

Isabella, or The Adventures of A Nun

Anonymous

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Transcribed by Alex Maisey and Kiera Chapman

PART I

CHAPTER I.

In the year 1592, a worthy hidalgo of St. Sebastian, Miguel de Aranso by name, an old soldier, with a large family and very small means, was greatly chagrined on learning one morning that heaven had sent him a fourth daughter. It needed no elaborate calculation to convince him that should the feminine new-comer live to womanhood, he could not give her a marriage portion: so he determined that the little Isabella should become a nun, and that her noviciate should commence on the instant. Accordingly, taking the little stranger from the nurse, and carefully enveloping the tiny form in his ample cloak, he hastened to a convent, of which his sister-in-law, Donna Ursula, was the Superior, and to that worthy lady's care consigned the infant and her fortunes, and returned home with the comfortable conviction that he had done wisely and well in dedicating to heaven the young life that could be of no earthly service to himself.

It must be admitted that the worthy and tender parent showed no lack of promptitude in placing the little Isabella in the way of acquiring a taste for Dominican life: but though she was as it were cradled in the sanctuary, nature had altogether denied her the conventual vocation; and never, perhaps, was such a pupil reared in such a school. As an infant, our Isabella was the most fractious and intolerable little plague that "elders and betters" were ever perplexed withal; and her noviciate did no discredit to the promise of her petulant infancy; for never was there a novice so rebellious and unmanageable. At fifteen years old, at that age when the young girl's countenance usually

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beams with the candour of childhood mingled with the grace and dignity of dawning womanhood, nothing feminine could anyone discern in the countenance, disposition, temper, or manners of Isabella. Already here was far more of the Ensign than of the Nun in the whole aspect and bearing of her who was so oddly to acquire the strangely compounded title of the Nun-Ensign. In her the modest blush and the charming embarrassment of the young girl newly awakened to the consciousness of her beauty and its power, were completely wanting. She was haughty and violent; everything and every one must yield to her; and so stern and fierce a resolution flashed from her large black eyes, that the pious beholders scarcely knew what to think of so strange a novice, who reminded them of a hawk reared by mistake in a dove's nest. All the recluses did not alike endure the wild and imperious temper of Isabella. Those of her own age, having been from infancy accustomed to her domination, tremblingly and invariably submitted to her superior, and as it seemed to them masculine self-will; but she had to deal with nuns as well as with novices. In the convent there were some of those withered and harsh old recluses who, embittered by celibacy, had countenances resembling geometrical figures clothed in parchment; old women of that traditional type of ugly repulsiveness that may always be seen, and that was in convents only. Donna Incarnacian de Aliri was the stiffest and most ill-tempered of those old maids, who ordinarily hold youth and beauty in detestation; she hated Isabella, and had long sworn to finish, once and for all, with the impertinent novice. One evening, as the sisters were repairing to the refectory, Isabella, in defiance of all etiquette and respect, impudently thrust Donna Incarnacian aside in order to precede her. The nun sharply repulsed the presumptuous novice who still persisted in pushing forward, and received for her pains a sounding box on the ear from the very hardest and most bony hand in the whole Peninsular. The countenance of Isabella changed on the instant, and assumed an expression so terrible that the terrified nuns all pressed around her, dreading some misfortune. Donna Incarnacian, for her part, hastened from the spot; and she subsequently was wont to affirm that the young girl's glance, fierce and malignant as that of some wild animal, and gleaming as a sword, revealed in lightning-like speed and lurid brightness the evil destiny of Isabella.

