renowned could have indeed spent so much toil, and time, all to so little a purpose. This, for a short space, was the point of many a light jest many a merry surmise gradually grew to be the subject of grave wonder and deliberation; for it was now remarked by all, even by his superiors, that Hernando though he had been of yore the keenest volunteer to offer, nay, to urge his services, when any foray was proposed against the daring tribe of Caonabo, the bold Cacique of the Charibs, who now alone, of the five hereditary monarchs that erst held sway in Hispaniola, dared to wage war against the white invaders of his native fastnesses no longer sought to be employed on such occasions nay, that he even had refused, as it appeared, to those who had solicited aid, on slight and feigned excuses, to join their perilous excursions. Whispers increased among his comrades, and, ere long, grew to be dark murmurs rumor said that no hunter ever saw the form of Don Hernando backing his fiery Andalusian, or heard the furious bay of his stanch bloodhounds in any of those haunts where strayed most frequently, and in the greatest plenty, the quarry which he feigned to chase fame said, and for once truly, that though the best scouts of the Spaniards had been urged by curiosity to play the spy upon his movements, their utmost skill had availed nothing; that whether in broad day, or in the noon of night, they never could keep him in view beyond the margin of one belt of forest land, or track the foot-prints of his charger, although the soil was deep and loamy, into its dark recesses; that, in whatever course he turned his horse's head, or bent his footsteps, on departing from the fortress of his friends, he ever reached by devious turns, and secret bypaths, that same almost impenetrable thicket, and there vanished. It was an age of credulous fear of dark, fanatical superstitions. He who, a few short months before, had been the idol of his countrymen, the soul of their convivial meetings, the foremost and the blithest in their bold hunting matches, was now the object of distrust, of doubt, of actual fear, and almost actual hatred. Some said that he had cast by his allegiance to his country and his king that he had wedded with an Indian girl, and joined himself to her people, heart and hand that he kept up this hollow show of amity with his betrayed forsaken countrymen only that he might gain some sure and fatal opportunity of yielding them, at once, to the implacable resentment of the Charib Caonabo. Others, more credulous still, averred, in secret, that he had leagued himself, more desperately yet, and yet more guiltily, with creatures of another world! that mystic sounds, and voices not of human beings, had been heard by the neighbors of his barrack-chamber! and one, he who had scouted him the farthest, and most closely, swore that, on more than one occasion, he had beheld a grim and dusky form rise suddenly, as if from out the earth, and join him in the wildest of those woodlands through which he loved to wander.

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Thus did the time pass onward Hernando and Guarica becoming every day more fond and more confiding, and, if that could be, more inseparable; and, at the same time, suspicion, enmity, distrust, becoming more and more apparent at every hour between him and his Spanish kinsmen.

Thus did the time pass onward, without the occurrence of any thing of moment either to disturb the blissful dreams of the young lovers, or to awaken a suspicion in their breasts, that they were themselves the objects of distrust or of espial.

Yet every day, closer and closer were the toils contracting round them; strong enmities were at work, weponed by puissant energies, and quick intelligences; and, though they knew it not, they were even now on the brink of an abyss.

Thus did the time pass onward; 'till, on on a close and sultry afternoon, in the latter part of autumn, when the thunderclouds were mustering thick over the azure vault, and now and then a pale flash on the far horizon succeeded by a distant rumble, told of the coming hurricane, that three or four horsemen, whose dress and accoutrements proclaimed them at once to be Spaniards from the fortress, were seen to issue from the forest, and ride rapidly across the little plain toward Guarica's dwelling.

At first a blithe smile lighted up the features of the young princess, as the sound of the hoofs came to her ears, while, occupied in some light feminine labor, she was standing in the inner chamber of her cottage for, horses being as yet the exclusive property of the invaders, and no other Spaniard than her own Hernando having as yet visited that sequestered spot, she doubted not that it was her lover, who, in the eagerness of his unwaning passion, had thus anticipated the hour of his coming.

Full of this sweet idea, her lovely features gaining a deeper and more feeling charm, from the inspiration which seemed to infuse them at the mere thought of him she loved so passing well, she bounded forth to meet him. But, before even her foot had crossed the threshold, she repented her precipitation; although it was already too late to remedy it.

Her ear, quicker by nature than that of any European, and sharpened now beyond its wonted keenness by the strange powers of overruling passion, had detected, even as she sprung forth to meet the comers, first that instead of one there were several horses, and next that her lover's Andalusian was not of the number. Strange it may seem that that lovely girl, who, perhaps, never in her life had seen ten horses, nor listened to the tread of any save Hernando's charger, could have sworn to *his* springy tramp out of ten thousand strange it may seem, and incredible to us, whose instincts are quenched by dwelling amid the monotonous occurrences of a life spent in the midst of busy crowds, whose ears are deadened and eyes dimmed unto the sounds and sights of nature but it is true she knew it in an instant, and half paused upon the door-sill, wondering what chance could have brought strangers thither; and apprehending, she knew not what, of coming evil.

And all of us know at least all of us who have known sorrow, or anxiety, or even strong and overmastering passion how rapidly thought flits at times through the spirit how that, which to the body is but a point of time, but a fleet second, may to the mind be an age of ages.

In the mere instant that Guarica, bounding forth toward the portico, paused half alarmed upon the threshold, a hundred flitting fancies passed through her brain fancies of joy, and hope, and agony, almost despair but with the instant which had given them birth they ended. Knowing instinctively that she must have been seen already, and having, though more than a little frightened, no motive for concealment, she stepped forth quietly; and found herself in the presence of two persons, whom her quick intelligence discovered instantly to be cavaliers of rank and birth; and as many more whom she recognized as servants, with hounds in leashes, and hawks on their fists, who had just pulled up their horses at the door.

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He, who appeared the principal personage of the two, was a tall, powerful, gaunt man, not in reality above a year or two De Leon's senior, but in exterior show far more advanced in life. This might have been the consequence of the hardships he had undergone, or it might have arisen from the predominance of those fierce and fiery passions which wear away the body, even as a keen blade frets and in time destroys its scabbard but, whether from one cause or the other, his brow, instead of presenting the fair broad expanse which was so striking in Hernando's noble countenance, was furrowed by three wrinkles, as deep as are usually seen in men of sixty years; and these were again cut at right angles by the strong indentation of an habitual frown. The features were all in themselves well formed and handsome, although the aquiline nose was so thin as to seem almost fleshless, the cheeks hollow, and the eyes sunken. The general expression, too, was grave and dignified, and far from unpleasing; although the heaviness of the brow cast over it a sort of melancholy gloom; and at times a dark sneering smile distorted the thin lips, altering for the worse the entire character of the face, and giving it, so long as it lasted, a singular and intense air of malignity and contempt.

The figure of this gentleman was, it is true, gaunt and thin, almost to meagreness; but not so much as to impair, in any degree, his muscular and sinewy strength, which appeared to be prodigious. His demeanor, though somewhat formal and stately, was full of the grace of dignity, if not of ease; and his whole aspect, set off by his dark, rich hunting-dress and his magnificent bay charger, was striking and impressive.

His companion was an older man, yet bearing in his round and jovial face, although his hair and beard were grizzled, far fewer marks of age than his fellow-hunter. This was a broad and square-set person, with a quick merry eye, a bronzed face, and a constant smile about his full, arched lips; his countenance, too, was as strongly marked with bold and daring frankness, as was the other's with dark and suspicious gloom; and his bearing as abrupt and impulsive, as his friend's was self-restrained and formal.

Any one at all used to judge of men's professions, by their aspect or their manners, might have pronounced this gentleman a sailor, without fear of contradiction nor did his seat or hand upon his horse, which were both artless and ungainly, contradict the surmise. He, too, was richly dressed, though far more gaudily than his companion, and he bestrode a strong and active horse, quite equal to his weight, though lacking the high, blood-like type, and spirited action, of the bay charger by his side.

It was the former of the two cavaliers who, with an air half-insolent, half-condescending, addressed Guarica, as she came forth upon the portico, in a few words, imperfectly pronounced and ungrammatically put together, of the Indian dialect of that province; requesting permission to take shelter, until the storm, which was threatening so nearly, should pass over, and alleging, as a farther cause for their intrusion, that they had seen the building from the edge of the forest, wherein they had been hunting all the morning, just as they were deliberating whither they should fly for refuge from the tornado.

Guarica replied instantly, in pure Castilian, to which the most critical ear could have taken but slight objection; begging them to alight from their horses, and accept such accommodation as her poor dwelling could afford them. "Stables," she added, "we, of course, have none to offer you; but there is a hut yonder, which we use as a storehouse, empty now, wherein your serving-men can tie your horses. I beseech you enter."

Neither of the cavaliers, both of whom dismounted instantly, showed the least surprise, or made any comment on her speaking the Spanish tongue so fluently; although the younger cast a quick, keen glance, accompanied by the peculiar smile, which has been mentioned, to his comrade, as they followed her, after giving directions to their servants, into the building. For she paused not to show them the way humbly, but led them, with the air and gesture of a princess, into her dwelling.

Again a look of intelligence was interchanged between the Spaniards; and the sailor licked his lips with the affectation of a liquorish air, as she swept forward; but there was nothing in the look that betokened astonishment, though there was much that spoke of admiration, and perhaps something of self-gratulation at their own

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shrewdness.

Could they have read, however, all that was passing in Guarica's mind, they would perhaps have found less reason for the latter sentiment than they imagined; so accurately had the wild Indian girl already judged the cause and the motives which had brought them to her lonely dwelling.

Her quick eye, running over the whole group, even in the short time while the cavalier was speaking to her, had taken in, without seeming to note any thing at all, the closest and most minute details. Thus, among other things, she observed that both the gentlemen and their followers were armed far more heavily than was usual for hunters; both the latter having the short, heavy arquebuses of the day slung at their backs, and both the former carrying huge wheel-lock pistols at their holsters.

She saw, moreover, that although the horses were somewhat heated, as must be the case in a day so singularly sultry, they were not splashed with mud, or embossed with foam that the hounds were as sleek as when they left their kennel in the morning, and evidently had not been uncoupled and that the dresses of the riders were in too orderly array, with their plumes trim and unbroken, and their spurs bright and bloodless, to allow it to be imagined, even by a novice, that they had been engaged, for hours, in so rude a pastime as the chase, and that, too, in so wild a forest region.

A slight smile of contempt flitted across her lovely face, as she thought within herself "They are but poor deceivers, after all perhaps, in their self-opinion, they fancy that it needs no exertion of their high European faculties to dupe a *savage*. But this time they are mistaken. They are no hunters, that is clear. I wonder what has brought them hither? No good! no good! I fancy. I do not like the tall man's looks; but I will watch, I will find out, before they go." And even while she was pondering these things with herself, she called three or four Indian maidens from an inner room, and having spoken a few words in a low tone to one, who darted out of the house immediately, and made her way, without being seen by the Spaniards, into the forest, she gave directions to the others to prepare refreshment for the strangers; and though she spoke in her own language, she used phrases so purposely simple, that they were readily understood by her unwelcome guests, who had just entered their instructions to their servants ended.

"It is fortunate," she then said, quite naturally, and as if she believed their story perfectly "it is very fortunate, that you should have seen our cottage, for there is no village, or house, very near us; and I think we shall have a heavy storm. I almost wonder you should have ventured so far from Isabella. We have seen the clouds gathering here all the morning."

"It is fortunate, indeed," said the younger cavalier, "and I believe we must confess ourselves but artless woodmen, Sanchez and I for we had no suspicion of the storm at all, 'till we heard the thunder. Yes, thanks to Heaven! we are wondrous fortunate."

"You will think so, should it prove such a tornado as I look for," she answered, simply, looking out of the open door toward the storm-clouds, which were gathering thicker every moment.

"I meant that we are fortunate in finding so sweet and beautiful a hostess, here all alone, in the wild forest, and speaking our own tongue, too, like a Castilian princess! Are you the lady of the castle, fair one? and do you queen it here alone, without court, or guards, or courtiers?"

"Oh!" she replied, with a light laugh, "I have heard of your grand Spanish compliments, which you cavaliers deem it right to bestow on every woman, if she be old even, and wrinkled. And, as for speaking your language, I must have been dull indeed had I not learned it from my aunt Anaçona; and more "

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"Anaçona! And have we indeed the happiness to kiss the hands of a niece of that peerless queen and lady, the friend and protectress of our people?" exclaimed the same gentleman who had spoken before; while his ruder companion broke out into a loud whistle of astonishment, which he expressed yet farther by a loud sea-faring oath, and a repetition of the name, Anaçona!

"The queen Anacaona *is* my aunt, and has ever been the Spaniard's friend may they prove grateful to her. But I was about to say that I do not live alone; my brother, Orozimbo, dwells with me, and will be here anon; he, like yourselves, is hunting with his vassals. I would he were here to receive you more befittingly."

"That were impossible, most peerless flower," began the cavalier, but Guarica quietly interrupted him.

"I pray you pardon me, Senor," she said, "but if we have learned your language in order to converse the better with our *masters*," and she laid rather a bitter emphasis on the last word, "we have not yet adopted, nor do we wish to do so, your gallant modes of speech, which seem to us mere falsehood and hypoerisy. My name is Guarica, a simple Indian girl, and neither flower nor pearl as such I am glad to shelter and to serve you. Will you not walk into the inner chamber? you will find seats there to repose you; and my maidens will bring some wine of the palm and some fresh water; you must be parched with thirst. Pray enter make no ceremony and excuse me."

And with the words she raised a many-colored mat of rushes, which hung across a low doorway, and waving them toward the large airy chamber wherein she was sitting when their horses' tread apprised of their coming, she retired from the hall, where they had as yet been standing, and left them alone to their own devices.

"By Heaven! but this is a strange business, Guzman," exclaimed the sailor, now speaking for the first time. "I do not wonder at Hernando passing his time here, nor do I blame him for it, by St. Jago! I would I were in his shoes. She is the perfection of a *bona roba*. I wonder has he married her, or does she love him *paramour*? But what the devil are we to do next?"

"*You* are to hold your tongue that is to say if you can, by any means, and not to spoil every thing by your absurd and illtimed jesting; and, above all, you are not to keep calling me Guzman and Herreiro," he added, sinking his voice into a whisper, as he pronounced the last words. "I vow to God, if you do it again I will put my dagger into you."

"Your dagger, will you?" answered the other, bursting into a rough laugh. "No you won't! no you won't! Guz plague on it! there I go again. Who the devil can think of such things? but you will put no dagger into me, I can tell you."

"And why not? why not, I pray you, when you plague me so when you would plague the archangel Gabriel out of patience with your buffoonery and folly? why should I not?"

"In the first place, because I would not let you why two can play at dagger-work as well as one, man! and I think I am as good as you, any day. But if I were not, I wear a *secret*, when I ride with *you* for I have heard a thing or two, and I don't forget what I hear, either "

"What have you heard? what have you heard?" exclaimed the other, furiously, but turning very pale as he spoke. "Say on I insist on your saying on! You have said too much, or not enough; speak! out with it, what have you heard?"

"Nay," said the sailor, "never mind I do not want to quarrel; and if I did, this is no place for it. Let us go in, as the girl told us. I would not have said aught, but you spoke of stabbing me. Come, come forget it! let us go in."

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And, with the words, he stalked on with a sturdy step, and a quiet fearless smile, into the room Guarica had indicated; but the other paused behind, and muttered through his teeth.

"He knows too much! he knows too much! He is dangerous; but what a fool he was to let me find it out. In one thing he is right, however, this is no place, and no time, either; and we have other cards to play, too, for the nonce! but patience patience!"

And, with a grim smile, he too walked in after his companion, and throwing himself down on a pile of soft cotton cushions, smoothed his disordered features, and took a careful observation of the room, and every article which it contained. And there were many things most unusual to behold in an Indian's dwelling, and such as must naturally have excited both comment and surprise in any person not prepared fully to encounter them. Upon a centre table of some variegated wood, elaborately carved and polished, lay several Spanish books of romance and poetry, a mandolin of exquisite workmanship, and several sheets of music, marked with the rude notation of the day. There was a standish, too, with several pens, both of reed and quills, and several rolls of parchment. Upon the walls were five or six bold and masterly sketches of combats with the Moors of Granada, and one or two views and sea pieces. In one corner of the room stood a long arquebuse which both the strangers recognized in a moment; while, from the autlers of a stag which adorned the wall, there hung a powder-horn, a set of bandoleers, a pair of gilt Spanish spurs, and a hunting bugle. Upon a long divan or couch under the window was a black velvet cloak and a plumed hat.

At these things, when Herreiro entered the man he had called Sanchez was gaping with a fixed wondering stare, and when he perceived that the other had come in, he pointed to them with his finger, and was about to speak, when Guzman cut him short in a quick whisper.

"I see, I see it is just as I thought; but do not seem to notice them for God's sake do not speak; I am sure that girl is watching us. I do beseech you, do not seem to see, and yet see every thing!"

"Tush! you are always so suspicious; now, I think "

"Of course you do," Herreiro again interrupted him "of course you think it is going to rain; why it *is* raining over there already."

Sanchez stared at him, but before he could reply, Guarica, who had entered unperceived by him, as he sat with his back toward the door, though Herreiro had perceived her, invited him to take some wine, which a girl was just bringing, with tropical fruits and cool water.

In a few moments afterward Orozimbo entered, carrying in his hand a couple of long javelins, the head of one of which was wet with fresh blood; and followed by several Indians, two of whom bore a deer, slung by its legs to a pole resting on their shoulders.

These threw themselves down to rest under the portico, but Orozimbo walked straight into his sister's guest-chamber; and, though he expressed no surprise, but greeted his visitors hospitably, it was evident to his sister that he partook of her astonishment, if not of her apprehension.

Meanwhile the storm burst with a degree of intense and concentrated fury that cannot be conceived till it is seen, and can be seen only within the tropics; the thunder rolled in one continuous and incessant roar the whole expanse of heaven was one broad glare of blue and vivid lightning the wind raved horribly, sweeping the largest trees away as if they were mere straws in its path. At length the rain poured down in torrents, the wind sunk, the thunder died away the danger was at an end; and, within two hours, the setting sun beamed out again serenely, and not a token of the storm was to be felt or seen, save in the fallen trees, and in the freshness of the air, cooled and reanimated by the thunder-gust.

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During the storm the strangers had conversed on many subjects, endeavoring, evidently, and the younger man, more particularly, to render themselves agreeable to Guarica; and, above all, to appear perfectly at ease and off-handed. But in neither one nor the other of these ends were they at all successful; and that, too, as it often happens, in consequence of the very means they took to promote them.

In the first place, the courtly air, over-strained compliments, and yet more than these, the ominous and sneering smile of Guzman, impressed Guarica with feelings any thing rather than favorable; and, in the second, the very care which the strangers took to avoid all allusion to the articles betokening, as clearly as spoken words, the habitual intercourse of the inhabitants with some gentleman of Spanish blood, convinced her not that they did not see them for that would have argued them blind, or at least stupidly unobservant but that they were prepared to see them there; and that their visit was, in some sort, connected with Hernando de Leon.

As the storm had now cleared off, and as night was drawing near, they had no excuse for remaining longer; and, with many courteous speeches, and many formalities of thanks and leave-taking, they mounted their horses and departed having declined Orozimbo's offer to send a guide to show them the nearest way to the fortress of Isabella.

Among the last words he uttered, Guzman had, with great adroitness, as he thought, contrived to let out very naturally that his own name was Sylva de Fronteiro, while he continually addressed the sailor as Juan Sanchez; thereby convincing Guarica, beyond a peradventure, that both these titles were unreal; for she had overheard the latter call Herreiro Guzman, and had caught some words of the rebuke which the blunder had called forth.

In a word, neither the brother nor sister were deceived, for scarcely had they ridden ten yards from the door before Orozimbo said

"Who are they, Guarica; who are they; and what brought them hither?"

"Nay, brother," answered the lovely girl, "I never saw either of them before; they said they were out hunting, but that is not true, for they had never let their hounds loose, nor even soiled their boots."

"They are spies," said the boy, "spies on Hernando, and I fancy they gave us false names."

"I am sure they did," answered Guarica. "I heard the little man call the other 'Guzman,' when they thought me out of hearing; but De Leon will be here anon, and then we shall know all about it."

"I will know all about it sooner. What ho! give me my bow and arrows there. What time comes Hernando?"

"Not till the moon is above the foresttops; he was on guard all day, answered Guarica, simply.

"And that they knew right well," said Orozimbo, but I will find them out! And now one word, Guarica be thou sure that De Leon means thee honor? These Spaniards aye, the best of them, are but false knaves and liars; and by the sun and moon, and all the hosts of heaven! if he be the villain to deceive thee, and thou the dupe to be deceived, this hand this very hand of mine dost understand, Guarica? Girl! girl! I would rather see thee dead dead by my own hand, than guilty with a Spaniard!"

"And I would rather be so dead," replied the girl, very firmly; "but you wrong both him and me."

"Look to it, thou, that it be so! Fare thee well; remember who thou art, and who were they before thee. Ere the moon set will I learn something of these fellows."