Trifling as this event undoubtedly was, it yet wrought a sudden and utter change in the life of our novice. A few hours afterwards, on the 18th of March, 1607, the eve of St. Joseph, when all the convent rose to matins, Isabella accompanied the rest of the recluses to the chapel and knelt, as was her wont, beside the Abbess, her aunt. That holy lady almost immediately gave the key of her apartment to the novice and desired her to go thither for her breviary, which the holy mother had forgotten. The novice proceeded on her errand, and on opening a cupboard espied a bunch of keys hanging on a nail; these keys commanded every lock in the convent, and the sight of them inspired Isabella with a new idea. Leaving the room door open she hastened back to her aunt with the key and the breviary, and almost immediately afterwards pleaded a sudden illness, and asked permission to retire from the chapel. The good Donna Ursula, who was ever exceedingly indulgent to her wayward niece, tenderly kissed her and told her to return to her bed. Isabella waited for no second bidding; quitting the chapel, she hastened back to her aunt's apartment and again opened the cupboard, from whence she took the keys, a pair of scissors, a needle, some thread, and two only out of eight reals which were in her aunt's purse. Having thus gotten all she needed, she took up a lamp which burned in the apartment, and hastened to quit the convent, taking care, however, to double lock every door that she shut behind her, from the inner to the outer one. Having this gained the street, which was utterly strange to her, for a single moment she stood undecided how to proceed. The yet early morning was calm and serene, and the most profound silence reigned in the city, save when Isabella could from time to time hear the distant and faint sound of the chaunt of her late companions. Where and in what direction was she to go? A perplexing question; but her hesitation did not last long. Throwing away the keys and the lamp, she thrilled with joy at breathing the air of liberty, and set off, at her utmost speed; she knew not whither.

At a short distance from the city she reached a chesnut wood; and after a brief moment of reflection, she plunged into it, hiding herself as well as she could in the thickets; and as soon as it was sufficiently light she undressed herself and ripped up and completely metamorphosed her clothes, turning her blue cloth petticoat into a pair of breeches, and her green robe into a vest and gaiters. As for her veil and scapulary, she left them among the bushes. Having next cut her hair becomingly, she flattered herself that she might anywhere pass as a handsome boy; and as soon as it grew sufficiently dark again, she left her hiding-place and set forth, completely at hazard, upon her travels; and on the third day she thus, on foot, reached Vittoria, which is twenty leagues from St.

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Sebastian. By this time the unfortunate child was ready to sink with fatigue and hunger, having from the time at which she quitted the convent eaten nothing but the wild berries that she plucked on her road, and ate as she walked.

Isabella knew no one at Vittoria, and the two reals which composed her whole fortune could not carry her far. Not daring to enter an inn, she bought a small loaf of a baker whom she met in the street, and seating herself upon a post, made her poor repast, and seasoned it with anything but very pleasant reflections. Necessity, it is said, is the mother of invention; and assuredly hunger is an admirable freshener of the memory. By dint of cudgelling her brains, Isabella succeeded in calling to mind that there should then be living at Vittoria a very worthy old man named Don Francisco de Cerralta, a distant relative of her mother, and a professor. Questioning a school-boy who was skipping by with his books under his arm, she learned that her mother's erudite relative not only was still living at Vittoria, but that his house was the very one in front of which she had taken up her position. Without being superstitious, Isabella yet saw the finger of destiny in this coincidence, and she knocked loudly at the professor's door.

Don Francisco, like a candid and unsuspecting philosopher as he was, gave a kindly reception to that bold and frank as well as intelligent-looking scholar, who amused him with a fine story of his desire to learn, and who contrived very appropriately to introduce into his discourse the few words that he seemingly he, at least had picked up at the convent. Even had he a hundred times seen his niece the novice, the old professor would not have recognised her in the oddly-attired vagrant before him; and he, with ready humanity, undertook to ascertain whether that seeming boy, at once so courageous and so destitute, had in him the stuff for a great man. As Isabella had shown some taste for Latin the worthy professor put the grammar into her hands; and now behold her declining substantives and conjugating verbs. But she had scarcely got into the irregulars ere she was seized with a terrible fit of weariness. Had she quitted the convent only to hold out her hand to the ferule of a master? True it was, Don Francisco kept a good table; but the warm and gentle airs that disturbed the papers on the study-table were impregnated with I know not what perfume of liberty, which turned Isabella's young brain. Her thoughts wandered back to the country roads and to the noble trees waving to and fro on the mountains' brows; and these thoughts returned so often, and became so powerful over her, that one morning, while Don Francisco was absent, she snatched a handful of reals from the chimney-piece and rushed from the house, apologising to herself, so far as regarded the reals, with the consideration that, after all, the money was still in the family. At the gates of the town she found a muleteer who, at a charge of one douros, agreed to conduct her on one of his mules to Vallalolid.

At that moment the King and his whole court were at Vallalolid; and a vast crowd of soldiers, with numerous horses and equipages, rendered the streets scarcely passable. Isabella was well nigh at her wit's end with delight at sight of a spectacle so new to her. Roving from street to street she at length reached the great square, where a band was performing a martial air. Seized with admiration, our disguised novice, that she might hear the more at her ease, joined a party of those idle children who in all countries find their dearest delight in following the drum. Every one who has been in Spain is aware that the Peninsular children are often enough remarkable for the oddity of their costume; but that of Isabella, cut out of her feminine attire and put together in the woods, was so surprisingly odd that the merry and mischievous urchins by whom she was surrounded speedily deserted the music and betook themselves to the more tempting amusement of hooting their strange companion. From hooting and laughing they proceeded to insults, and ten to pelting her with mud. Isabella's temper was speedily aroused by this ill-treatment, and she began to ply both feet and fists with equal vigour and quickness; and as her assailants began to press too closely upon her, she picked up some stones, and began a more perilous kind of warfare. One of the boys, bolder than his companions, attempted to disarm her: he fared but ill for his pains; for she struck him so shrewdly with a sharp flint that he fell to the ground with his eye cut and his face covered with blood. His companions too to flight, and some of the bystanders pointed out Isabella as the aggressor to two alguazils, who at once proceeded to show the young delinquent the way to prison.

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The adventures of our novice would now have terminated prosaically enough, had fate not come to her aid at the critical moment. A nobleman attached to the court had his lodging in the great square, and from his window he had been a witness of the whole fray in which the disguised Isabella had been engaged. Struck with her courage, her fine countenance, and her very singular costume, he hastened into the street and followed the alguazils, to whom in a few words he explained the whole business, and thus procured the instant release of the prisoner. Isabella followed her liberator; and as she curiously noted his plumed hat, his embroidered pourpoint, and his long rapier, she for a moment fancied that he was the king. But her liberator was, in fact, only the Don Carlos de Arellano, a rich and gallant gentleman. He on the instant took Isabella into his service as his page; and when, on the following day, she was newly equipped from head to foot, dressed like a prince in velvet, and having a gilded poniard suspended from her belt, the vagrant niece of the lady abbess felt within herself an invincible power; she imagined herself selected for great adventures, and almost foresaw the destiny which actually awaited her.

Scarcely had she been a month in her new situation ere a strange event occurred to justify her presentiments. One evening as she and a fellow-page were in waiting in the ante-chamber of her new master, and fortunately just as the evening was darkening down, an old military officer presented himself and asked to see Don Carlos. At the very first words that were uttered by the new comer, Isabella trembled in every limb; for by his voice she recognised the visitor as her father, Don Miguel de Aransa. Isabella's first impulse was to fly, but an instant's reflection showed her that audacity offered her the better chance of safety. She therefore boldly answered that Don Carlos was within, and that she would go and inquire whether he could receive his visitor. When she returned with an affirmative reply, Don Miguel de Aransa gazed searchingly upon the features of his disguised daughter. This examination doubtless failed to confirm his suspicions; for, without a word of remark, he proceeded towards the apartment of Don Carlos, followed by the seeming page, who, despite her very extensive provision of assurance, felt ready to sink with terror. Don Carlos had advanced to the head of the stairs, and, after cordially embracing the old gentleman, inquired to what he was indebted for the pleasure of his visit. The veteran then, with tears in his eyes, related the scandalous flight of his daughter and Isabella gathered from the conversation that ensued that Don Carlos was the most powerful and zealous patron of the convent which had been founded by his family. Judging that she had now heard quite enough, and feeling her heart sink within her at the mere thought of again enduring the searching glance of her stern father, she ran nimbly up to her bed-chamber, made up her clothes into a bundle, into which she also put her purse containing eight doubloons, and without further ceremony rushed out of the house and concealed herself among the straw in the stable of a neighbouring inn. Shortly afterwards two muleteers entered the stable and lay down among the straw to rest, and from their conversation she learned that they were to set out on the following morning for San Lucar, in Andalusia, whence, in the course of the following month, the squadron of Fernandez de Cordova was to sail for America. As soon as the day began to break Isabella crept softly from among the straw and posted herself on the road by which she knew that the muleteers must pass; and when they came up with her she made a bargain with them, mounted one of their mules, and gaily set off for San Lucar, at which place she arrived about a fortnight afterwards. The squadron was now on the very eve of sailing, and young men were in the greatest possible request for the completion of the crew. Isabella, who felt herself as it were haunted by the image of her father, had already made up her mind to place the broad Atlantic between herself and her family; and she consequently presented herself to Don Estevan Eguino, the commander of one of the ships, and was received on board as cabin-boy. That same night a fresh and favouring breeze sprang up, and on the following morning the squadron was far from land, and with it our heroine and her fortunes.