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And snatching his long bow and four shafts from the tall Indian who had brought them at his bidding he waved a farewell to his sister, bounded across the lawn, and entered the forest at the point where, a little while before, the cavaliers had struck it on their route for Isabella.

CHAPTER III.

The strangers had not ridden many yard across the meadow, before one of the servants spurred his horse sharply forward and riding up alongside of his master, said

"I do not know, my lord, what the girl meant, when she said there was no stabling; for I never laid my eyes, in all my life, on a neater rack and manger than were in that shed or outhouse and a good steel chain with a running billet, and head-stall of Spanish leather, fit for count's charger. Good store there was of bedding, too, and better maize than we have at the fort for the troop horses. Nor was that all, senor, for there had stood horse there within twelve hours there was fresh dung in the stall."

"I know I know, Pacheco, all about it," replied Guzman, "and thou shalt know too, one of these days so thou wilt only hold thy peace one word blabbed at the guard-room or canteen will spoil every thing."

"You may trust me, my lord I never talk!"

"I know you never do, Pacheco," answered Herreiro; "you are a faithful fellow, as well as a stout soldier."

The man touched his bonnet, and fell back to his companion, highly gratified and began inculcating to him the necessity of silence.

"Well I hope you are now satisfied," said the sailor. "I hope you are satisfied that, as you runagate Charib dog informed you, Hernando comes hither to court yon Indian beauty. She is temptation enough, truly, without bringing treason in to aid Why, she would set half Ferdinand's court afire with those eyes of hers, half passionate lustre and half sleepy languor!"

"Satisfied am I, right well, that thou art a fool, Gomez," said Herreiro; "I doubt not now that you fancy I shall abandon it "

"I do n't see, for my part, what there is to abandon, or to prosecute either. Here has Hernando de Leon seduced a pretty Indian, and passes all his spare time fondling her well! there is no sin against martial law in that, I trow or if there be, few of us here shall escape the provost marshal. Or if you like it better, he is wooing her to honorable marriage and that the old admiral is like to consider it an especial service; particularly when the wooer stands so high for prowess as Hernando; and when the bride is the niece of the unconquered Caonabo why, he will deem it a sure pledge of the pacification of the race."

"I thought as much just such an argument as a thick-skulled, addle-brained sailor like yourself would be sure to draw from it. But I I can see farther. I will so plot it, that I will brew from these ingredients "

"Beware that your brewing," interrupted the other, "return not bitterly to your own lips. For all that I can see, all you are like to gain in this matter, is that Hernando will knock your brains out, like a mad dog's, for meddling with his inamorata."

"Would God! that he would try it I ask nothing better any thing, any thing to give me a chance of one fair thrust at his accursed heart!"

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"I' faith, you are a good hater whatever you may be beside," answered the sailor Gomez; "but, for my part, I cannot see why you hate the lad so deadly. They tell me he has saved your life some three or four times "

"Thrice! thrice! curses be on his head!" replied Don Guzman, gnashing his teeth with deadly spite. "It is for that for that I hate him! From the first time I ever saw him, I felt that in him was my bane. In every thing he has crossed my path in every thing outdone me, foiled, defeated me his praises are the deadliest poison to my soul and, from my school-days upward, his praises have never for a moment ceased to ring trumpet-like in my ears. Then, as in veriest spite of Fortune, he must make *me* the very butt whereon to prove his valor, his magnanimity, his self-devotion he must force *me*, whom it well nigh choked in the utterance, to swell the burthen of his glory. Death to his soul! how I hate him! and then, here, here is new cause for hatred, if there were none before."

"Here? new cause here? in what, I prithee?"

"Here! art thou blind, Gomez? Here in this girl, this angel, this Guarica! but if I call the fiend himself to aid, here I will outdo him."

Gomez looked long and steadily in his companion's face, as if he would fain have read something there, which he expected; but, disappointed, he withdrew his eyes, and shook his head doubtfully.

"What, in the name of all the fiends of hell! dost thou stare so for? What seest thou in my face, man, to fascinate thee?"

"Naught! Guzman naught! I looked to see utter madness stark lunacy sheer frenzy! but I see none of these things and yet so surely as there is a God in heaven, thou must be mad "

"For what should I be mad I pray thee?" answered Herreiro, angrily; "my pulse is as cool as thine, my brain a thousand times more clear, and vivid in conception for what should I be mad? for loving this most perfect of Heaven's creatures?"

"Ay! for that very thing most wildly mad!" replied the sailor. "I knew you ever for a fierce and voluptuous devil, but thy blood must indeed be like Greek fire to blaze out thus unquenchable at one spark from a brown wench's eye! most wildly mad in this and absolutely frenzied, when you would dream of winning her from De Leon. Why he hath had her heart, possessed her soul, these six months and think you that he is so weak a rival, and that too, when so 'stablished in her favors? Why, if you and he were to start fairly, he could give you his topsails and beat you; as I have seen an Algerine felucca run our best caravellas hull down in an hour. Tush! man, think better of it to judge by one look I saw her give you, were you the only man on the island, she would have none of you!"

"I will have her or die for it!" answered Don Guzman, fiercely. "So let that bethe end of it!"

"The end of it, then, let it be as it *will* sure enough! For Hernando will kill you like a rat, as soon as he finds you meddling with his Bonnibella. But we had better ride on somewhat quickly now, and get out of his track; for we are in the very path he always rides; and he is off his guard by this time, and is now flying hitherward, I warrant me, upon the wings of hot anticipation!"

"That is the first word of sense you have spoken to-night," said Herreiro; "let us gallop."

And with the word they put their horses to their speed, and dashed along the sort of forest path, which had been worn in the virgin soil by the hoofs of De Leon's Andalusian, so constantly during the last six months had he passed and repassed between the cottage of his love and the Spanish fortress. After an hour's riding they came to a

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spot where a broad shallow rivulet, flowing upon a pebbly bed, rippled across the path, and turning abruptly into its channel to the left hand of Hernando's track, they descended it slowly, the waters rarely mounting above their horses fetlocks, for something better than a mile, where it flowed out of the shadowy woods, into an open plain or bega, wide of Hernundo's route, across which they sped rapidly toward Isabella.

It was not, probably, half an hour after the time of their turning into the stream that the tramp of a horse, had there been any one there to listen, might have been heard coming up from the settlements, and in a moment or two, De Leon, followed by his trusty hounds, cantered along the path; but as he reached the little ford he pulled up suddenly, for there, in the centre of the horse track, stooping down as if to examine some late footprints in the moist soil, stood the Charib boy Orozimbo.

"Ha! Orozimbo what hath brought thee so far from home, at this untimely hour?"

"Knavery, if not villany, Hernando," answered the youth, in Spanish, which he spoke now with much more accuracy, both of pronunciation and of syntax, than he had done at his first meeting with De Leon; but still not nearly with so correct an emphasis as his beautiful sister "and perchance treason!"

"Treason!" cried the young Spaniard, "by whom, or whom against? what do you mean, boy?"

"By whom, I know not," answered Orozimbo, "but against thee, if I err not." And he proceeded to relate to him the circumstances of the visit Guarica had received that day; and their reasons for suspecting that all was not right, nor as it seemed to be. He described the persons of the riders with a degree of minute accuracy, extending to the smallest details of their dress, to the fashion of their spurs, the ornaments of their sword hilts, the marks and colors of their horses, the very spots on their hounds; such things as no mortal eye, save of an Indian, could have observed in so short a period, as had enabled him to take in and comprehend the whole.

At first, Hernando de Leon listened half carelessly, thinking in his own mind that the visit must have been purely accidental, attaching little consequence to the details, and half inclined to smile at the habitual suspicion of the Indian, so characteristically and so needlessly displayed.

Soon, however, it appeared that his attention was excited, for he now listened eagerly, asked two or three quick and pertinent questions, to which he received answers as intelligent and clear and, after the boy had ceased speaking, pondered for a few moments deeply, and then said

"That is odd it must have been Gomez Aria, with Guzman de Herreiro there are no others in the fortress to whom this description could apply "

"Yes! yes!" interrupted Orozimbo, eagerly; "I had forgotten that Guarica heard the short man call the other, `Guzman. ' It was they, I am sure of it. Are they friends of yours? are they true men?"

"Herreiro is; I would stake my soul's salvation on it! I have saved his life thrice, at the risk of my own. And as for Gomez, he is a good blunt sailor and I have never wronged him. Yet it is passing strange. You say they rode home by this path?"

"To this spot and here they have turned off down the rivulet's bed to avoid meeting you knew they the hour at which you would leave Isabella?"

"Herreiro did, for he asked me to ride out with him to-day, and I told him I was officer of the guard until eight o'clock at night. I wondered somewhat, when he asked me; for I have noted a shade of coolness in his manner lately."

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"Beware of him!" said Orozimbo "he means you no good. They had not been hunting; no! not they they had not so much as uncoupled their blood hounds. And neither one nor other of them noticed, or seemed to see, the Spanish books or the music which you left the other day; or even your gun and bugle horn. Had they been honest, they would have naturally inquired about those things, which are not to be found, you know, in every Indian's cabin."

"He can mean me no evil," said Hernando, thoughtfully; "he never had a cause "

"He has one now!" answered Orozimbo, quickly.

"He has a cause now? a cause to mean me ill? How so what cause?"

"Guarica."

"Guarica? how? a cause to injure me! Guarica?"

"Yes! yes! Guarica. For he loves her."

"Loves her? Why he hath never seen her, but for an hour to-day and do you say he loves her?"

"Ay!" said the boy, drily "loves her, as much as you Spanish ever love Indian maidens. He lusts after her young beauty "

"Hold, Orozimbo!" said De Leon, looking him steadily and sternly in the face "was that meant to me?"

"Perhaps!" answered the youth, gloomily "perhaps! and yet no! no! I believe thou art honest, De Leon. Yet I doubt, sometimes, even thee."

"Mark me, Orozimbo," replied Hernando, leaning from his tall charger, and pressing the naked shoulder of the Charib heavily with his right hand "Mark me. For myself, I care not for your suspicions but if I deemed that your rash tongue dared syllable one doubt of Guarica's purity that your brain had surmised, even for a second's space, that she would listen to a dishonorable suit her brother though you be "

"What then her brother though I be what then?" cried Orozimbo, under strong excitement.

"I would strike you to my feet!" the young Spaniard answered gravely "to my feet! for calumniating, in your own sister, one of God's angels!"

"You would do well!" cried the boy, grasping his hand; "I should deserve it! But I doubt neither of you least of all her! But when I think of the wrongs you Spaniards have done to us of our hearths defiled, our names disgraced, our wives and sisters torn from our bosoms, wooed and caressed and courted until your passions or your whims are satisfied, and then sent back dishonored and undone to be a blot upon the homes they once adorned when I think on these things, Hernando de Leon, my soul grows black within me, and I doubt all things! and I tell *you* you who love her I marked you Guzman's dark and snakelike eye dwell on Guarica's form, as never man's eye dwelt on maiden whom he hoped not to dishonor, whom he lusted not to destroy. I tell you he gloated on every heave of her swelling bosom, on every undulation of her limbs not a movement, not a turn of her figure could escape him. By the God, whom I worship, my soul burned to slay him where he sat. Let him come here again, and a shaft from this bow, that never misses, shall drown the flames of his accursed lust in his black heart's blood!"

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"Nay! nay, my friend, and soon to be my brother, be not rash, Orozimbo. I trust thou art too hasty. I trust that, in this at least, thou art too suspicious. But if it were so, if it were as thou thinkest, dost imagine that I I, Hernando de Leon would leave to any other man alive, were that other the Cid Ruy Diaz of Bivar, the right of avenging a wrong offered to my promised wife the privilege of shedding his life blood that dared but to look on her too warmly? No! no! believe me, Orozimbo if it be so, he dies upon this blade, which twice has beat death back from the gates of his existence! But not a word of this not a word, on thy life, to Guarica! I will myself speak with Don Guzman, when I return to-morrow. I think he will not dare, even if he should wish it, to show aught but respectful courtesy to my promised bride."

"It shall be done as you wish, Hernando," answered the youth, "but beware of him. Certain am I, that he is no true man, or honest friend; and for the rest, he knows even now, as well as I do, that you daily visit Guarica; though it may be he fancies her your paramour, and not your destined wife. But, as I said, beware of him; and let him beware of me for as surely as there is a God, who witnesses our thoughts, as clearly as our actions, so surely will I shoot him, like a dog, if I catch him lurking about her. And now go on your way to Guarica she waits for you."

"And you, Orozimbo?"

"I will pursue these men, until I house them fairly; that I may learn to a foot the path in which they travel; for by that same path will they return again."

"No violence, my friend, promise me that there shall be no violence."

"I do," replied the Charib, laying his tawny hand on his bare bosom; "I do promise you. Why should I harm them until I am certain? I am not quite so mad as that, Senor Hernando."

"Then go it is as well thou shouldst and keep good watch for I am ordered hence, with a detachment to the new fortress eastward, and shall be absent seven days, or perhaps longer. Watch over her while I am gone for if he dare attempt aught, it will be then though I think it not of him."

"Ordered hence ha! ordered away!" cried the boy; "when was that? When did you hear of that? Are you sure he had naught to do with it?"

"The order was conveyed to me this morning from my superiors. Don Guzman had no voice in it, save as one of the council; besides, it is a high and honorable post! Farewell, and be thou prudent; ere I set forth I will seek occasion to hold converse with him. Good night, and fare thee well, if thou return not to the cottage ere I leave it."

And shaking hands kindly with the young and gallant Indian, he cantered forward, full of high hopes and tender dreams, to join his beautiful Guarica; while, with the patient and doglike sagacity of his race, her brother set himself to track out, inch by inch, the route of those strangers, from whose visit his suspicions pointed to so much of evil.

But though Hernando partly from a reluctance to admit himself the possibility of such a surmise; and still more from a prudent apprehension of wakening the fiery soul of the Charib boy to some deed of signal vengeance, the consequence of which might be to cause a war of extermination between the races but though Hernando had expressed his confidence so strongly in the good faith of Herreiro, that confidence, as he rode onward in deep self-communion, began to wane; and if not quite extinguished, was much weakened before he reached the dwelling of his lady love; and in her witching smile forgot all thought of peril.

As soon as Orozimbo left him, he began to reflect within himself upon the altered conduct of Don Guzman; for he could not deny to his own heart that it was altered strangely. From having been at one time his most constant and familiar comrade, he now remembered, that for many weeks past Herreiro had avoided him; and, if compelled by

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the routine of duty to exchange a few words with him, had done so hurriedly, and without any longer pause than was necessary. When he thought upon this, he began naturally enough to think upon the reason, why he, so late the idol of his friends and fellow soldiers, should have now earned their suspicion and dislike. Nor could he but confess that in some sort the fault had been his own that he had been so utterly engrossed by his passion for the princess, as to neglect all else except his duty and almost that also! Nor could he wonder that his own sudden alienation from the pastimes and pursuits of his associates, should have given rise in them not only to a like alienation, but to a feeling of resentment and distrust, and perhaps even of hatred, ever the child of irritated vanity.

He struck his hand on his breast with a gloomy feeling of self-condemnation. "Alas!" he muttered to himself "Alas! how often do even our best feelings lead us astray how often do we by our own first injustice toward others, beget that injustice toward ourselves, of which we afterward so bitterly complain. But I will speak with him to-morrow, ere I start; I will speak with him openly and frankly, and all shall be well. And now for Guarica."

By this time he had traversed the tract of forest land, and reached the edge of the lone savannah, whence he could mark the cottage home of his beloved, o'ercanopied by its tall palms, and feathery mimosas; the moon was hanging like a lamp of silver in the serene and cloudless sky, wherein a thousand glorious constellations unknown to our colder hemispheres were burning with a clear and deathless lustre, undimmed by any mist or earthly vapor. Myriads of fire-flies were glancing in the thick foliage of the trees, or flitting to and fro over the dewy grass perfumes were steaming up from every herb and flower, and the light air that fanned the face of the young Spaniard was loaded with a rich and spicy fragrance, almost too powerful for the senses. There was a hum of melody upon the soft night breeze, the blended voices of ten thousand small nocturnal insects, but sweeter, clearer, more melodious far than all swelled up from the distant cottage, the pure voice of young womanhood, rising in notes of sacred song to the very throne of Holiness. The young man paused to listen with a soul thrilling with delight it was the hymn to the Virgin, and though the intermediate words were lost in distance, the burthen *Ave Purissima* pealed in her clear and silvery accents high as the swell of a seraphic trumpet. While he yet stood and listened, the light, which beamed fair and uninterrupted from the casement of Guarica's chamber, was suddenly obscured, and he might see the slight and exquisite proportions of the fair girl penciled, distinct and sharp, against the glowing background, as she stood looking out into the night, awaiting his approach, who, though unseen, was so nigh to her.

He gave his horse the spur, and in five minutes was beside her. It is not in the power of words to describe such meetings Those who have loved, as did the young Hernando, fervently, wildly, passionately, (yet withal so chastely and so purely that his most ardent wish had called no blush to the chariest maiden's cheek,) can remember, can conceive. To all beside, the high and holy aspirations, the sweet blending of those kindred souls, is a sealed book; and sealed it must remain, until to them, too, love shall give the key.

Suffice it they were happy; as happy as aught of mortal mould may be. No thought of care or evil came nigh them: lapped in the dreams of young romance absorbed in their unselfish, fond affection they had no thoughts but of the blissful present no hopes but of a blessed future.

Long they sat, hand-in-hand, in that serene and tranquil happiness, which is too deep, too full of thought, to find vent in many words; and afterward, long they conversed of their future prospects, anticipating the arrival of the great and good Columbus, who was soon hourly expected to return from Old Spain, and whose consent alone, and presence, they awaited, in order to be made one in the sight of man and God.

The night was wearing late, and the slight meal of fruits and cake, and sweet, palm wine had been tasted, yet not once had Guarica ever thought of mentioning the visit of her lover's countrymen; nor had Hernando found courage yet to tell her that seven days must elapse before he should again behold her.

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But now, when the time had arrived to say, farewell, and he was forced reluctantly to tell her all reluctantly, not only that it was painful to himself to dwell even on his temporary absence but that he could not bear to see those sweet eyes swim in tears, that charming bosom swell with the sob of suppressed agony now, in the agitation and the anguish of that parting moment, the fears, which she had that day for the first time experienced, came back upon her, dark and gloomy.

And, hanging on Hernando's shoulder, she owned, even while she strove to smile at her own weak and womanish dismay she confessed that she, too, had read in the dark eye of Guzman, she knew not what, that had filled her soul with harrowing dread; with forebodings such as she never had entertained, or thought of before; which had hung all the evening like a heavy storm-cloud darkening her very soul; and which, though banished for a space by his presence, had again returned, sadder, and heavier, and darker than before.

It was in vain that Hernando argued with her, as he had argued with her brother; that he used every faculty of his powerful mind to convince, to soothe, to reassure her it was in vain she would not be consoled.

"I know it," she said, in reply to all that he could urge; "I feel it here, and I know it will be so I know that the time of my trial is at hand. God grant me strength to pass through it stainless and unscathed but I foresee my peril, and the quarter whence it cometh. I know that you must leave me I would not have you stay, or loiter no, not to save my life: for what should you be, with your soldier's honor tarnished or what would be left for me, if I should tempt you to dishonor? No! my beloved, no! You must begone, and leave Guarica to her trials and her God! Pray for me, my beloved, pray for me and oh! whatever shall fall out, be well assured of this that never will Guarica survive her honor, or her love for De Leon. Farewell, then, dear Hernando; but, ere you go, grant me one boon will you not, dearest? the first boon Guarica ever asked of her Hernando?"

"Can you ask, if I will, Guarica? Take any thing take all! my life, my very soul is thine. What shall I give thee, dearest?"

"This!" said the girl, laying her hand on the hilt of a small, slight, though long stiletto, with a square blade, scarce thicker than a lady's bodkin, which he wore in a golden scabbard at his girdle "give me this, only!"

"Nay! nay! this were an ominous gift, Guarica; ask any thing but this."

"Will you refuse me my first prayer, Hernando?"

"I would not willingly refuse but there is an ancient saw, about sharp-edged gifts. I am not superstitious, and yet and yet I will own the truth I do not like to *give* it!"

"Then will I buy it of you: what shall I give you? See," she continued, smiling, "the other day you asked me for a lock of hair: give me the dagger quick, and you shall have it!"

And with the words she drew it from the sheath, and severed a long, silky ringlet. "Give me the scabbard, now, and you shall have this and "

"And what, Guarica?"

"And what you never would have dared to ask of me." And she cast down her eyes; and a quick blush shot across her sunny features; and a visible thrill shook her frame, as if she half repented the words she had uttered.

"A kiss, Guarica?"

She raised her eyes again, timidly but unshrinkingly, to meet her lover's ardent gaze:

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"You will not think me overbold, or unmaidenly, Hernando?"

"You! you unmaidenly, Guarica! the saints in heaven as soon!"

And as he spoke, he unlinked the jeweled scabbard from his girdle, and laying it in her hand, folded her for one moment in his arms, and printed one long, chaste kiss, on lips that returned not the pressure.

"But for what can you want such a keepsake, dearest? what will you do with it?" he asked, as he released her.