CHAPTER II

And now behold our heroine of sixteen years old, slender in figure, but resolute in aspect, and, moreover, a Spaniard, metamorphosed into a rude sea-boy, and living in the midst of two hundred seamen. It must be admitted that her position was a delicate one, and that far more prudent heroines have sunk beneath smaller perils and difficulties. But Isabella did not even bestow a thought upon the thousand perils that surrounded her. In donning the attire of a man she had, so to speak, put off her sex. Nothing feminine appeared in the life of this

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extraordinary woman; the part that she had to play was, as it were, inaccurate in her, and the idea of her real quality and sex on no occasion appears to have troubled her. A rebellious novice at the convent, a wayward and finally a runaway scholar to the old professor and an expert and runaway page to the gallant Don Carlos, she was no sooner on board ship than she showed herself among the most intrepid of its crew; and nor one among all her numerous shipmates had the fortune to detect the girl beneath the tarry costume of the cabin-boy, Francisco the *nom de guerre* which she had assumed for the nonce.

After a long and perilous voyage the squadron made the shores of Peru, and the vessel in which Isabella, or Francisco, served was dispatched to the little port of Paita, about two hundred leagues from Lima. The courage of Isabella was now again about to be put to the proof by an unexpected and terrible catastrophe. One dark and tempestuous night the vessel was dashed upon a rock so violently that her seams speedily opened from stem to stern. The terrified crew, in defiance of the commands and entreaties of the captain, got out of the boats, and immediately deserted the vessel and her veteran captain, who resolved to stand by her as long as she would hold together. Whether from some lucky inspiration, or from genuine heroism, Isabella at this fearful crisis, alone remained true to duty and to her captain; and well was it for her that she did so, for in less than a quarter of an hour from the departure of the deserters, Isabella, by the lurid gleams of the almost unintermitting lightnings, saw every one of them swallowed up by the foaming sea.

At daybreak the wind fell and the sea became comparatively calm. The horribly shattered ship remained as if by a miracle, suspended between two crags of the fatal rock; but ever timber groaned horribly, and it was evident that she must speedily go to pieces. Isabella clearly saw that not a moment was to be lost; and with the aid of the old captain, she collected some scattered spars with which she contrived to construct a small raft. Even in this terrible and decisive moment her usual presence of mind did not desert her; and she remembered that, in this best of all possible worlds, there is no travelling far without money. Catching up an axe she made her way into the cabin, which was already half-full of water, broke open the treasure chest, and took out a hundred gold doubloons, which she wrapped in a bit of sail-cloth, and fastened to her raft. This done, she called to Don Estevan to imitate her, and boldly threw herself into the waves, taking care at the same time, to keep a firm grasp on her raft. The old captain endeavoured to follow her bold example; but age or agitation had so far disqualified him for a feat requiring no little agility, that his skull was fractured against the side of the wreck, and he sank to rise no more. Isabella at once, more active and more fortunate, clung closely to her raft; and the tide washed her upon the adjacent shore, safe indeed, but bruised, exhausted, and insensible. For a long time she lay there in a state of stupor; but at length a delicious sensation of heat caused the young blood to circulate once more through her stiffened frame, and recalled her to a sense of her situation. Looking around her she perceived that she lay on upon a completely desert shore, upon which the sun was already shining in almost meridian splendour; and some scattered fragments of wreck that floated upon the now delightfully calm sea, alone remained to show how fatal its fury had been to the lately gay and gallant ship, the *Habanero* of which those scattered fragments alone remained. All the ties which had connected Isabella with Europe, and which might have served to direct suspicion upon her track, were now, then, completely destroyed; all traces of her were for ever lost to all who had known her; and here in this new vast world she could lead whatsoever life she pleases without fear of any one. But then came the important questions: where was she? what was to become of her? Important as these questions were, they were no less difficult to answer; but Isabella was not of a nature to allow perils or difficulties to deprive her of hope and energy. Her first care was to adjust her seaman's dress, which the sun had already dried; and then she secured in her various pockets the precious store of gold which had safely floated ashore with her upon the raft. Having made these preparations for her journey she knew not whither, Isabella now discovered that she was furiously hungry. Having attentively examined as far as her sight would reach in every direction in land, and seeing no signs of any human habitation, she began to fear that she had only been spared by the waves to perish miserably of hunger upon a desert land should she endeavour to make her way up the country, while, on the contrary, by following the line of coast, she must sooner or later reach Paita, that being a sea-port. She scarcely walked a mile from the spot at which she started ere she found one of the *Habanero's* casks half buried in the sands; and on examination it proved to be full of biscuit, somewhat damaged, it is true, but a most welcome prize for all that. Having eaten as much as she possibly could, she carried away some for her future provision, and once more set