"Wear it next to my heart," she answered, her soft eye lightening with a bright, enthusiastic inspiration, and her whole form appearing to dilate with energy and soul. "Now I am mistress of myself now I am mistress of my honor!"

"Lovely enthusiast! and think'st thou, thou couldst find the courage or the strength to use it?"

"Think I think I, Hernando? No! I *think* not I know it. Should that man dare to wrong me, so surely as I hope to live in heaven hereafter, where he stood, there should he die by a girl's hand; or, if that should fail, I have a heart myself, that lies not so deep but this would reach it. Now, I am happy, love now I am strong and fearless. Fare thee well fare thee well, Hernando, and dread nothing. Spotless you leave me now, and loving, and spotless you shall find me, ay! and loving, whether it be on earth or *there!* " and she pointed with the gleaming dagger to the calm, azure heavens, as she spoke, in a voice so tranquilly harmonious, and with an air of majesty so perfect, that Hernando almost asked himself whether she were not a being of a nature *too pure and ethereal*, to be the object of mere mortal love, and fitter for man's adoration as a guardian saint or angel.

"Beautiful, glorious creature!" he exclaimed, almost involuntarily, "it will be needless all: there lives no man on earth daring enough to dream of harming thee; and if there were, the Lord, who watches over all his virtuous creatures, would surely send down legions of thy kindred angels to defend thee!"

"Hernando!"

"Guarica! sweet Guarica! Farewell!"

And the young lovers parted. Sad word, alas! sad thought. For who that part can dream when they shall meet again, or what shall pass before that meeting?

CHAPTER IV.

Morning had dawned already, when Hernando returned to the fortress of his countrymen, and all was noise and bustle; two companies were under arms without the gates, and the whole esplanade between the walls and the sea was alive with men rolling down casks of ammunition or provisions to a tall caravella, which lay in the little basin at the wharf, with her foretopsail loose, in readiness to sail, as it seemed, at a moment's notice.

As Hernando dismounted, two or three officers, who were inspecting the arquebusers and pikemen, stepped forward to salute him.

"How soon will the tide serve, Señor Gomez?" asked the young cavalier, addressing the personage who had accompanied Herreiro on the previous day.

"Not for two hours, at the earliest, Don Hernando," replied the sailor; "but I am waiting only to have the soldiers put on board, before I shove off into the stream."

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"I will give orders I will give orders. How soon shall you want me on board?"

"My boat shall wait you in an hour at the port stairs."

"I will be ready, señor. Don Luis Mandragone, get your men on board instantly. Steadily, sir! steadily! no hurry! Forward, march!"

And for a few moments he stood still, observing the movement of the troops, who, with that steadiness of severe discipline which rendered the Spanish infantry the most famous in the world, went through the requisite manoeuvres, with equal speed and facility.

This done, Hernando turned to the sentinels on duty, and inquired if Don Guzman de Herreiro was within the walls, but, greatly to his disappointment, he was answered in the negative; and, on making farther inquiries, still more to his vexation, he was informed that, although he had not returned home till a late hour on the previous evening, he had set out, alone, to hunt before daybreak.

Not a word did De Leon utter in reply, but his brow grew as black as night, and he strode away, hastily, to his own barrack, and locking himself in, to avoid interruption, took pen and paper, and addressed a long letter to his whilom friend and comrade.

For he was not deceived in the least by the pretext of hunting; knowing, as he did, that Herreiro was by no means so ardent an admirer of field sports, as to get up before the sun two following mornings, to ride after the stanchest hounds that ever opened upon game.

He doubted not, therefore, that, whatever the pretence, his Guarica, his own betrothed, was the true object of pursuit to a man, whom he knew bold, resolute, voluptuous, unscrupulous, and persevering. It was a moment of strange agony! For though he never so much as dreamed of doubting Guarica's purity of soul, or power to resist more potent fascinations than were like to be brought against her though he imagined not that Herreiro would dare resort to violence still it was anguish to believe that she, his soul's idol, would have to endure the solicitations, to brook the insolent addresses of this bold libertine.

It was now that he felt bitterly the folly of his conduct, in so estranging himself from his comrades; for he had no one to whom he could confide his anxieties, of whom he could ask comfort or advice. The rather that the very man to whom it would have been most natural that he should apply, was he against whom he was now called upon to take counsel.

Short was the space which was left to him, either for action or deliberation, and perhaps it was well for him that it was so; for assuredly, under the spur of instant necessity, he took a course which, if the boldest, was the wisest he could have adopted.

He sat down and wrote a long, frank letter to Herreiro, as from one devoted friend to another. He apologized in some sort for his late strangeness and alienation, by accounting for it; which he did ingenuously, frankly, truly. He wrote to him of Guarica, as if he were ignorant that Herreiro knew of her existence: he told him of his first fascination, of his deep love arising thence, of his intention to make her his wife, immediately on the return of Columbus; and then, touching on his compulsory absence from Isabella, he commended his mistress to the care of his friend, in all loyalty and honor; conjuring him to watch over her, to protect her in case of any peril, to be to her, in short, if necessity should arise, as a brother.

This packet finished, and confided to the charge of Don Guzman's confidential servant, which was not done until the hour of embarkation was at hand, Hernando's mind was more composed and tranquilized than it had been since his discovery of Herreiro's conduct.

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"He cannot," thought he, within himself, "after receiving this he cannot dream of prosecuting any dishonorable suit toward my destined wife. First, I cannot believe his heart so treacherously base and evil: second, he dare not; for he knows that, did he so, within six hours of my return, he would have ceased to draw the breath of life: and third, as gentleman and belted knight, he dare not meet the obloquy and scorn of every honorable man, which would burst on his head should he despise this frank and loyal trust."

And in this renewed confidence, he stepped on board the boat that was to bear him to the stately caravella; and as he climbed her castellated prow, and stood upon her guarded deck, with the free, fair breeze laughing in her shrouds and halyards, and the blue waves of the bright Caribbean rippling and gurgling round her bows, sorrow and care, and sad anticipation passed from his heart, as a cloud is swept away by the autumnal wind from the face of some rich champagne, and in their place the sunshine of ambition, and blithe energetic action, possessed the spirit of the adventurous soldier.

So true it is, that for man, however deeply and devotedly he love, that love is still but the amusement, the luxury, if you will, of his existence; while, on the contrary, to a woman it is the necessity of life nay, it is life itself.

It certainly is not possible that any man on earth could have loved more sincerely, more fervently, than Hernando; and yet, from the instant when the brave frigate left her moorings, spreading sheet after sheet of snowy canvas to the favoring breeze, and dashing the small seas asunder in jets of flashing spray, not a thought of anxiety or sadness came to disturb him, or, if it did, it was banished by an effort of strong will, as being, if not unmanly, at least inconsistent with his bolder duties.

Fair blew the breeze, and rapidly the good ship sped before it, and the cheer of the stout mariners, and the jest and song of the idle soldiery, to whom this summer voyage was a gay holiday of rest from the monotonous routine of the garrison, made merry, though rough music. Action and bustle, and perhaps strife enthusiastic, thrilling strife before them the walls of Isabella ere long sunk on their lee, and they, and all that they contained, were soon forgotten.

But in the forest—home of poor Guarica there was no keen excitement, no hurried action, to banish heavy shadows from the heart no change of scene to divert the weary eyes from thoughts begotten by the sight of familiar objects. No new, strange sounds to distract the ear, filled as it were with old memories, recalled at every moment by old, accustomed noises.

There she sat in her wonted chamber, where he had so lately sat beside her, gazing upon the same sweet landscape which so often they had admired together now turning to the books which he had given her, now trying to distract her sorrows by singing, to his mandolin, the Spanish airs which he had taught her. But all would not do; the one dread thought, the one dread terror, sat on her heart, haunted her as with a real presence the fixed presentiment of evil evil from that dark, terrible Don Guzman.

And, as if to increase the weight of that terror, it chanced that Orozimbo, who, fearful as herself of some deep laid and treacherous stratagem, had resolved to devote the whole time of Hernando's absence to watching over Guarica was called away at dawn that very morning, with every vassal he could muster, to attend a general council of the tribe, convened by Caonabo, whose mandate, as his uncle and his chief, he neither dared dispute nor could resist.

Again, therefore, was she left alone with her maidens, to whom, knowing the inutility of awakening their terrors fruitlessly, she had confided nothing of her apprehensions.

The day, however, passed, until the sun had buried his lower limb in the green summits of the tall forest which encompassed the savannah; and no alarm had occurred, nor any sound come from the neighboring woodlands, to denote the vicinity of any stranger. The lapse of time, as it ever will, bred something of security, and she began to

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reprove herself with cowardly and shameful weakness, and to endeavor to convince herself that, as Hernando had assured her, Don Guzman's visit must have been purely accidental.

It wanted, perhaps, two hours, or nearly three of the true sunset, although the shadows of the woods were already cast in level lines of purple over the smooth savannah, when her girls came in to announce to her that they were going down to bear the cotton cloths they had been spinning to the bleach ground beside the brook. Once, for a moment, it occurred to her to retain one of the girls near her person, but with a smile at her own cowardice, she changed her mind, and suffered them to leave her all alone, reflecting, as she did so, that if danger should arise they could afford her little or no protection; and again, that should she be alarmed, a moment would carry her to the spot where they were assembled.

She sat still, therefore, for a space, listening to the gay sound of their laughing voices, until they were lost in the distance: and then, although she held a volume of some high Spanish poet in her hand, she fell into a reverie, which lasted till the purple hues of evening were gradually stealing toward the zenith. She had just, partially aroused from her meditation, began to marvel at the long tarrying of the girls, when she felt, rather than saw, for her eyes were lowered to the ground, that some one had passed the window near which she was sitting.

At the next moment a footstep, which her quick Indian ear told her was a man's, and a European's, fell heavily upon the portico.

Instinctively her hand glanced down to the hilt of the stiletto which she wore, as she had said she would, next to her heart, within her muslin and robe, and as she loosened the keen weapon in the sheath, a high and flashing smile illumined her dark features.

At the same moment, the tall form of Don Guzman de Herreiro stood on the threshold of the door.

He was dressed in a full suit of black cloth, with hat, plumes, mantle of the same color, and the swift eye of the girl perceived instantly that he was heavily, almost, indeed, ostentatiously armed for in addition to the long Toledo blade which hung at his left side, and the heavy dagger which counterbalanced it, he had a pair of horseman's pistols at his belt, so large and cumbrous that they would appear almost out of place in holsters at the saddle—how.

He did not speak a word, but, removing the hat from his high pale brow, stood gazing at her with an eye so fixed and baneful that it seemed almost as if he believed he could fascinate her.

And she rose instantly, and faced him, tranquil and calm, and though paler than usual, firm and untrembling.

Then stepping one pace forward, and extending his hand, as if to take hers, which hung by her side motionless, he said in tones of affected softness

"Well, my sweet princess of the forests, happy am I, again, to find you all alone."

"Don Guzman de Herreiro," she replied, still confronting him with a quiet eye, and rejecting his hand, as though she had not perceived that he offered it "Don Guzman de Herreiro will perhaps condescend to explain the motives that have led him to this intrusion. There is no storm to—night, nor has the chase, I think, this time led him hither."

"You know me, then you know me," exclaimed the Spaniard, a bright color for a moment kindling his sallow features. "Fortunate *that*, my sweet Guarica; for it will save the awkwardness of introductions."

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"I do know you, senor," the young girl answered steadily, "and when you have answered me my question, you shall know *me*, which I now perceive you do not."

"Your question," said Herreiro, with an air half forgetful, and half supercilious; "Ay! why I have come hither, is it not? to see you, then, my beauty. It is your grace, your charms, that have brought me hither "

"And for what end, I pray you, or to what purpose?"

"These things, sweet one," he answered, carelessly, "are, perhaps, explained better by deeds than by words; some little time, and a few soft attentions, make all that clear and simple, which, if told bluntly, might alarm your sex's charming sensibility."

"I prayed you yesterday, senor, to spare yourself the trouble of paying me these fine compliments, as they are merely thrown away. I will now add, that if they be meant as serious gallantry, they are, if possible, more useless, than when regarded as mere figurative flourishes, employed to keep your tongue in tune."

"So scornful ha! so young and beautiful, and so contemptuous withal."

"How should I be other than scornful?" answered Guarica, still perfectly unmoved, "when your addresses can be regarded only as mockery, or as insult."

"Insult! you err sweet Guarica. What if I come to lay my heart in all honor at your feet to say to you frankly "

"Were that the case which it is not," she answered, "as frankly would I tell you, that I cannot accept your heart, having none to bestow on you in return."

"Again, what if I were to say that it is not your heart, but your beauty "

"Senor!"

"That overlooking all past frailties, all tendernesses of the heart toward one "

"To put a stop to all this matter at once," she interrupted him, speaking very rapidly, and with a marked and thrilling emphasis, "I will fill up your sentence. To one, *you* say to Don Hernando de Leon, say I, whose promised bride I am. You will see now the propriety of urging me no further. Don Guzman, you are answered. If that you be a gentleman, you will leave me."

"And do you really think, my angel, that I believe such nonsense that I even suppose *you* to believe it? De Leon's paramour, if you love the title, and much honor you do to his good taste but his wife his wife ha! ha! you make me laugh, By heavens! you make me laugh, Guarica!"

And with the word he advanced a little way toward her; but she exclaimed in a clear high note, that pierced his ear like the blast of a silver trumpet

"Stand back! stand back! I say not if you be a gentleman you, who are recreant to every law of Spanish chivalry or knightly honor! You, who are false to your noble comrade's trust! you, traitor and knave, and liar! I say not, if you be a man, for nothing worthy the name of man would so insult and outrage a helpless solitary girl! But still, I say, stand back! Back! not for shame, or honesty, or honor! But for fear! Back! lest, when he return, Hernando scourge you like a vile cur as you are, scourge you before the face of your chivalric countrymen!"

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"A fair defiance, lovely Guarica, a fair but dangerous defiance. Never, if you will be advised by me, taunt a man on his personal courage. You are a brave girl to defy me thus, when you are at my mercy, when you are alone.

"I am not at your mercy! I am not alone!"

"Not at my mercy? not alone? But you know not that I have watched my time that I am thoroughly aware, that, save we two, there is no living creature within earshot!"

"I care not how you may have watched, I care not what you know I am *not* at your mercy! I am *not* alone!"

"As how, sweet beauty? By heaven! your daring lends fresh lustre to your loveliness!"

"I am the mistress of myself, and God is with me!"

"See, then," said Herreiro, sneeringly, "if God will aid you. Come, girl, wilt grant to love, what thou perforce must yield to violence?"

Her lips moved rapidly, but no sound reached his ear. Her eyes were turned upward. But her right hand was firmly clasped within the bosom of her robe.

"Come, Guarica, be wise resistance is in vain submit thee "

"Beware thou! I will not submit me!"

And she stood pale and motionless as marble, but as firm at the same time, and almost as fearless. Maddened by passion, and excited almost to frenzy by her scornful bearing, he sprung to seize her; his right hand had already clutched her left arm, as it hung by her side, his left was flung about her waist, when, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, the spell was broken the blood rushed in a torrent to brow, cheek, neck and bosom of the pale statue, her eye flashed fiery indignation, her right hand sprung into the air, the keen blade of Hernando's dagger glittering through the dusky twilight.

"Die!" she cried; "ravisher and villain die in thy sin and shame!"

And with a quick and fiery energy that made up for the want of strength, she smote him three times in the bosom with the speed of light, that the strong man let go his hold, and staggered back a pace or two, like one who has received a mortal wound.

Yet Guarica knew that the villain was unwounded, for every blow that she dealt him had jarred her slight arm to the shoulder, as the point of her weapon glanced from the *secret* of chain mail which Herreiro wore beneath his doublet. Had the blade been of less perfect temper it had been shattered to the hilt. As it was, it had not lost one iota of its trenchant keenness, and, as she started back, she coolly tried its point with her finger.

"Best leave me, senior!" she exclaimed. "From me you can gain nothing, even on terms more shameful to your manhood, than your success were dishonoring to me!"

"You are mistaken, girl!" he replied, fiercely, for he was no coward, and his blood was up. "Your God will no more aid you, than will your foolish bodkin pierce my good Spanish mail. Prepare yourself for the worst. It is now pride and vengeance. Look to yourself you will find no mercy!"

"I expect none," she answered, and as he rushed toward her, his eyes glowing and his cheeks flushed with fiendish passion, she added, looking up toward heaven "Yet am I mistress of myself! come one step nearer and by the

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God whom thou dost not believe, and who shall yet smite thee in thy unbelief in my own heart I plunge this dagger, and on thy head be the blood and the curse!"

And with the word she tore away the cotton robe that scarce restrained her panting bosom, and raised the long keen blade aloft with proud determination.

"My flesh will hardly turn the point, which thy mail armor scarce resisted!"

He read it in her firm and compressed lip, he noted it in the steadfast gaze of her earnest eye, he heard it in every note of her clear, composed and unfaltering voice that resolution, fixed and sure as death. He knew by the concentrated energy and force with which she had stricken him, that no weakness of her woman arm would mar her purpose in the execution. He was foiled, and he knew it foiled and defeated by a girl a savage!"

Unable to persist in his base intent, unwilling to retreat, he stood infirm of purpose, speechless, and vacillating. At length he faltered forth

"Bravely played! bravely played, on my soul! Guarica, it could not have been done better had we been both in earnest, which ha! ha! ha! it makes me laugh! ha! ha! it does, by St. Jago! which I believe you really thought I was. Come, confess confess, noble Guarica, didst thou not think that I was in earnest?"

"Didst thou think that I was?" replied Guarica, with a smile of contempt and loathing. "Well is it for thee that thou wear'st a coat of proof when thou playest these merry jests else had my dagger and thy heart's blood been acquainted. Yes! senor," she continued, changing her tone of bitter scorn into an accent of deliberate and firm assertion. "Yes, senor, I do believe, or rather I do know that you were in earnest, and on this night, seven days hence, we will see what Hernando de Leon will believe touching it. And now, senor, you offered me some advice awhile since, which I will repay by offering some to you in turn. Betake yourself to your horse as quickly as you may; I hear my maidens' voices coming hitherward, it may be there are men with them."

"To hell! with your council, minion!" cried Hernando, perceiving himself now thoroughly detected, and yielding to his furious hate and disappointed malice. "You think yourself invincible, because this time you have baffled me but patience! patience! and the time will come! and hark you, girl! on that same day whereon Hernando learns what has passed this night, on that same day he dies! Ha! do I touch you? Tell him, fool, tell him, and you seal his death warrant!"

"Ha! ha!" shrilly laughed Guarica, and sneeringly. "It is my time, now my time to laugh!" she cried. "Nay, 't would make dumb things laugh to hear *you* threaten *you*, and him!"

Enraged beyond endurance by her taunts, he had half drawn a pistol from his belt would he have had the baseness to aim it at a woman's life? when the quick tread of many men was heard without then! then, for the first time, when aid was close at hand, and terror causeless, Guarica's courage failed her she uttered one long shriek the revulsion of her feelings was too much for her, she fell to the ground fainting.

One bound carried Herreiro clear through the open window his horse stood close at hand he was upon his back, the spur in his side, the bridle lifted, when the loud Charib war-cry pealed around him, and a long arrow, shot in haste and aimlessly, whistled close by his ear.

The good horse stretched into his gallop another and another shaft just grazed him harmless he was safe safe by a few short yards alone, so furiously did the revengeful Charibs, headed by Orozimbo, press the chase. And so long, and so stanchly did they keep it up, that when he crossed the echoing drawbridge, and stood in safety within the battlemented walls of Isabella, the dark forms of the Indian runners were visible on the savannah, at a short half mile's distance; and their loud yells and whoops were heard fearfully distinct in the quiet night.

CHAPTER V.

Day after day passed onward, but no more did Guarica hear or see of Don Guzman de Herreiro; for not only did he not again venture to approach her forest home, but not once did he quit the guarded precincts of the fortress. And well was it for him he did not.

Perhaps, indeed, it was a secret instinct that taught him to conceal himself within the barrack square, a consciousness that wrong, so deadly as he had meditated to the forest princess, could not be offered with impunity. Bold as he was, and daring in the battle field, perhaps his heart failed him when he thought of lurking foes concealed in every brake, waiting with all the deadly patience of Indian revenge, to wing the fatal arrow to his heart and well was it for him.

For from the very hour in which Orozimbo had tracked him to the fortress, saved only by the fleetness of his charger, from that very hour not ten steps could he have made beyond the drawbridge, without encountering death, beyond a peradventure. Day and night, fair or foul, the wakeful Charibs lay concealed around; never was there a moment when one at least of Orozimbo's men was not within easy arrow range of the castle gates. One watching while another slept, one feeding while another fasted, constantly, resolutely, was the ward kept the watch and ward of vengeance.

Yet with such skillful subtlety, with such deep craft was it all ordered, that though Herreiro might have had his spies on the look out, he could have learned or suspected nothing.

The watcher now would be a solitary fisherman plying his scoop-net at the basin's mouth; now a wild hunter offering his game for sale to the officers; now a group of old Indians with palm and wine and fruits, and now a knot of striplings playing or wrestling on the green before the esplanade; but each and all with bow and quiver at his back, eyeing furtively but keenly the form of every passer, each and all ready and alert to avenge the insult offered to their young princess.

Nor while the gates of Isabella were thus formidably guarded and beset, was Guarica again left unprotected or alone. Whenever Orozimbo was abroad, and he was now abroad more frequently than ever, for it appeared that something new and strange was in the wind, armed musters being held almost nightly of Caonabo's vassals, whenever Orozimbo was abroad, two or three stalwart Indians might be seen at some point or other within sight and earshot of the cottage, while others were on the scout constantly among the woods, through which a foe must pass to reach the dwelling of Guarica.

That something was on foot among the savages, as they were still termed by the Spaniards, could not be doubted. The great Lord of the Golden House had mustered all his warriors; and many subjects of the four other independent caciques of the Island, who, more timid or less patriotic than the heroic Caonabo, shrunk from collision with the whites, were gathered to the banners of the champion of his people.

This was especially the case with the tribemen of the queen Anacaona. Invariably the friend of the white men herself, she had inculcated the like pacific notions into the minds of her kinsmen; so that both Orozimbo and Guarica had been scarce second to their aunt in good will to the pale invaders.

The fiery blood of the young Indian had been, however, so thoroughly aroused by the atrocious outrage offered to his sister that he had joined heart in hand with his warlike kinsman, who had determined on a simultaneous onslaught upon every Spanish post, previous to the return of the great Admiral. Not a few of the best and boldest of his tribes were united with him, but knowing well the predilection of his aunt and sister for the European colonists, all had been carefully concealed from them. While Orozimbo satisfied his conscience as to the consequences of his conduct on his sister's fate, by charging all his followers to respect the person of Hernando,

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and preserve him at all hazards, and by obtaining a pledge of his safety from the great cacique.

Such was the state of things when De Leon returned from his mission, late in the afternoon of the seventh day from his parting with Guarica. The plans of Caonabo were all laid and determined; but the day and hour on which the attack should be made he still kept buried in his own bosom, lest once known to his people, treason, or drunkenness for, since the coming of the white men this curse likewise was entailed upon the Indian or careless indiscretion might betray it to the foe. Even Orozimbo knew no more than the meanest of his tribesmen; night after night every inferior chief was ordered to hold all his men in readiness, though none knew for what; and night after night, up to the evening of Hernando's coming, each had received a mandate instructing him to disband his people until the following moonrise.

Scarce had Hernando disembarked from his caravella, ere he hurried to the quarters of Don Guzman, expecting to receive a solution of all his doubts and surmises. But when he reached his door, he was, to his extreme astonishment, refused admittance, on the pretence that Herreiro had been very ill and confined to his bed during the whole period of his, Hernando's, absence, and that the leech had forbidden strictly that any person should have access to him.

Frustrated thus, he inquired of the servant whether the packet he had left on the morning of his departure was delivered to which question the man answered promptly, and as it afterward appeared truly, that it was that he gave it to his master, on his return from hunting, the same day on which he received it; although, he added, that he knew not whether Don Guzman had read it, having been taken ill within an hour or two of his return, in consequence, it was supposed, of a sun-stroke.

Having exhausted thus every source of information that was open to him, Hernando, after making his report to the commandant, and receiving his congee for the night, ordered his horse to be prepared immediately, and rode away into the forest, taking his bloodhounds with him.

In the mean time the officers were revelling in the mess room, with cards, and dice and wine, and dark haired Indian women; the sentinels were slumbering or drinking at their posts; the cannon were unloaded; the walls almost unguarded Riot and luxury within, and relaxed discipline; and without armed foes, thirsty for blood and vengeance.

So stood affairs, when Hernando galloped from the gates, fearless and free of heart, and full of bright and gay anticipation. The very news he had received from Herreiro's servant reassured him for it had not occurred to him to doubt its truth So that, secure in his imagination that Guarica could have been troubled by no fresh intrusion, he rode joyously along the forest track, in all the confidence of happy and successful love.

He was surprised a little, it is true, at meeting, three times, on his road an armed Indian, apparently on the scout; such a thing never having previously happened in all the times he had come and gone to and fro. But the men, all of whom happened to be acquainted with his person, spoke to him pleasantly, and passed on their way; and Hernando, indeed, almost forgot that he had seen them, until, when he saw Guarica, and she related to him, amid tears of gratitude and joy, all that had happened, he perceived and appreciated the object of the wise precaution.

Fierce and tremendous was his indignation, as, without a touch of fear at the foul menace of Herreiro, the fair girl recited to him the whole of that thrilling scene; but so much more were his love and admiration kindled toward the heroic maiden, that his ire smouldered in his bosom as quietly as though he had entertained no such feeling. So much so that Guarica herself almost wondered that, with so much cause for violent and quick resentment, her lover's mood should be softer, calmer, and more tranquil than its wont.

Little she knew that the current of fierce wrath, when stillest, is ever deadliest and deepest. Little she fancied that Hernando's spirits were so gay and lightsome, his manner so soft and unconcerned, because he saw his course of

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vengeance plain before him because he knew that on the morrow his enemy must pay his debt even unto the uttermost farthing.

After a little while, as is sometimes the case with all of us, when our spirits are enkindled and our sensibilities aroused far beyond their wont, the atmosphere of the airy room in which the lovers sat appeared to them confined and oppressive, their souls seemed to want scope to expand they panted for the free air of the wide, starry heavens, and forth they strolled, arm-in-arm, through the quiet moonlight, across the beautiful savannah across the little brook, dry-shod upon the snow-white stepping-stones and thence along the forest's edge whence first Hernando had beheld her.

That, since their loves had grown into maturity, had been to them a hallowed place and on the streamlet's bank, just on the spot where he had forced his Andalusian steed to leap it, de Leon's hands had built a rustic seat, beneath the shelter of a huge palm tree, and close to the verge of the unbroken forest. Thither they bent their steps, led by some secret mutual impulse, and there they sat down, side by side, in happiness too deep to find vent in many words.

It was Guarica who spoke first, and when she did, it was of the subject that was ever foremost in her mind, the villany and treason of Don Guzman. But she struck no responsive string in Hernando's mind; and he spoke wide of the mark, making some passing observation, touching the beauty of the night.

"But let us speak," she said, "of this Herreiro: think you that he will dare attempt his menaced vengeance?"

"His vengeance, paltry knave!" said Hernando, scornfully. "No! but let him dread mine for it shall find him out before he dream of it; nor shall his feigned distemper save him! But let us think of him no further. He is not worth one instant's care. The viper is but perilous so long as we suspect him not; once seen, he is so harmless, that it is scarce worth the while to crush him, and, for the rest, it will be but a little space a little space, which we must bear with patience scarcely a week, I trust, my own and best beloved, before the good and great Columbus shall return; and then, then, sweet one, there will be an end to all your doubts, anxieties, and fears. He is the best, the noblest, the most just of men. He is my friend, too, and a tried one. He once returned, I will avow at once to him my love for my Guarica; his consent it is meet that we should have before our union, and of it I am certain! Then then, thou shalt be mine, for ever mine, in the sight of men, as thou art now in the sight of Heaven and all its angles!"

"My own Hernando!" was her sole answer, for her heart swelled as she spoke, and her passion was too strong for words, and two large diamond tears collected slowly on the long, silky fringes of her eyelids, and hanging there like dew-drops on the violet's petal, slid slowly down her soft, transparent cheeks.

"Tears tears, Guarica!" cried the lover, half reproachfully, "Can it be, can it be, that thou doubttest me? *me*, who have never asked the slightest freedom never assayed the smallest and most innocent familiarity; me, who would rather die die, not on earth only, but for all eter nity, than call up one chaste blush upon those maiden cheeks than wake one doubt in that pure heart than print one stain upon the whiteness of that virgin mind! Can it be "

"No! no!" exclaimed the girl, panting with eagerness to interrupt him, for he had spoken, hitherto, with such impetuous haste, that she had vainly sought to answer him. "No! no! Sooner could I doubt Heaven than thee, Hernando. They were tears, not of sorrow, not of doubt, but of pure, heart-felt joy! I know thou art the very soul of honor I know thou wouldst ask nothing of thy Guarica that it would not be her pride, her joy, her duty, to bestow. It was but joy, dear, dear Hernando, to think that we should so soon be united beyond the power of man to part us."

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Even as she spoke, while her cheek almost touched the face of her young lover, for, in the intense excitement of the moment, she had leaned forward, clasping Hernando's hand in both her own, and watering it with her tears, a sharp, keen twang, mixed with a clash, as if of steel, was heard behind them; a long, dark streak seemed to glare through the narrow space between their heads, with a low, whizzing sound, and on the instant a bolt, or arrow, stood quivering in the stem of a palm tree opposite.

To spring upon his feet, to whirl his long, two-edged Toledo from the scabbard, to dart, with a loud shout, into the thicket, calling upon his trusty hounds, which, quite unconscious of any peril, were slumbering at Guarica's feet, to whom they had become familiar guardians, was but an instant's work to the young and fiery hidalgo. For at least ten minutes' space, he was absent from the Indian maiden; who, trembling with apprehension for the safety of him whom she had learned to love far more than life itself, with every tinge of color banished by mortal terror from her features, awaited his return. With every sense on the alert, eye, ear and spirit on the watch, she stood in terrible excitement. She heard him crashing through the tangled brake; she heard his loud voice cheering the eager blood-hounds to track out the footsteps of his hidden foe; but no bay of the sagacious animals, no clash of steel, or answering defiance, fell on her anxious ear. His search was vain his anxious labor fruitless no fraying of the interlaced and thorny branches showed where the dastardly assassin had forced a passage for his retreating footsteps no print in the clayey soil revealed where he had trodden; and, stranger yet, the keen scent of the sagacious dogs detected not the slightest taint upon the earth, or on the dewy herbage, although they quested to and fro, three hundred yards, at least, in circuit, around the tree wherein the well-aimed arrow stood sure evidence of the murderer's intent. He returned, baulked and disappointed, to Guarica; big drops of icy perspiration standing, like bubbles, on his high, clear, forehead, and his whole frame trembling with the agitation of strong excitement.

"By Him who made me," he exclaimed, as he returned to her, "this is most marvelous! there is not, nor hath been, within two hundred yards of us, a human being since we have sat here if I may trust the sight of mine own eyes, or, what is truer far, the scent of my good hounds! Yet here," he added, as he tore from the stem of the tall palm tree the short, massive bolt, with its four-cornered barbed steel head, "here is the evidence that one and that, too, a Spaniard hath been, or now is close beside us. Come, dearest, come, let us leave this perilous spot. By Heaven! but it is wondrous strange!"

In silence for the girl was too full of terror, the cavalier, of dark and anxious thought, to enter into converse he led her homeward. Across the bright savannah, gleaming in the moonlight, they reached, ere long, the portico of her loved home, and there, after a tender parting, Hernando vaulted into the saddle of his fiery Andalusian, whistled his faithful blood-hounds to his heel, and dashed away, at a furious gallop, toward the fortress of his unfriendly countrymen. Eager, still, to discover, if so it might be, something of him who had so ruthlessly aimed the murderer's shaft that night, Hernando rode directly to the spot where he had sat with Guarica when the fell missile was discharged: he saw the grass betraying, by its bruised and prostrate blades, the very spot by which they had been sitting; but all was still and lonely. Onward he went across the very ground which he had searched so carefully scarce half an hour before, and, ere he had traversed fifty paces, both blood-hounds challenged fiercely. Calling them instantly to heel, the cavalier alighted, bound his hot war-horse to a tree, and eagerly scanned the soil. At the first glance, deep printed in the yielding mould, he found the clear print of a Spanish buskin, furnished with a long, knightly spur. To follow the trace backward was his first impulse; and scarce three minutes were consumed, before he tracked it to a tall and shadowy oak, the bark of which, scarred and defaced, showed that some person had, not long before, both climbed it and descended.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, striking his breast with his clenched hand, "ha! idiot that I was, who thought not of this. It matters not, however; by God! it matters not; for right soon will I have him! Forward, good hounds," he added, "forward, hark, halloa, ho! hark, forward!" And the vexed woodlands rang to the deep-mouthed dogs, and the hard gallop of the hunter. They reached the open ground, a league of forest having been already passed, and the hounds, for a moment, were at fault.

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Springing again to the earth, Hernando easily discovered, by the prints in the soil, that here the fugitive had taken horse having, it would seem, left his charger under the keeping of a menial, while prosecuting his foul enterprise; for henceforth *two* broad horse-tracks might be seen running distinctly over the bare savannah homeward. Laying the hounds upon the horse-track, the cavalier again re-mounted, and the fresh dew aiding the scent, away they drove, at a pace almost unexampled, through brake and bush, over the open plain, athwart the murky covert hill and hollow vanished beneath their fiery speed, rock and tree glanced by and disappeared, so furious was their pace; the deepest torrent turned him not, nor the most perilous leap deterred him for the most fiery, the most constant, the most pervading of all human passions deadly revenge was burning his heart's core, turning the healthful currents of his blood to streams of fiery lava.

The deadest hour of night had long been passed already, when he dashed forth upon that desperate race; the pale cold light of morning was streaming, broad but still, over the palisaded ditch and ramparts of the Spanish fortress, when Don Hernando de Leon pulled up his foaming steed before the drawbridge. Early, however, and untimely as was the hour, men were abroad already. A mounted servitor, in livery of Isabel and silver, riding a coal-black jennet, and leading by the bridle-rein a tall bay charger, trapped and housed richly with the same colors, was retiring from the gates, which were just closing, toward the barrack stables. Toward this steed, jaded and spent with toil, and all embossed with sweat and foam-flakes, and galled and bleeding at the flanks from cruel and incessant spurring, the savage blood-hounds still in full cry, dashed without check or stint, and would have pulled the bay horse down had not the stern voice of their master checked them. He rode up to the groom, and in a deep voice, calm, slow, and perfectly unmoved, demanded, "Whose charger?"

Without reply the servitor was hastening away, when he asked once again, in fiercer tones, drawing his dagger as he spoke

"Whose charger, dog? Speak, or thou diest! Whose charger? and who hath now dismounted from him? Not that I need thy voice to tell me what I already know, but that I choose to hear my knowledge confirmed by human words. Whose charger?"

"Don Guzman de Herreiro's," replied the faltering menial; "he hath even now gone in the bridge is not yet lifted."

"Excellent well!" replied the cavalier, "excellent well! Mine ancient comrade; excellent well! My fellow soldier, whose life I have thrice saved once from the Moors, amid the mountain glens of Malaga, once from the surf, among the dread Antilles, and once here in this isle of Hispaniola, from the envenomed arrow of the Charib. Excellent well, Don Guzman!"

In the mean time dismounting at the gates, he gave his charger and his hounds to the care of a favorite domestic who awaited him; and, with a firm, slow step, crossing the drawbridge, stopped for a moment to address the sentinel.

"So," he said "old Gaspar, thou keepest good watch. When went Don Guzman forth?"

"After we set the watch yestreen, fair sir, replied the old Castilian, presenting, as he spoke, his partizan. "Now I bethink me, it was scarce five minutes after *thou* didst ride forth into the forest!"

"And he hath now returned?"

"But now."

No farther words were interchanged; the young knight slowly passed across the court-yard, entered the vaulted passage which led toward the chambers of Don Guzman, paused at the door, and without one word struck on the panel one strong blow. A stern voice from within cried "enter!" And he did enter, and closed the door behind him,

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and locked and double locked it; and though strange sounds were heard, and fearful voices, above half an hour passed ere he came forth; and when he did so, his face, though very stern and calm, was pale as death; and he retired to his own quarters without a word to any one.

CHAPTER VI.

It was not until a late hour on the night following that of Hernando's departure from the presence of Guarica, who was now far more seriously alarmed at what she never doubted to be an attempt, on Herreiro's part, to execute his deadly meace, than she had been at his outrage toward herself, that Orozimbo returned from Caonaho's council, heated, and out of breath, as if he had run hard; and somewhat fatigued, but with an air of high enthusiasm and excitement, such as before she had never seen in her brother's features. So much, however, was she engrossed with the thoughts of what had, the previous night, befallen her proving as it did, beyond a doubt, the implacable and fiendish malice of Don Guzman, and filling her with the wildest apprehensions for her beloved Hernando's safety that she paid far less attention to the manner or appearance of her brother, than under any other circumstances she would have done. Eagerly, and with a vehement rapidity of speech, singularly at variance with the calm and almost inanimate tranquillity of her usual demeanor, she related to Orozimbo, without remarking the absent and distracted expression with which he listened to her, the wondrous attempt on her life and that of De Leon.

If she was not surprised, however, at the vacancy of his look, as she began her narrative, she was indeed astonished, although she well knew the excitability of his nature, at the tremendous burst of passion with which he replied to her last words.

"I thank the Great Spirit," he cried, springing to his feet, and shaking his hand furiously aloft, "I thank the Great Spirit that it is so! This, this alone was needful to banish the last throb of compunction, to extinguish the last spark of mercy or of friendship in my soul. Ha! ha! It is well, very well! He would have slain thee? Ha! let him look to himself, now, dog and villain. Now am I all the Charib; now am I all my country's! Give me my arms, give me my arms, Guarica, I am but wasting time, when time is most precious. Give me my helm of tiger skin give me the golden buckler, the strong war-club of my father; never yet was it brandished in more just or holy cause; give me "

"Hold! Orozimbo," exclaimed the lovely girl, now terrified by his continued vehemence, "what mean you, brother? For what should I give you arms? Are you mad, that you dream you, you alone, o seeking out this Spaniard in his guarded fortress. Why, boy, the very sentinels would spurn you from their gates!"

"Will they? ha! will they? Will the two paltry sentinels who stand beside their empty cannon, spurn back unconquered Caonabo? Let them look, I say, let them now look to themselves, these ravishing and murderous Spaniards. By the great gods! they shall learn, and that ere to-morrow's dawn, that it is one thing to strain in the hug of an Indian warrior, panting for vengeance and athirst for blood, and another to dally in the soft arms of an Indian maiden!"

"Brother, what mean you? Brother, brother, what fearful words are these what frantic meaning do they bear?"

"Ask me not, ask me not, Guarica; these are no times for girlish thoughts or girlish councils. Give me my arms, I say; let me begone; give me my arms!"

And with the words, he seized Hernando's bugle from the wall, and, springing to the window, blew a long thrilling blast, which was answered on the instant by the dull roar of a dozen conch-shells, sounding the Indian war-note everywhere through the nightly forest.

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"There is your answer, Guarica the souls of a thousand warriors, the bravest of the brave, are alive, are burning in those war-notes. Give me my arms. I say, before to-morrow's day-break, there shall be no more Isabella; by the gods! no more Spaniards!"

But as he spoke she threw herself at his feet, clung to his knees, watered his feet with her tears; she called on him by every tenderest pledge, invoked him by every dearest name, reminded him of every fondest memory, implored him by the soul of her gallant father, by the love of their dead mother implored him for her sake for her sake, whom that dying mother had confided to his charge if he would not see her die broken-hearted at his knees, to forego, to forget his fearful purpose, to desert the disastrous combination.

It was long, very long, ere she succeeded in the least in bending him; he was intractable, fierce, resolute. The last worst outrage had maddened him. It was long ere he would listen in the least to the voice of nature, much less to the words of reason. But at last nature did prevail, and old affection; his heart melted, and he raised her from the ground and kissed her, and mixed his tears with hers. But even when this step was gained, she had yet much to do, ere she could win him to her wishes. Pride now forbid him to desert the expedition in which he had enlisted with such zealous ardor to forsake the comrades to whom his faith was pledged, to prove disloyal to the monarch to whom he insisted that he owed allegiance. But Guarica's mind, although a woman's and a young lovely woman's too, was of the firmer and the sterner stuff, and in the end it conquered. Reason and wisdom were on her side, and for once reason and wisdom carried the day, over passion and brute violence.

She showed him, in clear colors, the hopelessness, the madness of the expedition; she proved to him, beyond the power of paradox to resist, that even if in the first their efforts should be crowned with success, the end would but be the more disastrous to the rash patriots, and to their country.

"Even," she said, "even if you should carry Isabella if you should, as you tell me you have sworn to do, burn it with fire, and raze it to the very earth, till not one stone remain upon another even if you should drown the smoking embers of the last Spanish dwelling with the life-blood of the last Spanish soldier, what will all this avail you? Is not the great, the God-like, the invincible and irresistible Columbus, even now flying hitherward on the wings of the very wind to which you propose to fling your banners of defiance? Does he not bring with him a fleet, a whole fleet, freighted with steel-clad men, invulnerable and with no mimic thunderbolts? And will not he avenge merciful as he is, and good, and gracious will not he exact awful retribution for the destruction of his comrades? And who dare hope to succeed, to strive, even, against the unconquered, the unconquerable admiral? Spare them, my brother, spare I will not say your sister, but your king, your countrymen, your country!"

"But how?" replied Orozimbo, mightily moved both by her arguments and her passion, "how shall I dare be a deserter a traitor to my tribe a recreant to my honor? How, if I do so, shall I ever dare again to show my face before my tribesmen? to take my seat in the council of the chiefs? No! sister, no! it is too late too late! and if you be it the right, as now I believe you are, to-morrow will be a day fatal both to us and to our invaders. I would I would, indeed, that I had told you of our plans heretofore, while there was yet the time to listen to your arguments but it is now too late, and I must on."