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off on her toilsome journey, and in the course of the day fell in with a stream of fresh water, of which she was no less in need than she had been of food. Resting there all night, she on the following morning set forward again, and after a most toilsome day's walk, and just as evening was approaching, and her courage beginning to desert her, she imagined that in the distance she could discern signs of human habitation. Her instinct had not deceived her as to the best direction she could take, directed only by that instinct she had now arrived at Paita.

As she was entering the town, Isabella reflected that as she possessed a considerable sum of money she stood in no need of public commiseration, and that it consequently would be unnecessary, if even it would not be imprudent, to make any mention of her misfortunes. Why should she profess herself poor when in fact she was rich and might doubtless play an honourable part in this retired little nook of the world? Thus reflecting, she inquired of the best inn of the place, walked in as coolly as though she had lived there all her days, and ordered an excellent supper, to be prepared forthwith, to which she failed not to do the most perfect justice. On the following day she sent for the most skilful tailor in the town and purchased an elegant suit of clothes befitting the son of a wealthy shipowner, which character she thought fit to assume.

The tailor, who effected this sudden and most advantageous change in our Isabella's appearance, was named Urquiza. Being more of the merchant than of the mere tailor, he carried on a very profitable trade not only at Paita, but also at Trujillo, where he had a second establishment. Isabella's manners and appearance pleased Urquiza; and discovering that the seeming youth wrote an excellent hand and knew enough of arithmetic to keep books, and that, moreover, the seeming youth had all the requisite quickness to make an excellent clerk, he offered to engage Domingo the new name of our adventuress in that capacity, clerks being at that time a scarce commodity at Paita. Domingo accepted the proffered employment, and shortly afterwards the merchant, having occasion to go to his other house of business at Trujillo, he entire charge of the Paita establishment was committed to Domingo, who had two Negroes and a negress left as his servants and an allowance of three crowns per diem for his personal expenses. Our new clerk of course received detailed instructions for the conduct of the business during the absence of his master, and consequently was well aware whom he might safely give credit to and to whom it was necessary to refuse it. The merchant, Urquiza, had especially mentioned the Senora Beatrix de Cardenas as a lady of distinction whom he passionately admired, and in whom he had the utmost possible confidence; and on the other hand he had pointed out that lady's cousin, a gentleman named Reyes, as a person of very bad principle, and one to be most carefully guarded against and kept at a distance. Donna Beatrix soon called at the warehouse and made some considerable purchases on credit: French velvet, Holland linen, Chinese fans, Castile lace, and a whole host of other articles were ordered by the lady to an extent so serious, that Domingo thought it necessary to write to the absent merchant upon the subject; but an immediate answer was returned that if the lady chose actually to clear the warehouse, she was at full liberty to do so. This answer set the mind of Domingo completely at rest, as it cleared him of all responsibility by leaving him, in fact, but one plain course to pursue.