"It is never too late to repent, brother," answered the eager and excited girl "never too late to exchange evil for good counsel, madness for wisdom, crime for virtue. And it is evil counsel, it is madness yes! Orozimbo, it is crime, knowingly to rush headlong on destruction; nor to destroy yourself alone, but to involve hundreds in one common, hopeless, unnecessary ruin. Listen to me, and believe me, brother. You may think you *do* think, doubtless, that I am but a love-sick girl, pleading the cause of selfish passion, terrified for my lover's safety, and willing to give up all beside, friends, kinsmen, country, so that my senseless love for this stranger of a hostile race may be gratified. No! by my Christian faith, no! by the Christian's God, whom he has taught me to adore! it is not so. Were there a reasonable hope that permanent success could follow your bold exploit were there one chance in the thousand that our country could be once more free that the invader's foot prints could be erased forever from our virgin shores that no white face should ever more be seen in our happy fields then, Orozimbo, then would I

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cry forward! forward! although your first step should be planted on my breaking heart, and the next on my Hernando's prostrate head! Then would my voice be the first and the loudest to cheer you to the fray, as it is now the only one to warn you."

"And why not," asked her brother, gloomily, as he sat with his head buried between his hands "Why is it not so now?"

"You know why not," she answered, firmly. "You know that, were every white man swept, to-night, from the face of our fair island, thousands and tens of thousands would spring up in their places. When was the Spaniard's footstep ever checked by the fear of peril? when was his lust of gold ever repressed by thoughts of the risk incurred in snatching? Their race is as numerous as the green leaves of the forest, or as the sands on the sea shore in fierceness they are the tiger's equals, in wisdom they are almost gods! Look at the beasts which they have trained to fight their battles: the glorious war-horse, with his eye kindling to the trumpet; the dreadful blood-hound, more wily and more savage than the jaguar; look at their bright, impenetrable armor, from which your strongest shafts rebound, as from the earthfast rock; look at their cannon-shot, more perilous to man than heaven's own thunders. And then think think if a few, a mere handful of adventurers for such they were who first landed on our shores if they have subjugated half, aye! four-fifths of our nation, and that for the mere love of gold and of dominion, think what their nation would effect in its majesty and might, roused to revenge the blood of its slaughtered sons roused to uphold and vindicate the honor of its name! No! brother, no! when the first little band stepped forth from their winged canoes upon our hospitable shores, had our people then broke down upon them with the spear and mace, the death-drum and the battle-cry had they all perished to a man, and none returned across the wide, wide sea, to tell their comrades' fate them might we have been saved from the white man's dominion. But the very day that saw the first caravella spread its wings to the homeward breeze, that day, I tell you, rivetted on our necks a yoke that must endure for ever. I tell you their mariners, their very dumb and senseless galleys, know the path to and fro the trackless deep, as surely as you know the wood-tracks of our native island. For every Spanish breath you quench, a hundred, and a hundred times a hundred, will be quenched, and forever, of our own; for every drop of Spanish blood you shed, rivers shall flow of ours. The white man has an eye that descries every thing, though seas may roll between; an arm that strikes a thousand leagues aloof; a hand that, when it once hath closed upon its prey, never foregoes its hold! I have spoken! but I look not that you will believe me! Go! pour your naked hundreds against the mail-clad cavaliers; go! dash your bare breasts on their walls of granite; go! and expose your mortal flesh to the blasting breath of their cannon: and then, when all is lost, when, hunted to the last verge of the last precipice, bayed by their unrelenting hounds, cut down by their resistless steel, no longer even to be saved as the remnant of a people, ye call upon the earth to yawn and swallow ye, upon the rocks to fall and cover ye and earth and rocks are pitiless as your avenging foemen then, I say, then remember the words of her whom you murdered of your sister, your only and fond sister, who told you all these things, how they should be, and you heard not her warning, but laughed her words to scorn, and murdered her the last of your unhappy race!"

"Murdered you!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet "murdered you, Guarica!" and his dark features were convulsed, and his limbs trembled with the violence of his contending passions.

"Ay, Orozimbo! murdered; for think you that I could, even if I would, survive him and that, too, knowing him slaughtered by a brother?"

"But I have charged our warriors," he exclaimed, vehemently "but I have drawn an oath from Caonabo, to spare him in the strife, and, the war ended, to treat him as a friend and kinsman."

"And how long would your charge be heeded? until the first frenzy of the strife had turned their blood to liquid fire. And how long would Caonabo's oath be kept, after its end was answered? Tush! brother, tush! If you can so deceive yourself, so can you not deceive me; moreover, think you Hernando de Leon is the man to be spared to spare himself in such a conflict? Think you Hernando de Leon is the man to survive the extermination of his

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comrades, and to clasp in his own the reeking hands of their butchers? If he were so, he might seek some European girl to share his life, and his infamy an Indian maid would scorn him. No! Orozimbo, follow out your plans, and mark what I tell you: when the last blow is stricken, when the last heroes die around the flag—staff of their country's honor, there will be found my slaughtered love, and there will I die on his body. Go! boy; we meet on earth no more. Go, brother, to *your* duty; I have mine, likewise!"

She ended; but long before she ended, her soul—fraught eloquence, the fire and pathos that were blended in her words, and, above all, the truth of what she said, had won back the ascendancy which she had ever had over her brother's spirit the ascendancy of moral strength over physical power of mind over matter. It was now his turn to cast himself at his sister's feet, but, ere he could do so, she had caught him in her arms, and clasped him to her heart, and covered him with the chaste kisses of a sister's holy love.

"Guaricia!" he said, "dear, dear Guarica, you have prevailed. Do with me as you will; I am your slave the creature of your bidding. Only think for me, and say how I shall save my honor!"

"Go to your uncle!" she cried, impetuously. "Go straight to the wise and noble Caonabo, and say to him as I have said to thee"

"It would avail me nothing; he would either strike me to the earth, or drive me in scorn from his presence: he will endure no opposition to his will, and hear no reason. As well may you hope to turn the sun from his course, as Caonabo from his project."

"Then mark me, brother. This plot of the great cacique depends, you tell me, on his finding the fortress unprepared, and the guards negligent and off their duty?"

"Ay!" he replied, "but what of that?"

"Ask me no further. Only observe what I say: All shall go well, yet. At what time is your onslaught appointed to begin?"

"Soon after day—break"

"Then go: join your leaders take your arms; lead your followers hence; but be sure that you lead all of them: leave not a soul behind you to play the spy on me. Where do your warriors muster?"

"By the spring, which they call the 'hunter's rest,' in the woodlands, within a mile of Isabella."

"I know I know," replied Guarica; "then go, brother, go: be of good cheer; all shall go well yet. Ask me no questions; but be sure that you send scouts to mark if the Spaniards be so unprepared as you imagine, ere you proceed to the attack."

"So it is ordered, sister But you mean not "

"Ask me no questions," she replied smiling; "for I shall answer none. Whate'er I do, that will I do, honestly and wisely, and it were better for all causes that you should know naught else. Kiss me, dear brother, and farewell; it is long, long past midnight. Farewell, go to your duty, and remember"

"Never will I forget, Guarica never will I forget what you have said to me this night. By all the gods! I swear to do, henceforth, whatever you command me."

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And with the words, he seized the arms which she gave him hastily, clasped her once more in his arms, and, calling to his Indian followers, who were collected under arms already, at a short distance from the building, to follow him at their speed, he set off at a long, swinging run, over the open meadow, and through the deep woodland, toward the forest rendezvous.

Scarcely was her brother out of sight, before the girl, who had eagerly watched his departure, and satisfied herself that none of his myrmidons remained behind, applied herself hastily to collect some articles of clothing more suitable, as it appeared, than those she wore, for a long and toilsome walk through the forest. She bound a pair of stronger sandals on her feet; she girded up her dress succinctly, in a form not unlike that of the graceful Doric chiton, as represented in the statues of Diana. She took in her hand a long, light, reed-javelin, with a flint head: it may have been as a staff to support her footsteps; it might have been as a weapon of defence; and with no further preparation, alone and unprotected, save by her own high resolution by that innate and noble daring which springs from the consciousness of chastity and innocence, and truth that glorious confidence of incorrupt virginity, concerning which

"It is said that a lion will turn and flee
From a maid, in the pride of her purity."

Fearless and firm in her high self-reliance, in her yet higher trust in God, forth she went into the wild and midnight forest, upon her errand of goodwill and mercy. The sky was dim and clouded; not a star twinkled through the murky gloom; not a moonbeam checkered the dark shadows of the heavy trees: yet on she went, unshrinking and undaunted, although the howl of the wolf, and the prowling foot of the panther, came constantly to her ear; though the snake coiled itself in her path, and the tangled briars opposed her passage, still, all night long, she traveled steadily onward, in the intent to warn the garrison of Isabella of the approaching peril, that they might be on their guard in time, and that the attack and bloodshed might be spared.

Full of her noble purpose, inspired by high benevolence and immortal love with strength beyond her powers, she struggled insensible to fatigue, and superior to weak terrors but all would have been in vain, for the day was beginning to show the first pale tokens of its coming in the far east, while she was yet many miles aloof from the Spanish fortress, and cold apprehension near akin to despair, was usurping rapidly the place of high hope and confidence, when suddenly, as she turned an angle of the blind deer-path she was treading, her eye was attracted and astonished by a clear gleaming light, burning purely in the deepest part of the forest.

Holding her very breath for fear its slightest aspiration might betray her, and treading stealthily upon the fallen leaves, she stole toward it, and, ere she had gone many steps a strange sight met her eyes.

In a small sheltered glade of the forest, stretched on the ground, with their watch cloaks round them, in deep slumber, their long lances planted erect by every sleeper's head, and their bright burnished helmets at their sides, lay ten Spanish cavaliers; their tall chargers with their steel plated demipiques, champons upon their frontlets, and iron poitrels on their breasts, stood round them, linked by their chain bridles, each horse hard by his lord.

But at a little distance from the rest one man kept watch but kept watch rather as a cowed monk than as a dauntless warrior for he knelt on both his knees, with his hands clasped in earnest supplication before an exquisitely painted picture of the virgin, which he had hung, by a little chain attached to it, from the hilt of his dagger driven deep into the stem of a gigantic palm tree. It was before this picture that burned, in a small lamp of richly embossed silver, fed with some odoriferous oil, the strange clear light which she had seen through the dim aisles of the forest. It was a wild and singular scene, and worthy of the pencil of Salvator. The sweet white silvery light streaming upward, and playing over the heavenly features of Madonna, which seemed to smile in the focus of its consecrated radiance, thence flashing on the dark enthusiastic features of the kneeling warrior, dancing upon his waving plume and polished armor, and thence flickering less distinctly over the figures of his sleeping comrades, and over the large limbs of the barbed chargers, which looked even larger and more formidable when half seen in the dim and hazy lustre of the distance.

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The warrior who was kneeling at his orisons in that wild place, and at that untimely hour, was a man not above the middle height, perhaps rather under it, but very powerfully built, with broad shoulders and thin flanks, and a chest singularly prominent and deep; his arms were long and muscular, and his legs, although slightly bowed outward, perhaps from constant exercise on horseback, were unusually strong and sinewy.

His features, which were almost as dark from exposure to all sorts of weather as those of an Indian, were rather stern than comely or agreeable. But harsh and strongly marked as they were, there was an air of inborn worth and dignity, of frankness and chivalric loyalty that could not be mistaken in his whole aspect; and at times there was a wild and outflashing beam of inspiration in his large dark eye, that told of the fiery and untamed spirit of that first, best and sole knight-errant, if he might be so called, of the Western Hemisphere.

From head to heel he was sheathed in a full panoply of Spanish steel, richly wrought with gold arabesques and bosses; his casque with its tall crimson plume, which indeed he rarely laid aside, was on his head, although the avantaille was raised, displaying his bold manly features. Gilt spurs of knighthood were buckled on his heels over his greaves and shoes of burnished steel, and from a scarf of rich crimson silk hung his long two-edged broadsword.

Such was Alonzo de Ojeda, the wildest and most daring spirit, the most fiery warrior, the most perfect knight of the bold band which had left the gay courts of their native land for the fierce forays and the wild adventures of the new western world.

Fervently as he was praying to the especial object of his chivalric and imaginative worship, his ear, accustomed to every sound, however slight or distant, of the forest, caught instantly the light tread of the Indian maiden, and recognized it as instantly for a human footstep.

He started to his feet, and cried aloud "Ho! who goes there?"

And ere the last words had left his lips, all his brave partisans were afoot, and on the alert around him.

"If you be friendly," he continued, "draw near fearlessly; if foes, be on your guard!" and then turning toward his nearest comrade, "It was a woman's tread I heard, if I mistake not "

He had said but thus far, when Guarica stepped forth modestly but firmly into the circle of light which the lamp cast for a little space around the armed group, saying

"It is, Sir Knight, indeed a woman but as she is so fortunate as to recognize Alonzo de Ojeda, she knows full well that she is as safe in his presence in the wild forest, alone, and unprotected, as she would be surrounded by a hundred of her tribesmen!"

"Lady," replied Alonzo, "for *lady* you must needs be, to understand so truly the spirit and devotion of a true cavalier, you do me, I am proud to say, no more than justice. But what are your commands at this dead hour? or wherefore have you sought me thus strangely, and how have you found me? Have you wrongs to be righted, damsel, for if you have, by the splendor of the blessed virgin's brow, and by the aid of good St. James of Compostella! never more willingly laid I the lance in rest for the fairest duchess of Castile, than I will couch it now for you, who have so nobly trusted in mine honor!"

"I sought you not, Don Alonzo," answered the Charib maiden; "I sought you not, but right fortunate it is that without seeking I have found you, for life and death is on my haste, and the distance, which I cannot accomplish even in hours, your coursers will make good in minutes."

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"Your words are full of emphasis," answered Ojeda, gravely, "and you speak as one used to authority, and accustomed to command. May I know with whom I am conversing?"

"My name will avail you little, senior. It is, I think, unknown to you I am called Guarica; but if my name be strange, my lineage is well known to you I am the niece and adopted daughter of queen Anacaona."

"Of the good queen the friend of the Admiral? Say then, dear lady, what is your errand? If done it may be at all, trust me it shall be done right speedily."

"It must be so done if it be done at all. But it must be said in your private ear. It is too secret, too full of dread import, to be spoken even before your chosen comrades."

And with the words she motioned him to move a little way apart, and he followed her with an air of deep respect, which, however different from the mode of treatment most of his countrymen would have vouchsafed to an Indian girl, was perfectly in keeping with the grand though perhaps exaggerated character of his knight errantry.

Although, therefore, he moved out of earshot of his brother partisans, he did not suffer her to go so far from them that any motion on the part of either should be unseen by all; for with a delicate compunction, most honorable to his feelings, he was resolved that her reputation should in no wise suffer by her noble confidence in his integrity.

The other Spaniards, who awaited in great wonder and some surprise the issue of this strange conference, soon saw by the extreme surprise which every gesture of Alonzo indicated, that the girl's news must be indeed important. They could perceive that he asked two or three questions, which were answered readily, and it seemed satisfactorily, for after a minute or two, Alonzo raised her hand to his lips and kissed it respectfully saying,

"Thanks thanks! eternal thanks! This never shall be forgotten never! and be not alarmed, there is ample time!"

Then turning to his men, he cried in quick, commanding tones

"To horse! to horse, hastily!"

But even in the hurry and confusion which succeeded, confusion tending unto order, they could see that Guarica again spoke to him even more urgently than before, and they heard him answer,

"I promise you I promise you, upon the honor of a cavalier upon *my* honor, it shall be as you wish. Unless they return again, there shall be no bloodshed."

And again kissing her hand, he hastily put up his picture of the virgin and his hallowed lamp in his knapsack, where at all times and in all expeditions he ever carried them, mounted his warhorse, thundered his orders in a voice meant by nature for command, and spurring his horse to the gallop, rode furiously, straight as the bird flies through the forest, to the gates of Isabella.

Don Guzman de Herreiro had just ridden out of sight, as Alonzo reached the drawbridge, which he found actually lowered, with but some three or four half drunken soldiers lounging about the gate house. But ere he had been within the walls ten minutes, the drums beat to arms, the great alarm bell tolled, the gates were barricaded, and the bridges raised; cannon were loaded and extra ammunition served to the cannoneers. The Spanish flag was hoisted, and the whole garrison was mustered in full war array upon the guarded ramparts.

These preparations had been made about an hour, when two or three Indians were seen lurking about the edge of the nearest woodland, and their appearance being hailed by a flourish of trumpets, and a show of soldiers manoeuvring upon the esplanade above the gates, they instantly retired, and nothing was heard or seen that day

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from the walls of Isabella to justify the suddenness of Alonzo de Ojeda's arrival, and the alarm he had occasioned.

CHAPTER VII.

The whole of the day on which Hernan do de Leon returned from his nocturnal chase, passed gloomily; no eye of sentinel or warder beheld Don Guzman de Herreiro, nor was he at the hall wherein his comrades feasted. Hernando, on the contrary, far from his wonted temper, was there the gayest of the gay; his repartee the keenest yet most polished; his laugh the merriest; his song the most entrancing. Men who had known him for long years who had fought by his side in the wild forays with the Saracens of bright Grenada, and in the scarce less desperate encounters of the tameless Charib—men who had borne all perils of the sea, the wilderness, and worse than all, the lazar-house, with him; men who had feasted at the jovial board, and drained the wassail cup for years with him, *now* marveled; they felt as though there were something in his manner which they had never known before; a melancholy in the merriment, yet mingled with a recklessness which baffled their sagacity; a deep romantic sentiment, an all-pervading tone of profound thought in his lightest converse, blent with an air of strange abstraction a breaking off from graver subjects, and plunging into bursts of wild and furious mirth; and then again a softening of the mirth into the sweetest and the saddest touches of imagination that poet ever dreamed, or minstrel sang. Thus passed the evening meal; and when the comrades parted, the souls of many who had felt estranged, they scarce knew why, from the young cavalier, yearned to partake again his high and generous friendship, grasped his hand more warmly than they had done for months, although their present mood of kindness was in no less degree unmeaning, than had been their suspicion and distrust. Gaily they parted, with many merry comments on the unwonted absence of Don Guzman, and many a jocular conjecture as to the cause of his feigned illness; for when the trumpets had rung forth their gladsome peals of invitation to the festive board, the seneschal had borne to the presiding officer his courteous greetings, and regrets that he was ill at ease, and might not, for that day, participate in their accustomed revelries. They parted and night fell dim and silent over the Spanish fortress. Throughout that long and weary night the lamp was still replenished in the lone chamber of Don Guzman; and still from hour to hour the solitary inmate paced to and fro the floor, his long spurs clanking with a dull and heavy sound on the rude pavement; and now pausing to mutter, with clenched hands and writhing lip, fierce imprecations on his own head on the head of his detested comrade, and on the weak hand which had failed to execute his deadly purpose; now hurrying onward with unequal but swift strides, as though he would have fled the torture of his own guilty thoughts. Thus did he pass that night, in agony more bitter than the direst tortures that ever tyrant wreaked on mortal body; and when the first gray light of dawning morn fell cold and chill through the uncurtained casements of his barrack-room, it found him haggard and feverish, yet pale withal, shivering as though he were an ague-stricken sufferer. The morning gun pealed sharp and sudden from the ramparts, and far and long its echoes were repeated from the dark forests which girt in, on every side, with their interminable walls of deathless verdure, the battlements of Isabella. At the sound Guzman started, as does the miserable guilty wretch who hears the sullen bell toll the dread signal for his execution! Manning himself, however, with a start, while the blood rushed, as though indignant at his former weakness, to lip and cheek and brow, he instantly resumed his agitated walk, nor did he break it off, nor give the smallest symptom of perception, when a quick hurried blow was struck upon the panel of the door; a second and a third time was that low tap repeated, but still Don Guzman heard it not, or if he did hear, heeded not; then the door slowly opened, and a gray-headed veteran, clothed in the liveries of that noble house to which, perchance, his master was the first scion who had brought no lustre, thrust in his time-blanching locks and war-worn visage.

"Your charger, waits, *senor*," he whispered, "the hour has long gone by."

"What hour? what meanest thou? Gone by! gone by! Would would oh, would to Heaven it had indeed gone by! Ha! what," he went on, gathering strength as he spoke, and rousing himself from his wild waking dream to a perception of his true position, "ha! what hast thou then dared to suffer me to neglect it? Death to thy soul, slave! hast thou dared suffer Guzman de Herreiro to fail his plighted word?"

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"Not so, not so, mine honored lord," faltered the faithful vassal; "the hour, indeed, hath passed, when thou didst order that thy steed should stand beside the water-gate, and he hath stood and chafed there this half hour; but scarce five minutes have elapsed since, with his hawks and hounds, and his gay page, Alonzo, the gallant Don Hernando hath set forth into the forest; put but spurs to your brave Bobadil, and, ere the words are said, you shall o'ertake him!"

"Hurry, then, hurry!" shouted Herreiro, fiercely, and belting on his long Toledo, and casting his broad-leafed sombrero on his disordered locks, he rushed out with wild haste, no less to the dismay than the astonishment of his stanch servitor, whom he had summoned, almost savagely, to follow him.

Far otherwise had passed the hours of darkness to Hernando de Leon. The banquet ended he had withdrawn to his chamber, as though he had no farther object than to lie down upon a peaceful bed, that he might thence arise with the succeeding morn, to go about his wonted avocations. He had sat down before his little escrutoire, and, having finished several letters, sealed and directed them cast off his vest and doublet, and drawn from his feet his falling leathern buskins then throwing himself upon his knees beside his pallet-bed, buried his head between his hands, and for some time prayed, as it would seem, in deep though silent fervor. Rising at length erect, he spread his arms abroad, and in a clear high voice, unconscious, evidently, that he spoke aloud, "and above all, bear witness Thou," he cried, "bear witness Thou who knowest and seest all things, that not in any mortal wrath not in the mood of blind and senseless anger, nor in that selfish strain of vengeance which thinks of private injury, do I go forth unto this strife, but as unto a high and solemn duty! Not as mine own avenger for to Thee, and to Thee only, doth belong the right of vengeance but as the vindicator of society, the punisher of crime, which else must go unpunished the righter of the wronged the champion of the weak the faithful, although frail defender of thine holy law. If this be not so, forsake me thou, oh Lord! Give me up to the mercies of my direst foe suffer me to fall unavenged, unwept and unhonored! But if in truth and honor, and in right I do go forth, strike Thou, as is thy wont, for the right, likewise."

This said, he lay down quietly upon his couch, and, ere five minutes had passed over him, slept peaceably and sweetly as an infant, until the self-same gun which had aroused Don Guzman from the perturbed visions of his guilty conscience, broke his refreshing slumbers. Arising, instantly, he, too, girt on his sword, buckled his mantle over his broad chest, fixed his hat firmly on his head, and strode forth, all unsummoned, to the water-gate. There stood four noble chargers; his own proud Andalusian, with a less high-bred charger at his side, backed by the page Alonzo, who, with a merlin on his wrist, and the two powerful blood-hounds, without which never did Hernando ride forth into the wilderness, crouching before him, sat patiently awaiting the arrival of his lord. A little way aloof a menial, clad in the rich liveries of Isabel and silver, held the bay coursers of Herreiro and his old squire.

No foot did Don Hernando set in stirrup, but seizing the reins firmly in his left hand, while with his right he grasped the cantle of his demi-pique, he swung himself at once with a light leap to his charger's back. Bolt upright did the fiery creature bound into the air, tossing his stag-like head and long thin mane aloft, in glorious exultation; but firm as though he had been, like the fabled centaurs of olden time, a portion of the animal which he bestrode so fearlessly and well, the rider sat undaunted. Flinging the reins free to the impulse of the fiery horse, while he stood yet erect, he curbed him tightly up as his feet struck the sod, and slightly pricking him with his long gilded spurs, dashed off at a handgallop into the wild glades of the forest.

A short mile's distance from the walls of Isabella, embosomed in deep woodlands, there was a small savanna, scarcely a hundred yards across, clothed with short mossy grass, which, in that lovely climate, never, at any season, lost the rich freshness of its emerald verdure; for, in its farthest curve, lurking beneath the shelter of a group of tall and feathery palm-trees, there lay the basin of a tiny crystal spring, whence welling forth, in copious and perennial beauty, a silver streamlet issued and, compassing two-thirds of that small plain with its refreshing waters, stole away silently among the devious wilds through which it flowed, unmarked, into the neighboring sea. Here it was here, in this lovely and secluded spot, far far as it would seem removed from the fierce turmoils, the

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stern bitterness, the angry hatreds of the world, that the two foemen were to meet. For half an hour, at least, Hernando had sat there, motionless as a statue, upon his docile charger, awaiting, in the centre of that sylvan solitude, the coming of the man to whom, for having sought, on the preceding night, to slay him with the secret shaft of the assassin, he now extended the high privilege of striving to amend his aim in the open daylight, and fair conflict with the hidalgo's weapon.

Hard by the lovely spring, the page Alonzo had looped the bridle of his tall gray charger to the tough stem of a mimosa, and now sat on the mossy turf, toying with the gigantic hounds, which he held closely coupled, by a chain of tempered steel, riveted firmly to their stout leathern collars; while, perched on a projecting limb of the same tree to which the horse was fastened the hooded merlin dozed, with its bells ready on its yellow legs, and its light jesses hanging, all unfastened.

Just as Hernando had begun to marvel at the protracted absence of his intended slayer, the sharp and rattling clatter of a horse's gallop, tearing his route through the dense saplings of the tangled wood, was heard approaching; and, in another moment, his reins, and neck, and chest embossed with flakes of snow-white foam, and his flanks bleeding from incessant spurring, Herreiro's charger bore him, at the top of his speed, into the scene of action. As he approached, Hernando raised his hat, with the stern courtesy exacted by the strict punctilio of the duel from every honorable cavalier; yet, well schooled as he was to suppress each outward token of every inward sentiment, the noble cavalier half started as he beheld the ravages worked by a single night of anguish on the proud mein and comely features of his antagonist.

His hair, which on the previous morning had been as dark and glossy as the black raven's wing, was now not merely tangled most disorderly in hideous elf-locks, but actually streaked with many a lock of gray. While his whole visage, which, though swart and somewhat stern, had yet been smooth and seemly, was scored by many a line and furrow, ploughed deep into the flesh during those few fleet hours, by the hot ploughshares of remorse and scorching anguish. No salutation did he make in answer to the bow of his brave young opponent; but whirling his long rapier from its sheath "Draw!" he cried, "draw, sir! Look on the sun for the last time and die!" and, as he spoke, plunging his spurs even more furiously than he had done before into the bleeding flanks of his good horse, he dashed at once upon him sword in hand, hoping, it was most evident, to take him at advantage, and bear him, unprepared, to earth. If such, however, were his ungenerous and foul intent, most grievously was he frustrated by the calm skill and perfect resolution of Hernando; who merely gathering his reins a little tighter, unsheathed his keen Toledo; and without moving one yard from the spot whereon his Andalusian stood, watching with fiery eye and broad expanded nostrils, the motions of the other charger, yet showing by no symptom, save the quivering of his erected ears, that he was conscious of the coming strife extended it with the point toward Herreiro's face. On came the fierce assailant on! with the speed of light his left hand clasping the reins firmly his right drawn back, in preparation for the deadly thrust, far past his hip; while the bright point of the long two-edged blade was glittering in advance of the bay charger's frontlet! Now they are within half-sword's length and now! see! see that quick, straight flash, bright as the stream of the electric fluid, and scarce, if any thing, less rapid! it was the thrust of Guzman, well aimed, and sped with strength, that, had it reached the mark, must have propelled it through the stoutest corslet that ever bucklered breast; much more through the slight silken jerkin which was the only armor that would have opposed its brunt. Midway, however, in its glancing course it was met by the calm, firm parry of Hernando's sword; and thus, diverted from its true direction, passed harmless, slightly grazing the bridle arm of the young cavalier. On came Herreiro still and for an instant's space it seemed as though the shock of his charger at full speed must have borne down the slighter Andalusian; but scarcely had he parried that home thrust before, with a quick motion of the bridle hand so quick, indeed, that it was scarce perceptible and a slight corresponding pressure of the spur on the flank opposite, Hernando wheeled his charger to the left; feinted a thrust at his foe's face; and, circling quite around him, delivered a full sweeping cut against the back part of his neck. With perfect mastery of steed and weapon, Don Guzman met this perilous and unexpected movement. Pulling so hard on his long Moorish curb, that his horse checked at once, stood upright and almost fell backward on his haunches, he swung his sword round to the guard so actively, that the strong blow fell harmless. Then they closed hand to hand; fragments of the short mossy turf flew high into the air, spurned by the iron heels of the excited

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chargers; sparks flew from the collision of the well-tempered blades feathers were shorn, blood flowed on either side! Yet neither failed nor faltered. At length a furious down-right cut, aimed by Don Guzman full at Hernando's head, glanced from his guard, and falling on the ear of the high-blooded Andalusian, almost dissevered it! Maddened with torture, the brave brute obeyed the bit no longer, but, with a yell of agony, bolted, despite the utmost efforts of the rider. Herreiro marked his advantage, and as the horse uncontrollably dashed by him, cut, by a second rapid lounge, his adversary's rein asunder. Frantic although his horse was with pain, and freed from the direct restraint of the half useless bridle, Hernando was not carried far before he recovered mastery enough to wheel him round once more to the encounter. Perceiving, instantly, that all chance of success by rapid turns or quick manoeuvring was at an end, he now adopting his opponent's system dashed straight upon him, and when within arm's length, throwing his own reins loose, caught, with his left hand, the long silver cheek-piece of Herreiro's bit, wheeling his own horse counter to flank upon him, by the mere dint of spur without the slightest exercise of hit or bridle; and shortened, at the same time, his sword to plunge it from above into the throat of the assassin.

It seemed as though no earthly power could have availed to rescue Guzman from his desperate situation. His horse, exhausted by his own exertions, reeled visibly beneath the shock; his rapier, far extended and abroad, could by no means have parried the down-thrust, which hung above him: But in that very point of time that very second, long as a thousand ages, in which he saw the dark glance of his injured comrade's eye fixed banefully upon him; in which he noted the grim smile mantling upon his scornful lip; in which he shuddered at the gleaming point of the suspended rapier, which no effort of his own could possibly avert in that dread point of time, a yelling shout arose from all the circumjacent woodlands; a howl, as though the fiends had all broke loose, to rend the upper air with their discordant voices, and, with the yell, a volley of flint-head arrows came hurtling through the air another, and another! but, with the first, Hernando's half-won triumph ended! For as he brandished his avenging sword aloft, clear through his elevated wrist drove the long, Charib shaft; a second grazed his plume; a third, most fatal of the flight, pierced through the very heart of his proud Andalusian, and hurled him lifeless to the earth. Herreiro turned turned for base flight; but not long did his forfeit life remain to him, for, with the second volley, down went both horse and man, transfixed by fifty shafts, gory and lifeless! And the last words that smote upon his deafening ear, among the yells and whoops of the wild Charibs, were those shouted in his own sonorous tongue "This arrow for Guarica!"

And, in good truth, it was that arrow, winged from the bow of Orozimbo, that did, as he had sworn so deeply, drown the flames of his lust in his heart's blackest blood.

"Mount! mount, Alonzo mount, boy, and fly," shouted the dauntless cavalier, as he lay wounded, and encumbered by his slaughtered horse.

The bold boy heard, but obeyed him not! Forth he rushed, sword in hand forth to the rescue of his lord; and forth, at the same instant, from the forest, forth sped the Charib Caonabo and his unconquered horde, with spear, and mace, and bow, and barbarous war-cry! "Down with your sword 't is madness to resist," cried the young Spaniard: and the next second had not passed, before the servant and the master were both the fettered captives of the invincible cacique.

CHAPTER VIII.

After the death of Herreiro, and the capture of De Leon, the Charibs, who had so suddenly unmasked their ambushade, in which, with the wonted patience of an Indian, they had lain during the occurrence of events which to them must have seemed strange and inexplicable, appeared, for some short time, to be in confusion, hurrying to and fro, like bees alarmed and swarming in their hives, without any very distinct plan or method.

After a little while, however, they were brought into comparative order by the exertion of their chieftan, and were

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arrayed in five parallel columns, in the well-known Indian file; each headed by a plumed cacique, and containing, as nearly as Hernando could conjecture, each, something better than a hundred warriors.

In the mean time, Hernando, with the page, was compelled to sit down at the foot of the tree to which Alonzo's horse and the bloodhounds were attached, and were both bound firmly with their arms pinioned behind them to the mossy trunk.

An interval of nearly half an hour followed, the chiefs being continually on the look out, as if they expected messengers; and as these did not come, even more uncertainty was displayed than before in the movements of the savages, who broke their ranks, and crowded round a little knoll, at some distance, on which Hernando could perceive a tall, powerful Indian, with a plumed crown, and many ornaments of gold on his breast, and about his neck and arms, whom he took to be Caonabo, the great Charib chief; the most resolute opponent and formidable foe the Spaniards had encountered on the island.

Around this chief there was soon collected a group of chiefs, gesticulating violently, and speaking very loud; so much so that Hernando was well nigh convinced that, once or twice, he heard his own name mentioned: an idea in which he was confirmed by seeing that many of the Indians looked toward him, and two or three pointed with their hands, as the sounds which he judged to be intended for his name were repeated.

Looking more earnestly, as he now did, he thought one of the figures of the younger chiefs resembled Orozimbo; and he was certain that this person was arguing violently with the great chief, and, as he believed, concerning himself likewise.

While he was gazing with all his eyes, a deep and sudden sound came down the wind, from the direction of the Spanish town: It was the heavy din of the alarm bell, followed, almost immediately, by the faint rattle of the drums, scarce audible at that distance, calling the garrison to arms. This in an instant, put an end, as if by magic, to the confused debate.

The men hurried back into their files, the chiefs took their places at the head of each; and if it was indeed Orozimbo whom he had seen, he could no more distinguish him among the crowd: nor did he again see the person whom he had fancied to be he, during the whole course of the day.

Scarcely were the Charibs again steady in their ranks, before three or four Indian scouts came rushing up, breathless and black with sweat, from the forest, with tidings, it would seem, of great importance. For they flew straight to the gigantic chieftain, and he, after hearing their report, called out four or five of the old caciques, and held a short, grave consultation. After this, Hernando and his page were unbound from the tree, and, with their arms still fettered, placed, each apart from the other, in the centre of a file, between two stout Indians.

A word was given; it was passed from man to man, and then they began their march, silent and slow, in one long, single file, toward the dark and distant wilderness.

All day long did the wily savages retreat, through the most wild and devious recesses of the forest, toward their mountain fastnesses, forcing their hapless captives, wounded though they were, and faint and weary, to strain every muscle to keep up with them. At mid-day, for a short hour, they halted at a bright, crystal spring, deep-bosomed in the pathless wilderness, kindled their fires, and applied themselves to the preparation of their artless meal. Most picturesque and striking was the aspect of that wild halt. The white smoke, curling up in snowy columns, strangely relieved by the dark foliage; the bright and flashing fires casting their red reflections on the gigantic brows of the innumerable trees; the flexible and graceful forms of the lythe, active natives, reclining, in small groups, upon the deep, rich turf, or hurrying to and fro, with swift and agile movements their arms piled up in glittering stacks; or swinging from the limbs of the embowering shrubs. Most picturesque it was, and most romantic; and had it been at any other time, no eye would have dwelt on it with more earnest pleasure no fancy

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would have sported more poetically with all its thousand accidents of light and shade, repose contrasted with swift motion, rare grouping, and bright coloring, than that of the young Spaniard. But as he lay beneath the canopy of a superb mimosa, with his arms painfully lashed behind his back with thongs, recently cut from a raw deer-hide, his thoughts were all too painfully absorbed, too vague, wandering, and distracted, to suffer him to dwell upon, or notice, that gay spectacle.

Conjecture was at work within his brain; but, busy as it was, no clue presented itself to his mind, whereby to solve the mystery. All was dark, intricate, and gloomy! By no means could he discover or divine what could have been the cause of such an inroad; or by what strange accident he should himself have fixed the rendezvous for the precise spot where the Charibs had laid their ambuscade, for that they could have learned the premeditated duel was, on the very face of things, impossible. Why such a force of Indians should have been mustered, (for the band was, at the very least reckoning, five hundred strong,) under their most redoubted champion, merely to interrupt a combat between two Spanish warriors; or why, supposing, as it was far more natural to deem, that the true object of the expedition had contemplated some end widely different, after the accidental capture of one soldier, had the real purpose of the onslaught been laid by, and overlooked, in the delight arising from a success so slight and unimportant! Deeply, however, as he pondered, he found not, heretofore, the smallest clue whereby to reach the termination of the maze in which his thoughts were so mysteriously involved. At times, a wild and anxious terror would possess his mind with the idea that his capture must be connected in some wise with his repeated visits to the Charib maiden, whom he had so devotedly enthroned within his heart of hearts, meet idol for that magic shrine! that the most distant surmise of peril to which she should be exposed, shook his strong nerves, even as an earthquake agitates the rock-ribbed mountains. Anon, as reason told him that such fancies were the mere visionary workings of a self-tormenting spirit, his features would array themselves in a wan, sickly smile, and he would deem, for a brief moment, that cheerfulness and hope were re-established in his heart.

Thus passed the mid-day halt; the simple preparations for the Indian meal were ended, and seated on the velvet cushioned greensward, the natives ate in silence and in haste, betokening the need of rare and, to their inert and voluptuous characters, unwelcome toil and exertion. Food and a calabash of water were set before Hernando; and a significant, although mute, gesture urged him to profit by the opportunity thus offered but, though he was aware of the necessity of keeping up, as far as possible, his physical, as well as mental powers, in order to exert himself on any chance occasion to effect his own escape, and that of his loved page, from the fierce savages, the fever of his wounds, enhanced by the anxiety and burning bitterness of his soul, had parched his throat and lips, and he turned with irrepressible and painful loathing from the viands, which, though rude and simple, might well have satisfied the palate of a soldier fasting since the preceding night, and spent with toil and travel. Deeply, however, did he drink of the cool liquid crystal, with which his calabash was often and again replenished by a bright eyed youth of gentler mien, and milder features than any other of the Charibs, who, from the first, had hovered unremarked about the captives, and who now smiled cheerily upon Hernando, while ministering with something of solicitude and tenderness to his most pressing wants. After the Spaniard had exhausted at a single draught the second gourd of water, and had relapsed into the deep abstraction of his own fevered thoughts, he was half startled by the soothing pressure of a cool soft hand upon his burning brow, laving his temples with the same pure icy element which had so gratefully relieved his burning thirst turning his eyes up with a sudden impulse, he caught again the features of the slight Indian boy, which several times before had met his gaze that morning, although unnoticed in the engrossing tumult of his senses. Again a brilliant smile glanced over the dark lineaments, and a quick flashing light, as if of well-pleased recognition, leaped from the lustrous eyes. Although his face was strange, although to the best of the young Spaniard's memory, never before had those dusky features met his eyes, there was yet something in their aspect which was familiar, something which brought back Hernando knew not why bright thoughts of by-gone days, and kindled livelier hopes of future welfare something of indistinct and vague similitude to some one he had seen before, although he could not, on the instant, bring to his mind, or time, or place, or person. Thought was at work within him, to make out wherein, and to whom, lay this strange similitude, while still the gentle hand steeped his hot forehead, and the mild eyes gazed into his with almost female tenderness. Sudden it flashed upon him sudden as the electric gleam! A radiant light shot from his clouded eyes, his lips moved, and the first syllables of an Indian word were quivering on his

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tongue, when the boy instantly appreciating the meaning of that sudden lustre, assumed a grave and warning air pressed his forefinger on his lip, and waved his left hand with a gesture so slight, as to be imperceptible except to him for whom it was intended, toward the great chieftain Caonabo, who lay at a short distance under the overbowering shadow of a huge forest tree, mantled with thousands of sweet parasites, engaged in consultation as it would seem from their grave bows and quiet gestures of deep import with his superior warriors. This done, he turned away and was lost instantly to the sight of Hernando among the Charib soldiery, who were now mustering fast, their simple meal concluded, as for their onward route. Another moment, and the gigantic cacique up-started to his feet, snatched from the branch, whence they hung, his long tough bow and gaily decorated quiver, slung them across his naked shoulders, braced on his left arm a light buckler covered with thin plates of the purest gold, and grasping in his right a ponderous mace of iron wood, curiously carved, and toothed at every angle with rows of jagged shells, stalked with an air of native dignity which could not have been outdone, had it been equaled, by the noblest potentate of Europe's haughtiest court across the green savannah, and stood among his warrior subjects, the mightiest and noblest of them all the mightiest and noblest not in the vainer attributes of rank and birth alone, not in the temporal power only, which may be and oft is bestowed upon the weak of limb and low of spirit, but in the thews and sinews, the energies, the daring and the soul, the power to do and suffer, the sublime and unmoved constancy of purpose, the indomitable, irresistible resolve, the all which makes one man superior to his fellows. A moment he stood there, gazing around him with a fearless and proud glance upon the muster of his tribe's best soldiery; then speaking a few words to a tall savage, who throughout the day had been the mightiest to his person, he stalked off slowly, followed by four at least of the five hundred which composed his band, in a direction nearly at right angles to the blind path, which they had hitherto pursued, and which might be perceived beyond the little area diving right onward between walls of impenetrable verdure, into the far depths of the forest. No clash of weapons, no clang of martial instruments, no heavy tramp of footsteps betrayed the movements of that armed array. Silently, one by one, in single file, they gleamed, like ghosts, upon the eye of De Leon as they disappeared, each after each, and shot again, each after each, into sight for a moment's space among the vast trunks of the forest, through which they held their noiseless march.