An itinerant company of actors just at this period paid a visit to Paita, and Domingo, who passed for one of the aristocracy of the place, felt bound to be among the patrons of the players. One evening, as he was seated very quietly in the theatre, that Signor Reyes, of whom he had been cautioned to beware, placed himself so as to render it impossible for Domingo to obtain the slightest glimpse of the stage. Domingo politely requested him to move a little aside; but the ruffianly fellow merely replied with an oath that he had better be quiet or he would cut his throat. This was too much for the somewhat limited patience of the pretended Domingo, who pale with excess of rage, rose from his seat, and unsheathed his dagger. Fortunately some of Domingo's friends were present, so they surrounded him, and with kindly force dragged him out of the theatre, and then made him aware that his situation in Urquiza's counting-house had long been wished for by Reyes, and they suggested that Domingo would act both wisely and magnanimously in making some allowance for the wounded vanity and disappointment of Reyes. The pretended Domingo affected to listen to the at once wise and well-meant advice of his friends; but his indomitable spirit could not brook so flagrant an insult. His heart was full of rancour, and it was with a sort of delicious impatience that he awaited the hour of vengeance. That hour at length arrived. On the day after the occurrence of which we have spoken, Reyes passed by the counting-house, and instantly spat upon the front

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window at which Domingo was at that moment standing. On the instant Domingo snatched from the wall where it hung a sword belonging to his master, and fastened the belt round his waist. It was the first time that he had worn a sword; but from that time forth he rarely went without a trusty blade by his side.

Having fastened on his sword and felt the point of his dagger, Domingo hastened after Reyes, and having overtaken him in the great square, rushed up to him, and said in a tone hoarse with emotion, "Well, Signor Reyes!"

"What want you with me?" returned Reyes, astonished at the agitation and paleness of the seeming clerk.

"I want," replied Domingo, "just to show you how we slit the throats of insolent fellows;" and, drawing his dagger, he plunged it to the very hilt in the body of Reyes. The unfortunate man fell to the earth without a groan; and before Domingo had time to reflect upon what he had done, two alguazils rushed upon him, seized him by the collar, and dragged him towards the town prison.

What was to be done? To get out of that strong dungeon was not so easy a matter as she had found her escape from her convent; and the noose of a rope, which now so imminently presented itself to her fears, was a very different thing from the slight punishments that had formerly expiated the wildest tricks of the novice of St. Dominic. Perplexed and exasperated she folded her arms across her chest, and as she made this motion her hand came in contact with some hard substance: it was a pocket-book which she usually had upon her person. The sight of this pocket-book caused a new and brilliant idea to flash across her mind. In the pocket-book there were paper and pencil; she could write, then; but to whom should she apply? Urquiza, as we have seen, was at Trujillo, and how was she to convey a letter to him? Then she thought of the Donna Beatrix; and as she doubted not that that fair lady was Urquiza's mistress, it seemed likely that she would be well enough inclined to side against her scampish cousin, who was scarcely worth a sword thrust. Moreover, Domingo was in no position to make a choice; so she forthwith pencilled a note to Donna Beatrix giving her a rapid but complete account of what had occurred; and when the gaoler appeared with a very sorry repast for the prisoner, the latter gave him the note with the promise of three pieces of gold if he would have it immediately conveyed as addressed. This done, she waited for a whole week, which to her seemed an eternity. At the end of that time the gaoler abruptly told Domingo that he would soon see or hear from Don Urquiza, who had now returned to Paita. On that very evening the massive door of the cell was again thrown open, and a woman closely veiled mysteriously entered: it was the Donna Beatrix. Domingo looked upon her as a guardian and saving angel, and threw himself at her feet. She kindly raised the young Domingo, and made him seat himself by her side, and then proceeded to inform him that her influence with the Corregidor, who was one of her friends, had procured her permission to visit the prisoner, but that his position was a really serious one; for that Reyes was dead, and his family had sworn to have vengeance upon his assassin. "The only chance left to Domingo," she added, "was at all risks and without any delay to make his escape, for which she had provided the means, being as she smilingly said, very loth to allow so handsome a youth to be hanged.