Scarce had the last of this train vanished from his sight, before the same tall savage to whose ear the parting words of Caonabo had been uttered, marshaled the little band which had been left, as it would seem under his sole command. Fifty of these, bearing their long bows ready bent, with a flint-headed arrow notched on the string of each, filed off under the guidance of an old hoary headed Charib, whose wrinkled brow and lean attenuated frame would have denoted him as one unfit for deeds of toil or daring, had not they been even more distinctly contradicted by the light vigor of his every motion, by the keen fire of his glaring eye-ball, and by the sinewy grace with which he wielded his war weapons. At the same stealthy cat-like pace, which he had marked in the warriors of the larger band, these dark-skinned archers threaded the defile of the umbrageous path, which was so narrow as scarcely to admit one man, and was so densely walled by brakes of cane and prickly shrubs, that it would have been a harder task to penetrate their leafy rampart, than to carve out a path through the most powerful bastions that mortal workmen ever framed of eternal granite. A signal from the chief directed him to follow, and conscious of the entire hopelessness of any present opposition to his will, recruited somewhat by his brief repose, and cheered yet more by the imagination that in the number of his captors he had found at the least one friend, Hernando entered with a quick and springy step the dim pass, while, hard upon his heels, urging him up close to the warrior who preceded him, strode the tall figure of the Charib captain, followed in turn by the remainder of his train, with, in their midst, the frail and fettered form of the young Alonzo. Onward they marched, still onward, tracking the windings of that narrow road, through the deep matted swamp, over the rocky ledge, among the giants of the forest! still walled at every point by masses of luxuriant verdure, so dense as to make twilight of the scorching noonday, still so defined that a blind man might have groped out his way unerring, and still so strait that it was utterly impossible for two to go abreast.

The only changes in the dark monotony of this dim defile were when it forded some wild torrent brawling along in gloomy discontent among the tangled thickets, or when it crossed, upheld on narrow causeways of rude logs, some woodgirt pool, half lake and half morass, where, for a little space, the weary eye might strive to penetrate the arched vista through which foamed the restless streamlet, or dwell upon the dull and lead-like surface of the

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small standing pool. Onward they marched, still onward! The sun, which all unmasked had climbed the height of heaven, and all unseen descended to its western verge, stooped like a giant bridegroom to his bed, and a more dull and browner horror overspread the trackless forest. The stars came out in the translucent skies, spangling the firmament with their unnumbered smiles, but not one mirthful glance might penetrate the solid vault of greenery which overcanopied their route the broad, bright moon soared up far over the tangled tree-tops, and here and there a pencil of soft lustre streamed downward through some verdant crevice, and a mild, hazy light diffused itself even in that murky avenue. Onward they marched, still onward, at one unwearied, even, silent pace. No halt was made at even-tide, no halt at the deep midnight, and the young Spaniard, proud though he was of his capacity to bear, well trained in every manly and martial exercise, felt that he was but a child in strength, and in activity, among the dark sons of the forest. The boy, Alonzo, had long since given out, and had been borne an unresisting and almost insensible weight in the stout arms of two powerful savages. Onward they went, still onward, and it was only by the utmost and most resolute exertion that Hernando could maintain the steady, swift pace which his captors held, without one pant disturbing the calm tenor of their breathing, or one sweat-drop appearing on their muscular, swart frames.

Daybreak was near at hand a deeper gloom had followed on the setting moon the stars had waned, and a chill freshness in the air betokened the approach of morning, although the skies were yet untinged by any gleam of light, when a low whistle was heard from the head of the long file; man by man it passed rearward, and all halted. After a second's space there was a forward movement; and, after a few steps, Hernando might perceive that the path opened somewhat, and that the men who went before him, fell orderly and steadily as they advanced, into a column of three front; halting, however, as they did so, in order that no interval might be left in their line of march. Then scarcely had he moved half a yard beyond the spot whereat the wider road commenced, before the tall chief mentioned heretofore, and the man next behind, moved simultaneously, by a quick, pard-like spring to either side of him, and grasped his arms above the elbow with a firm, though not painful pressure.

Meanwhile the heavens had brightened somewhat, and he might see that a huge rocky hill, or, as it might have been termed, not inaptly, mountain rose suddenly, an abrupt and giant barrier, directly in their front. A narrow road, climbing the height by different precipitous zigzags, so steep and rugged that even the well-breathed and active natives were forced, from time to time, to pause in the ascent, to catch their failing wind, scaled this vast front of bare and shrubless rock; and, as they paused at every angle, Hernando might look back upon the little progress they had made, and mark the almost insuperable difficulties which would present themselves to the advance of any civilized force by so untamed a road. Rough as it was, however, and difficult of access, an hour of constant labor brought them in safety to the summit, where a scene widely different from the bleak herbless crags which with so much of labor they had scaled, presented itself to the Spaniard's eyes. A table of rich fertile land, of many miles circumference, was here outspread upon the ledgy top of the huge hill, which fell abruptly down on every side, a precipice of several hundred feet in sheer descent, accessible alone by steep and zigzag paths, like that up which his weary feet had painfully surmounted its ascent. Groves of the freshest verdure towered high above the black and broken rocks which walled them in on every side, fields richly clothed with the tall maize, rustled and twinkled in the morning air streamlets of crystal water meandered to and fro until they reached the steep brink, whence they plunged in bright and foaming cataracts down to the vale below and here embosomed in the verdant groves, circled with rich and fertile fields, watered by rills of most translucent water; here, on a summit never before trodden by the feet of European, lay the secluded fastness of the Charib Caonabo a village larger and more neatly built than any which Hernando had yet seen in the fair island of Hispaniola. Some two, or at the most three hundred cottages, of the low Indian fashion, with roofs thatched by the spreading palmleaves, and pillared porticos scattered about in careless groups, irregularly mixed with groves and gardens, were carefully surrounded by a deep ditch, supplied with water from a dam upon a neighboring streamlet and a stockade composed of massive timbers of the already famous iron-wood, framed with much skill and ingenuity, in imitation of Spanish palisades. Columns of smoke were curling gaily upward from every cottage roof, and lights were glancing cheerily from every open door and wide unlatticed casement; and merry voices rung in friendly converse or unthinking song, through the long village streets; but none came forth to greet, or cheer the wounded weary stranger, who was dragged on right on wistfully eyeing the bright firesides, and listening with envious

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ears to the gay sounds of merriment, among which he stood alone and almost hopeless. At length, when he had passed every house when the lights and sounds had faded into distance, the hand which might be said to bear, rather than now to lead him onward, halted before a towering pile of rock, upon the farther verge of the small area of table land contiguous to the stern precipice. A light was procured instantly by one of the inferiors of the tribe, and by it was revealed a natural aperture in the dark rock, defended by a grated wicket, composed, like the stockade, of massive beams of iron-wood, securely fastened by a lock of Spanish manufacture. A key was instantly produced from the tall chieftain's girdle, and without any word of explanation the gate was opened, the Spaniard's bonds were loosened, a pile of cloaks of the rude native cotton was flung down in a dark recess of the cave which, by the dim light of the flickering torch, appeared to be of immense magnitude. Hernando was thrust violently in, the torch extinguished, and the gate closed on the moment locked and double-locked behind him. For a short time he listened to the departing footsteps of his captors, and then, outdone with weariness and wo, muttered his hasty prayers, and throwing himself down at full length on the simple pallet, slept heavily and soundly until the sun of the succeeding day was high in the blue heavens, when he awoke again to the recollection of his griefs, and the feverish torture of his wounds.

CHAPTER IX.

The sun was high in heaven, when Hernando de Leon awoke from the deep but perturbed and restless slumbers which, induced by the fever of his wounds, and the toilsome journey of the preceding day, had fallen on him almost before his limbs were stretched upon their temporary couch. The bright rays streaming in between the massive beams that barred the portal of his dungeon, full of ten thousand dancing motes, had fallen full upon his face, and uncurtained eyelids, dazzling the orbs within; so that when he upstarted from his dreamless sleep, it was a moment or two before he could so far collect his thoughts as to discover where he was, or what had been the circumstances which placed him in that wild abode. By slow degrees, however, the truth dawned on his mind, and with the truth that dull sense of oppression, that dense and smothering weight, which to souls of the highest order and most delicate perceptions, seems ever to attend the loss of liberty. For awhile, therefore, he brooded gloomily and darkly over the strange events of the past day; the singular mode in which he had been so unexpectedly entrapped, the unexplained and unintelligible conduct of the savages, and, above all, the motives which had influenced them in their treatment of himself.

Thence his thoughts strayed, by no unnatural transition, to the mild features and kind ministry of the Charib boy; and when he probed his memory, he clearly recollected him to be one of the slaves of Orozimbo's household, though from this he could draw no plausible conjecture, either for good or evil. After a little space, wandering again, his spirit began to reflect upon the chances of his liberation; nor did he meditate long on this topic, before he came to the conclusion that for his present escape from the hands of the fierce cacique, and for his ultimate return to the settlements of his countrymen, he must rely entirely on his own energies. Hope of assistance from without was evidently desperate. The speed and secrecy with which the Indians had conducted their retreat the ignorance of all his comrades respecting his own movements on that eventful morning the death, flight or capture of all those who had been privy to the time or place of his encounter with Herreiro, and above all the great and almost certain probability that some ulterior object, involving inroads on the Spanish posts, of magnitude sufficient to engage their occupants exclusively in their own self-preservation, had drawn the wily Caonabo to such a distance from his usual fastnesses, all these considerations led the young captive to believe that on himself alone, on his own often tried resources, on his own resolute will and unflinching nerves, on his own deep sagacity and dauntless courage, on his own hardihood of heart and corresponding energy of thews and sinews, depended all his hope of extrication from an imprisonment which promised to be long indeed, and painful, unless it should be brought to a more speedy, though no less unwished termination through the medium of a violent and cruel death.

Stimulated, by reflections such as these, to something of exertion, Hernando rose from his lowly couch, with the intent of exploring, to the utmost, the secrets of his prison-house, which, so far as the uncertain light, checkered

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and broken by the gratings through which it found its way, permitted him to judge, seemed of considerable depth and magnitude, when, to his great surprise, as he raised himself, he perceived that, during his slumbers, his dungeon had been visited by some one who had left, hard by his pillow, a calabash of pure, cold water, with a slight meal of fruits and the cassava bread, which formed the principal article of nutriment among the simple Indians. So sound, however, had been his sleep, that the noise of opening the heavy creaking gate had fallen unheard and unheeded on his dulled senses. To lave his heated brow and hands, in the cool element to quaff a long, long draught, more soothing, in his present temper, than the most fragrant wines of Xenos, or the yet more renowned and costly Val de Peñas was his first impulse; but when refreshed and reinvigorated by the innocent cup, he turned to taste the eatables before him, his very soul revolted from the untouched morsel, the rising spasm of the throat, the *hysterica passio* of poor Lear, convulsed him; and, casting the food from him, he buried his hot aching temples in his hands, and remained for many minutes, plunged, as it were, in a deep stupor then, by a mighty effort, shaking off the lethargic gloom, he drank again more deeply than before, sprung to his feet, and strode, with firm and rapid steps, several times to and fro the area of his prison, immediately within the wicket, where fell the brightest glances of the half-interrupted sunlight.

"Shame, shame!" he cried, at length giving articulate expression to his thoughts "shame, shame on thee, Hernando! to pine and give way thus beneath the pressure of so slight an evil for what is this to thy hard soul cankering captivity, among the savage paynimry of Spain where fettered to the floor thou languishedst for nine long months, unvisited by the fair light of Heaven. Shame! it must not be?" and he manned himself, upon the instant, by a single effort, and, turning from the light, explored with cautious scrutiny each nook and angle of the cavern. It was of large extent, wide, deep, and full of irregular recesses; and seemed to have been used as a species of magazine, or store-house; for piles of dried fish, baskets of wicker-work heaped with the golden ears of maize, or roots of the cassava, cumbered the floor; while on rude shelves were stowed away the simple fabric of the Indian broom, mattings, and rolls of cotton cloth, fantastically dyed, and in one the most secret nook, protected by a wooden door, a mass of glittering ornaments, some wrought of the purest gold, and others of the adulterated metal, which the savages termed *guanin*, breast-plates, and crowns and bracelets, enough to have satisfied the avarice insatiate of a Pizarro or a Cortez. Nor were these all; for visible amid the darkness, by the rays which their own gorgeous substance concentrated, lay bars, and ingots and huge wedges, of the virgin metal, beside a pile of unwrought ore, gleaming with massy veins, of value utterly uncalculable. Slight was the glance which the young Spaniard cast upon these more than kingly treasures a single crevice opening to the outer air had been to him a discovery more precious than the concentrated wealth of all the mighty mines of the new world a single coat of plate, with helm and buckler, and a good Spanish blade to match them, he would have clutched with hands that scorned the richer metal but these were not; and he turned from the cacique's treasury with a heedless air, to resume his hitherto unprofitable search. Not far did he go, however, before another wooden door presented itself, closed only by an inartificial latch, which yielded instantly to his impatient fingers. It opened and before him extended a huge and stately hall, for such it seemed, wide as the cloistered chancel of some gothic pile, and loftier; walled, paved and vaulted by the primeval hand of nature, first and unrivalled architect, with the eternal granite not as the outer chamber, obscure, or dimly seen by half-excluded daylight but flooded with pure, all-pervading sunshine, which poured in unpolluted and unveiled, through the vast natural arch which terminated the superb arcade. His heart leaped, as it seemed, with the vast joy of the moment, into his very throat! All suffering, all anxiety, all wo was instantly forgotten! for he was free! free as the fresh summer wind that was tossed round his head, rife with the perfumes of a thousand flowing hills! free as the glowing sunshine that streamed through that broad portal! With a quick step, and bounding pulse, he leaped toward the opening! he reached! he stood upon the threshold! Wherefore that sudden start? wherefore that ashy pallor pervading brow and cheek and lip? One other step, and he had been precipitated hundreds of feet from the sheer verge of the huge rock, which fell a perpendicular descent of ninety fathom, down to the cultured plains below! His feet were now tottering upon the very brink, and it required more than an ordinary effort of his strong active frame to check the impulse of his forward motion, which had been so impetuously swift, that but a little more would have sufficed to hurl him into the empty air. With a dull leaden weight that sudden disappointment crushed down the burning aspirations of his soul his heart fell sick within him he clasped his hands over his throbbing temples he was again a captive! It was, however, but for a moment he was unmanned. Before a second had elapsed, he was

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engaged with all his energies, in the examination of the smallest peculiarities of the place, hoping, alas! in vain, that he should still discover there some path whereby to quit his prison-house; but not the faintest track not the most slight projection, whereon to plant a foot, was there above, below, to right and left of that huge arch, the massy precipice was smooth and hard and slippery as glass and, after a minute inspection, the Spaniard was reluctantly compelled to own to his excited hopes, which fain would have deceived themselves, that nothing had been gained by his discovery beyond the powers of gazing forth over the beauties of that boundless scene, which stretched away, for miles and miles, beneath his feet to the blue waters of the ocean, which lost themselves in turn in the illimitable azure of the cloudless skies. Wistfully did he strain his eyes over the wide-spread plain, which from that lofty eminence showed, map-like and distinct, its every variation of hill, or sloping upland, tangled ravine, or broad and fertile valley, clearly delineated by the undulations of those mighty shadows which thrown by the strong sunshine from a hundred sweeping clouds careered like giant beings over the glittering landscape. Many an Indian village did he mark nestling beneath the umbrage of its sheltering palms, or perched upon some bold projection around the base of which murmured, with chafing waters, some one of those bright streams, hundreds of which might be seen glancing gold-like to the morning sun; but though he gazed till his eyes ached, he could descry no token of his countrymen. The settlements of Isabella were either too far distant to be reached by any human glance, or were, more probably, concealed by some dark forest-mantled hill; for he could neither discover them, nor recognize the curvature of the fair bay on which they stood. Suddenly, while he yet lingered over this distant prospect, a faint sound burst on his ear a sound oft heard and unforgotten; though so faint, that now it scarcely rose above the whisper of the breeze waving the myriad tree-tops of that untrodden solitude; and the small voice of the far river whose angry roar was mellowed, by the influence of distance, into a soft and soothing murmur. He started, and glanced hurriedly around again that sound nearer and clearer than before the remote din of ordnance! Toward the east he gazed, and there, winding their quiet way through the calm waters in close propinquity to the green margin of the isle, he saw four caravellas, with every snow-white sail spread to the favoring gales, with fluttering signals streaming from their mastheads, and by their oft repeated salvos, soliciting the notice of their countrymen. It was it was, past doubt, the squadron of Columbus long wished for, and arrived too late! That squadron, which he had so fondly, anxiously desired, the pledge and sanction of his nuptials with his adored Guarica which was even now making its destined harbor, while he a hopeless captive lay in a living tomb, his fate unknown, his prison unsuspected and she, his dark-eyed love, enduring he knew not what of disappointed love, of intense yearning, and of hope deferred perchance of barbarous outrage, prompted by the suspicion or the jealousy of her wild kinsmen. Hopeless, although he was, he watched those caravellas with a gaze as eagerly solicitous as that which the benighted sailor keeps on the beacon of his safety while, one by one they were lost to his sight behind some towering promontory, and reappeared again, each after each, glittering forth with all their white sails shimmering in the meridian light. At length he might behold them shortening sail, as though their haven was at hand, and by and by they shot into the shadow of a wide wood-crowned hill; and, though the waterer kept his post until the sun was bending down toward the western verge of the horizon, they issued not again upon the azure waters, beyond that mass of frowning verdure. With a heart sicker than before, he had already turned away, in order to go back into the outer cavern, when a sharp whizzing sound beside him attracted his attention, and ere he could look around the long shaft of a Charib arrow splintered itself against the rocky archway, and fell in fragments at his feet. The first glance of the dauntless Spaniard was outward, to descry, if possible, the archer who had launched that missile, and with so true an aim! Nor was he long in doubt for perched on a projecting crag of the same line of cliffs, wherein was perforated the wide cave, within the mouth of which he stood, a hundred yards, at the least calculation, distant, he saw the Charib Orozimbo. A quiver was suspended from his shoulders, and a long Indian bow was yet raised in his right hand, to the level of his eye; but by the friendly wafture of his left, he seemed to deprecate the notion that he was hostilely inclined. Again he waved his hand aloft, pointed toward the broken arrow, and turning hastily away, was out of sight before Hernando could reply to his brief amicable gestures. As soon as he had roused his scattered energies of mind, the youthful Spaniard turned his attention to the fragments of the splintered shaft, and instantly discovered a small packet securely fastened to the flint head. Tearing it hence with eager haste couched in the Spanish tongue, and traced upon the scrap of parchment by a remembered hand he read the following sentences:

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"Be of good cheer friends are about us. When the moon sets to-night, watch at the cavern mouth a clue of thread shall be conveyed to thee, by which thou shalt draw up a cord sufficient for thy weight means of escape shall wait thee at the cliff's foot. These, through the Charib Orozimbo, from thine

Alonzo."

He tore the billet on the instant into the smallest fragments, and lest some prying eye should fall on its contents, scattered it piecemeal, through the rocky porch to the free winds of heaven. This done, he looked about him carefully for some projection of the rock whereunto he might fix the rope, on which he was to wing his flight down that precipitous abyss, that no time might be wasted when the appointed hour should come, for the adventure; and soon discovered a tall stalactitic pillar, close to the brink of the descent, the strength of which he tested by the exertion of his utmost power. Satisfied now, that he had nothing more to do, but to avoid suspicion, and to await the action of his friends without, he returned instantly to the exterior cave secured the door with care, and dragging back the cotton mattress on which he had slept the preceding night into the darkest angle of the prison, stretched himself on it to expect, as patiently as might be, the approach of evening. Not long had he lain there, before a grim-visaged old wrinkled warrior entered with a supply of food and water. Without a word, this tawny jailer deposited his load on the rocky floor, and then, with uncouth courtesy, applied fresh bandages, besmeared with some sweet-scented Indian salve, which acted almost magically to the refreshment of the wound upon the wrist, which had been pierced by the Charib arrow. Having done this, he peered about with silent scrutiny, into each angle and recess of the cave-dungeon, and then, having severely tested the strength of the wooden barriers, swung to and locked the heavy lattice, and departed. Slowly the hours of daylight lagged away, but to the slowest and the longest term, its end must come, and gradually the long shadows, which the setting sun threw over that green landscape, melted into the dimness of the universal gloom, and one by one the stars came out in the dark azure firmament, and all was still and sweet and breathless. Anon, the moon came forth, climbing the arch of Heaven in her pure beauty, and bathing all on earth in peaceful glory. It seemed, to the excited spirits of Hernando, as if she never would complete her transit over the deep blue skies, and it was with no small exertion that he compelled himself to wait the time appointed. Well for him was it that he did so! for when she attained her central height, a band of dusky warriors, with the great Cacique Caonabo at their head, well armed with spears and warclubs, and equipped with many and bright torches, paused at the grated entrance, and summoned him to show himself to them, his captors. After this measure, evidently of precaution, he was left quite alone, and shortly after, he fell asleep for a short space, although his slumbers were disturbed and broken; and the moon had not set, although her lower limb was sinking fast into the forest when he awoke. Cautiously he peered out through the dungeon gate to see that all was still without, ere he should seek his post, then, satisfied that no spies were upon the watch, he noiselessly unclosed the inner door, fastened it softly after him, and stealing through the larger cavern, showed his tall figure in the archway just as the last ray of the moon glanced on the cliffs around him, ere she should disappear. She sunk, and all was gloom. A moment a shrill sharp whistle rung on the night air, and again a shaft whizzed by him and fell harmless. A slight thread was attached to it, which fathom after fathom he drew in, until a stronger line supplied its place, and next a stout cord, and at length, the promised rope! With eager hands, he gathered it link after link, coil after coil, fastened it to the lofty stalactite, and, after having tried, by a sudden jerk, the safety of the knot, leaned forth over the rocky brink to see if thence he might descry aught of his trusty friends. Diminished by the distance, into a twinkling gleam, scarce larger than the fire-fly's spark, at the crag's base, there blazed a single torch, and, this slight glimmer seen, without one word or doubt, the dauntless youth grasped the stout cable, and launched himself over the perilous brink into the viewless bosom of the air. The rope had been prepared with knots at each foot of its length, through every one of which was thrust a tough bamboo, forming a rude extempore step-ladder; yet, though facilitated somewhat, the descent into that black, and as it seemed, bottomless abyss, was still perilous in the extreme, and yet less perilous than fearful. Steadily, however, did Hernando, grasping the short rungs with an iron gripe, and planting his feet one by one, descend that fearful ladder; nor, till he stood unseathed on the firm soil below, did his brain reel, or his stout nerves tremble; and there, recovering from the transient tremor and bewilderment that fell upon him, he found himself clasped in the fond arms of the faithful Guarica, while round them gathered the bold page, Alonzo, and Orozimbo, the true Charib boy, Guarica's youthful brother; who had alone, designed with skill and with

success, accomplished this desperate adventure of escape.