As the lady spoke thus, Domingo looked more closely than he had done at her countenance, and perceived that she had charming eyes and teeth, splendid black hair, an exquisite Andalusian figure, and was only about five-and-twenty years old. The means of escape provided by Donna Beatrix were already old, no doubt, and worn out even on the stage; but they succeeded then as they would now, and ever will, as long as the world holds gold and greedy gaolers. Beatrix, in fact, had brought the young prisoner a complete outer dress for a female, and thus attired he was to go out while his visitor would remain to personate him in the dungeon. Really affected by this generous proposal, and unable to find words in which to reply, Domingo in his own small hands pressed the pretty ones of the Donna, and carried them respectfully to his lips. Far from withdrawing themselves, the white hands of the lady not only pressed the prisoner's, but wandered as if by accident till they were thrown round his neck; and though our disguised Isabella was not greatly given to blushing, she did blush, and deeply, too, as a long and impassioned kiss was impressed upon her brow, and as she noted the ardent glance of the Donna Beatrix. Fortunately for the prisoner this confusion was by the elder lady attributed to extreme youth and inexperience;

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and, also fortunately, the gaoler at this instant knocked at the door. Not a moment was now to be lost; and Domingo, having hastily donned his disguise, walked forth and hastened to the house of Urquiza, wondering all the way how this most strange adventure would end.

Urquiza rapturously welcomed his clerk, and warmly expressed his delight at seeing the young man again safe and sound: but although the danger was somewhat diminished, he added, it was still but too far from being at an end. Above all things it was necessary that Domingo should be instantly placed in a safer retreat than his employer's house; and to this end Urquiza had already removed all the baggage of the young man to a secure hiding-place, to which he proposed to accompany him. Without farther delay, then, he gave Domingo his arm and led him by back ways and unfrequented streets to a small detached house at one end of the town. A pretty and dapper little waiting-maid seemed to expect her nocturnal visitors; for she opened the door to them at the first knock, and casting an inquisitive glance upon Domingo, conducted them to an elegant saloon brilliantly lighted, displaying all the preparations for supper; and Domingo's quick glance noted that covers were laid for three. He now in his turn bestowed an inquisitive glance upon the waiting-maid, who replied by a meaning smile which he could not comprehend.

When they were alone, Urquiza informed his clerk how matters in reality stood. For a long time the Corregidor, urged by the implacable relatives of Reyes, had refused to hear reason, and at length Urquiza had been compelled to have recourse to an untruth, in positively affirming that Domingo and the Donna Beatrix were privately married. That assertion had at once cleared away all difficulties; for, as Beatrix was a cousin of Reyes, the death of the latter, instead of a murder that called for vengeance, became a small family drama which all in the family were interested in concealing. On this affirmation the Corregidor had consented to a release, but under circumstances to give it all the appearance of an escape. There now, therefore, remained only a formality, that, namely, of Domingo being actually married to Beatrix, who had so openly compromised herself in order to save him. "And, moreover," continued Urquiza, "the fair lady is more deeply enamoured of you than I can describe; and I congratulate you on your double good fortune in escaping the gallows and winning the handsomest wife in all Paita."

This discourse of the worthy merchant threw Domingo into a state of actual stupefaction; but he was not long ere he saw in this most unexpected and astounding arrangement all the marks of a deep laid plot. He felt quite convinced that Beatrix, whose reputation was somewhat of the lightest, was, in fact the mistress of Don Urquiza, who by marrying her to Domingo would at once patch up her fame without cost to himself, and retain the valuable services of his clever clerk. The speculation was not ill planned; and Domingo, as he pondered on its details, perceived that it was above all things necessary for him to gain time. He therefore replied that he was far too humble to be a fitting husband for so lovely a lady, and that to wed her to his poverty would be to make but an ill return for the generous service that she had done him. And moreover, he urged, was the formality of their marriage at all necessary? Were they not sufficiently entrenched behind the innocent falsehood of their being already married? Urquiza confessed that these scruples were both reasonable and honourable, but replied, "How are we to make the assertion believed by the irritated family unless by producing the official documents? And do you make no account of the ardent love of Donna Beatrix? Will she not be forever ruined in character by the generous course that she has taken, unless she were justified by this marriage?" Finally, the shrewd Urquiza added, "The very house in which Domingo was at this moment concealed belonged to Beatrix, and what would the world say, and especially what would the Corregidor say, on learning that the murderer of Don Reyes was sheltered there without such a right to Donna Beatrix's protection?"

To such extremely sincere reasoning there could be no resistance; and Domingo, feigning to be convinced, but in reality at his very wit's end how to act, thanked his friend for the happiness which he was about to confer upon him.