CHAPTER X.

Brief time had the young Spaniard and his Indian princess for explanation, or for converse, for while she was yet clasped to his grateful breast in the first sweet embrace of love, a long wild yell rung far into the bosom of the night from the cave's mouth above, and the broad glare of a hundred torches, tumultuously brandished by as many strong and savage hands, disclosed to the eyes of the astounded fugitives the fierce cacique himself, surrounded by the flower of his wild chivalry, armed at all points, with bow and buckler, war-club and javelin, and pike, thronging the rocky threshold of that deserted dungeon. Each swarthy figure stood out revealed on that bold eminence like animated sculptures of the far-famed Corinthian brass; the sinewy frames, the well developed muscles, nay! more, the very features of every stern cacique, the plummy crowns, and pictured quivers, all clearly visible and palpably defined against the fierce red glow which formed the back ground to that animated picture. Brief time was there, indeed! for instantly discovering the mode by which the fugitive had left his place of confinement, and guessing that his flight was but recent for though the crimson glare of their resinous torches rendered the group above as visible as daylight could have done, it lacked the power to penetrate the gloom which veiled the little knot of beings at the base of that huge precipice. Two of the boldest of the great cacique's followers addressed themselves to the pursuit by the same fearful and precarious ladder; while many others might be seen casting aside the heavier portions of their dress and armature, and girding up their loins for a similar purpose.

"Haste, haste, Hernando," whispered the Indian maiden, in a voice that fairly trembled with agitation "haste to you thicket by the stream fly thou, Alonzo, and unbind the horses! Come, Orozimbo brother!"

And as she spoke, grasping her lover by the arm, she hurried him away to a dense mass of thorny brushwood, which, overcanopied with many a vine and many a tangled creeper, clothed the banks of a wide, brawling streamlet, flowing with a loud, incessant murmur, though in a slender volume, over a bed of gravel, and small rocky fragments, detached, in the lapse of ages, from the tall crag that overhung it. Here, fastened to the branches, stood three Spanish chargers, equipped with the lightest housings then in use, except that one, in addition to the saddle, was provided with a velvet cushion attached to the cantle, and kept in its place by a thong, securing it to the richly plated crupper.

"Mount, mount, Alonzo," cried the maiden; "stay not to hold your master's stirrup; mount, and delay not! Every minute now is worth a human life!" While yet the words were on her lips, the page had leaped into his saddle, and swinging her slight form, with scarce an effort, to the croup of the tall charger, Hernando, without setting foot in stirrup, vaulted into the saddle before her, grasped the reins firmly with a practiced hand, and stirring his steed's mettle with the spur, role a few paces down the channel of the stream, till he had reached a place clear from the overbowering brushwood. The boy Alonzo followed hard on his traces, leading the third horse by the bridle, at his side.

"Where oh where tarries Orozimbo?" whispered again the Charib maiden, in a sweet low voice of her native tongue "without him, all is naught!"

Ere she had finished speaking, they cleared the thicket, and by the strong illumination of the lights above, a fearful scene was rendered visible. The foremost two of the pursuers were half way down the ladder, while three of their followers had commenced their perilous descent, and were now hanging to the topmost rungs! But where was Orozimbo? for though the torch-light was of far more avail to them, who profited by its partial lustre from a distance, than to those whose eyes, blinded by its near presence, looked abroad vainly into the surrounding darkness the bottom of the precipice, and all the thicket round, were buried in impenetrable gloom. Where where was Orozimbo?

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A sharp twang broke the silence which had succeeded to the yell of the infuriate Indians. A keen, sharp ringing twang! a hurtling sound, as of some missile in quick motion, followed a long, dark streak was seen almost immediately glancing within the circling radiance of the torches, toward the leading Charib at the next instant he relaxed his hold a piercing yell of anguish and despair pealed up to the dark heavens headforemost the tawny savage plunged earthward and the soft, heavy plashing noise announced, as plainly as the clearest words could tell, that not one bone remained unbroken after that fearful fall! Another twang and yet another! and almost simultaneously, with the small, shrill voice of the fatal cord, another, and another of the wretched Indians, transfixed by the unerring shafts of Orozimbo, were precipitated one shrieking hopelessly but incessantly through the deaf air, until the awful crash finished his cries and agonies together one mute in his stern despair from their slight foothold; while, daunted by the deadly archery of their unseen enemy, and ignorant how many foes were launching death at every shot among them, the survivors retreated up the ladder, with wild haste, and when they reached the summit, a long drawn yell, strangely expressive of malice frustrated, and disappointed vengeance, told those who heard it from below that they abandoned that precarious method of pursuit. Another moment, and the light passed from the verge, and a loud burst of dissonant and angry voices, receding rapidly, betokened that the pursuers had turned off to seek some easier exit from the hill-fortress.

Secured thus, by the bravery and foresight of her stripling brother, from a pursuit so instantaneous that escape would have been scarce possible, Guarica called aloud, no longer fearing to betray their proximity to the enemy by her words:

"Hasten, good brother, hasten! We tarry for thee, Orozimbo," and guided by the accents of her well known voice, panting from the rapidity of his previous motions, and from agitation in a scarcely less degree, with his full quiver rattling on his naked shoulders, and the long bow, which had of late done such good service, swinging at his back, the Charib boy darted down the slight declivity, and, wreathing his hand lightly in the courser's mane, bounded at once upon his back.

"Follow, Guarica; follow me close: there is no time for words," he exclaimed, as he snatched the bridle, and dashing at once into a gallop, drove down the pebbly channel of the stream the small stones and water flashing high into the air at every stroke of the fleet steed, and indicating to Hernando the direction which his guide had taken. No easy task was it, however, to ride down that wild watercourse; for though the streamlet was so shallow that it barely reached the horses' knees, the rugged inequalities of its bed here thickly interspersed with rough and craggy fragments, here paved with slippery boulders, and there with broad smooth ledges of hard slaty rock, polished by the incessant rippling of the current, till ice itself hardly would have afforded a less treacherous foothold rendered it perilous indeed, save to a cavalier of the first order, to put a horse to his speed among its numerous obstacles. At first, the youthful Spaniard could not conceive the cause which should have tempted Orozimbo to lead him by so strange a path; but busy as he was in holding up and guiding the stout charger which nobly bore his double freight, his mind was actively employed: and almost on the instant, remembering the instinct, scarcely inferior to the scent of the sagacious bloodhound, with which the Charib tribes were wont to follow on the track of any fugitive, he saw the wisdom of this singular precaution. For something more than two hours they dashed on unwearied, through the sparkling waters, which, driven far aloft, had dragged all their garments from the buskin to the very plume the stream now wending in bold curves through rich and fair savannahs, now diving into the most devious shades of underwood and forest. Still on they dashed, whether the free night-wind, laden with its freight of ten thousand dewy odors, sweeping across the open meadows, brought freshness to their heated brows or the damp mistwreaths of the steamy forest chilled the very life-blood in their veins. Still on they dashed, rousing the wild fowl from their sedgy haunts on the stream's margin, scaring the birds of night from their almost impervious roosts, till now the stars began to pale their ineffectual fines, and a faint streak on the eastern sky, to tell of coming day. They reached a smooth green vega, broader than any they had passed or seen, and here, for the first time, Orozimbo paused from his headlong race.

"All is well, now, Guarica pursuit is far behind; two leagues hence, just beyond that fringe of wood which you may see glooming dark against the opening morn, tarry your gallant kinsmen, Don Hernando. Many will blame us

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for the deeds which we have wrought in thy behalf, young Spaniard. All our countrymen *must* hate us, and if we 'scape this 'venture, our future home must be within the scope of Spain's all-powerful protection. All peril is over now for a space, and if thou art weary, my sweet sister, here may we rest a while."

"No, no!" Guarica interrupted him, breathless from the wild speed at which they had thus far journeyed. "No, no! no, no! we will not pause till we have reached the cavaliers."

"At least, however," interposed Hernando, using the Indian tongue, which was no less familiar to him than his native language "at least, let us, if we be free from present danger, ride somewhat gently, in order that our steeds may so regain their wind, and be in ease again to bear us stoutly, if aught should call for fresh exertion of mettle."

"Be it so," answered Orozimbo, turning his horse's head, and riding as he spoke up the green margin of the rivulet, till he stood on the level meadow, where he was joined by his companions "Be it so. Well I am assured no foeman could have followed with such speed as to be less than two leagues distant in our rear and on this open plain none can approach us undetected. One hour's advance will bring us to a band of horsemen, under the bold Ojeda, that would contemn the might of Caonabo's tribe.

Taking the lead once more, he trotted gently forward, the daylight brightening more and more till the great sun burst from the cloudy veil that curtained his bright orient chamber, and filled the earth with lustre and rejoicing. Oh, how sweet to the weary fugitives was that glad sun-burst, awakening, as it did upon the instant, the matutinal chorus of ten thousand joyous warblers, and calling forth unnumbered odors from the uprising flowers, which had lain sad and scentless during the absence of that glorious bridegroom. Hope, which had languished in their bosoms during the long night hours, was now at once transmuted, by nature's wondrous alchemist, into a gay and cheery confidence. Love, which, oppressed by doubt, anxiety and care, had been remembered only to aggravate their sorrows and increase their apprehensions, resumed, beneath that gladsome light, its more legitimate and wonted functions, and, before many moments had elapsed, Hernando was recounting to the attentive ears of the sweet Indian girl his confident and certain expectations of an immediate termination to all the obstacles which had thus far opposed their union, while he inquired eagerly into the late mysterious history of his surprise, imprisonment and rescue. Few words sufficed to make all clear. Chance, alone blind and sudden chance had brought about his capture a chance which had in fact preserved the Spanish settlements from certain peril probable destruction. Apprised, as has been mentioned heretofore, of the relaxed discipline and contemptuous negligence of military usages which had crept on the garrison during the absence of its great commander, the wily Charib had assembled all his bold tributary hordes, and was even then in full march to commence an onslaught on walls which he most assuredly would have found mounted with culverins unloaded and watched or unwatched rather by sentinels unarmed and sleeping. And despite the exertions of Guarica, had the assailants not been delayed by the arrival of the duelists and the protracted conflict which held the Charibs gazing in mute wonder, Ojeda's tidings would have been all too late to save the city from surprise. As it was, he arrived just in time; and the report of Caonabo's scouts, who reported the garrison to be so thoroughly on the alert that it was clear they must have received intelligence, determined the cacique to retreat instantly, and wait a better opportunity.

Hernando's eyes had not deceived him; for it was in truth Orozimbo, whom he had seen disputing with Caonabo; and, as he surmised, it was concerning himself that the argument was maintained so angrily; the young man insisting on his release, and his uncle, maddened by his disappointment, refusing positively to keep the word which he had plighted for his safety.

This refusal perhaps it was which, awakening a generous indignation on the boy's part, determined him, yet more than his sympathy in his beloved sister's affection, to effect by one means or other the escape of the young Spaniard. In this intent, he judged it best to accompany the band on their march; and to carry out his plans better he appeared to acquiesce in his uncle's views, and avoided all communication with, or apparent interest in the prisoner.

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Within half an hour of the capture, however, he contrived to send off news of what had happened to his sister, by a messenger on whom he could rely, desiring her to seek aid from the very man to whom she was most willing to apply, Alonzo de Ojeda; and to meet him prepared with horses, and with Spanish aid at hand, the next morning at a point which he indicated.

Arrived at the hill fortress, he easily obtained the release of Alonzo, on whom the Charibs set no value, no condition that he should be blindfolded until he was some miles distant from the fort.

This once conceded, he seemingly gave up all farther interest in Hernando; and, on pretence of conveying the boy homeward, had an interview with his father and Ojeda, arranged all the farther particulars of the escape, and conducted it with an energy and skill which ensured its complete success.

The only danger that remained now to be apprehended was that some roving band, several of which Orozimbo knew to be out, might discover the bivouac of Ojeda's horsemen, and, suspecting an escape, attempt to ambush the fugitives. Of this, however, there appeared to be little risk, conducted, as their flight had been, with so much craft and discretion; and, if the worst should fall out, it would be but a seeming skirmish, from which, well armed and mounted, there was but little to be feared.

All this Hernando soon learned from his sweet companion; and, as they careered, easily and freely, over the fair, green plain, which stretched for miles around them, and on whose broad champaign existed neither dingle, brake, nor glen to shade a lurking foeman, the certainty of safety and of freedom lent wings to the young lover's buoyant and exstatic soul. Well mounted and well armed with weapons of offence for with his charger the bold and wary partisan had failed not to send rapier and pistols, and battle-axe he would have cared but little had he been destined to fall in with a score of roving Indians, but as it seemed no such encounter was to be looked for, much less apprehended.

And now the wide savannah was already passed, and at the verge of the forest, within a short half mile of the spot where Ojeda waited their arrival, with ears and soul intent on every sound that might betoken their approach, they had to cross a narrow streamlet, running between deep and wooded banks. Orozimbo, who was their guide, still led the way, was in the middle of the ford, while Hernando with the maiden was descending the steep path which led to it, when the well known twang of the Indian bow was heard, and an arrow whizzed through the air, so truly aimed that it passed through the Spaniard's high-crowned hat.

"Push on," cried the quick-witted youth upon the instant; "push on, boy, to close quarters," and as he spoke, snatching a pistol from his holster, he dashed his spurs into his horse's flanks, and passing Orozimbo in mid channel, drove up the opposite ascent, followed by his page, sword in hand.

Then from the brushwood rose a loud, wild yell, accompanied by a flight of long Charib shafts close to the head and breast of De Leon they hurtled, but none took effect on him, or on Alonzo. A sharp cry rung, however, from the rear, followed almost immediately by a splash in the shallow water, and then, with bridle loose and blood-stained housings, the steed of Orozimbo darted at a fierce gallop onward. Scarce had Hernando reached the brow of the ravine before, with leveled pikes and brandished war-clubs, a dozen Charibs rushed against him; and one, more daring than his fellows, seized on his bridle rein. Not half a second did he keep his hold, for, leveled at a hand's breadth of his head, Hernando's pistol flashed with unerring aim the bullet crashed through the Indian's temples, and he fell without a word or a groan beneath the charger's feet. Rising upon the instant in his stirrups, the bold cavalier hurled, with a sure and steady hand, the discharged weapon in the face of his next opponent. Then, before he had even seen the effect, although it felled the savage stunned and headlong to the earth, he unsheathed his trusty rapier with one hand, while with the other, casting his bridle loose, he drew and discharged fatally his second pistol.

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All this had passed with the speed of light, and Alonzo, having at the same time cut down the first of his assailants, the Indians broke away on all sides, and it seemed as if they would have effected their escape; and so in fact they might have done, had the young Spaniard chosen to abandon Orozimbo to his fate; but such was not his nature. Reining his charger sharply up, he turned his head, and called aloud upon the faithful Indian. At the same point of time the Charibs, who had scattered diverse before his headlong charge, began again to rally, and one, the boldest of their number, fitting an arrow to his bow-string, drew it with steady and swift aim quite to the head, the cord twanged sharply, and the shaft took effect right in the broad breast of Hernando's war horse, transfixing his embroidered poytre. Headlong he fell to earth, and as he fell the savages gaining fresh courage, made a simultaneous rush upon the hapless rider.

So speedily, however, had the skillful soldier regained his foothold, and so powerfully did he wield his rapier, that they still feared to close with him absolutely. Not so, however, with the fair Guarica, for dislodged from her seat by the shock of the charger's downfall, she had been thrown to some yards distance, and seized, as soon as she had touched the ground, by a gigantic savage, who all athirst for vengeance and for blood, brandished his ponderous war-club round his head in the very act to smite, while hampered by their numerous foemen, neither Hernando nor the page could possibly assist her at this fearful crisis. Just at this moment, the fast, thickbeating tramp of many horses at full gallop was heard by both parties, and the continuous crashing of the brushwood, through which a band of Europeans was, it was evident, advancing. The near sound, it would seem, inspired both parties with fresh vigor the savages trying to finish their fell work before they should be interrupted the Spaniards gaining confidence and hope from the vicinity of friends. Too late, however, would the arrival of Ojeda on the scene of action have proved to save Guarica, though now he might be even within two hundred yards, plying his bloody spurs, and brandishing aloft his formidable rapier. Thrice did Hernando rush upon the Indians in the vain hope of succoring his promised bride, striking down at each charge a Charib warrior; but each time he was driven back by force of irresistible numbers; and nothing could have saved her from sure death, had not a bloody form, grim, ghastly, deathstricken, arisen like a spectre from the channel of the stream armed with a Spanish blade faithful in death itself, young Orozimbo! Though faint, and staggering, he plied his keen sword with such mortal energy, that all shrunk back from its down-right descent. The chief who had seized Guarica, and whose averted head beheld not the approach of this new combatant, received the full sway of its sheer edge on his bended neck. Through muscle, spine and marrow the trenchant blade drove unresisted. Loosing his grasp upon his captive, he dropped dead without a word or struggle; and carried onward by his own impetus the Charib boy fell over him, and lay beside him in his blood motionless, although living still. A second more, and with their battle cry, "Saint Jago!" the fiery Spaniards were upon them with flash, and shot, and stab and stroke, till not an enemy remained alive upon the bank of the small stream, which late so pure and lucid, flowed now all dark, curdled, and thick with human gore. Ere yet the mortal struggle was well over, Hernando caught Guarica to his arms, and the page Alonzo upraised the body of her faithful brother from the earth, and wiped the foam and gore from his pale lips, while the stern Spaniards stood around, mute and awestricken, leaning upon the weapons which reeked yet with the homicidal witness. One form was there beside Alonzo de Ojeda, on whom Hernando's eyes, engrossed by the sad spectacle before him, had not yet fallen a tall and noble form, gorgeously clad in scarlet, with much lace and embroidery of gold. But it was not the gorgeous dress, scarlet, nor lace, nor gold but the long locks of snow shading that broad and massive brow the air of conscious dignity and inborn worth, the impress of unutterable thought united to invincible resolve, that stamped upon that face and figure a natural majesty exceeding that of princes a majesty becoming the discoverer of worlds! Silent he stood, and sorrowful; while the boy Orozimbo, placing the fair hand of his sister, who, with her lover, knelt above him in speechless agony of wo, in that of the young Spaniard, strove hard but fruitlessly, against the grasp of death, which was now grappling with his very soul, to give his feelings sound gasping forth something of which naught could be heard but the words "Take her, love and protect" his eyes rolled wildly, as he struggled to fix them on the beloved brow of her for whom he was dying his lips were fearfully convulsed, and with one murmur "Sister sister!" he sunk upon the earth, as still and senseless as its least valued clod. Then that great man broke silence

"This is the visible and present hand of God! Take her, Hernando she is yours yours in the face of man and before God! Take her to be your wife, forever and forever and as to her you do prove faithful, true, and

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loving so may it be with you and yours, here and hereafter!"

And the wide forest aisles re-echoed to the deep "Amen," which burst impressively from the stern lips of the Spanish warriors.

The tenderness of her espoused lord effaced, in time, the cloud from the fair Indian's brow; and if the source of their first early love was troubled, so was it not in its meridian tide! Happy they lived, and honored, and when at length they paid the debt, which all must pay to nature, it was among the tears of children so numerous and noble, that to this very day many, the grandest of Spain's nobility, are proud to claim descent from Hernando de Leon and his bright Charib Bride!