Just as he had done so the door opened, and Donna Beatrix made her appearance; the most lively emotion coloured her cheeks and sparkled in her eyes, and made her look, if possible, more handsome than ever. As

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glancing tenderly upon Domingo, she gave him her small white hand to kiss. The trio sat down to supper, and the conversation turned almost entirely upon the very narrow and fortunate escape of Domingo; for, in presence of the young widow for Donna Beatrix was a widow of course no mention was made of marriage. Poor Domingo meanwhile glanced anxiously all around him, now examining the door, and anon the windows, for time passed quickly, and the moment was come when, or never, he must invoke the aid of his good genius. His companions could not but notice his agitation, which they jocularly attributed to his fear of the alguazils; and as he could not but stand in need of rest, he was invited to retire to a chamber under the staircase, so well concealed that it was impossible for any one to discover him there. Domingo gladly accepted the offer, and the Senora, accompanied by Urquiza, bearing a light, led the way, followed by the now truly alarmed and anxious Domingo.

The first impulse of the perplexed and epicene personage in question, was to seek safety in flight; but would he be permitted to do so? The merchant was both strong and active, and, moreover, a single cry would suffice to bring others to the spot; and to make an unsuccessful attempt at escape, would plunge him into utter and instant ruin. While these reflections passed through the mind of Isabella, they had reached the mysterious chamber. The merchant was the first to enter, and the lamp that he carried showed a small room which had no window or other outlet save the strong and heavy door. Isabella felt that if once she went in, all was over with her; and by one of those instinctive impulses which had already more than once served her, as Beatrix presented her hand to her, she seized the Donna round the waist and hurled her suddenly, and with no gentle force, upon the merchant. Pulling the door close, double locking it, and taking out the key, Isabella dashed into the street and hastened towards the port, where she cast loose a boat and rowed away from shore with all the skill of a sailor who has doubled Cape Horn. When she was about half a league from shore, Isabella ventured to rest upon her oars to take breath and look around her. She was now upon the open sea; but its waves were calm, the stars shone brightly, and a gentle breeze blew from the land and urged the boat still further from the shore; so Isabella resolved to let it drive, and abandoned herself to destiny to waft her at its will, as the feather is wafted by the breeze.

PART II

CHAPTER III

Having looked in every direction without discerning any pursuers, and listened in actual agony without hearing any sound of oars mingling with the murmur of the waves and the night breeze, Isabella, who was completely worn out with her recent fatigues and anxieties, threw herself at full length in the bottom of her boat, and fell fast asleep. When she awoke the sun was several hours high, and she perceived that, urged by the land breeze, and probably drawn into some current, her little bark had made considerable way during the night; for no land was visible in any direction; and now behold our heroine alone upon the wide ocean, and without provisions or compass. To row without knowing whither, would have been uselessly to fatigue herself; so our resolute heroine calmly folded her arms, and resolved to trust entirely to fortune. As evening came in Isabella, after vainly looking towards every point of the compass, imagined that at length she perceived a sail, and immediately took to her oars again, and rowed vigorously in that direction, lest the falling shades of evening should deprive her of this hope of safety. Fortunately the vessel tacked towards her, and she was thus enabled rapidly to near it; and hoisting her handkerchief upon the end of an oar, she waved it to and fro as a signal of distress. After a few minutes of indescribable anxiety, she was delighted at seeing the vessel alter its course a point or two, so as to bear directly down towards her. She was perceived! But prudence, which never slept long in the spirit of that strange girl, suggested to her that as she knew nothing of either the country or the character of the vessel, it behoved her to make some arrangements. Her plan was speedily formed. As it was already sufficiently dark to conceal her movements from the crew of the ship, and stamping with her full weight upon the boat, she contrived to turn it completely bottom upward. Diving at the same moment, she returned to the surface with great ease; for she was an accomplished swimmer, as, indeed, many Spanish ladies are; and getting astride upon the keel of the boat she held on, and awaited whatever fortune might have in store for her. Isabella had thus prepared the crew to hear a tale of shipwreck, a tale which procured her an instant and most kind reception.

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The ship was a Spanish galleon from Panama to Concepcion, whither she was transporting a considerable body of troops to take part in an expedition against the Indians of Chili. Isabella had no choice; it will, therefore, readily be guessed that she took to the musket, and was admitted as a volunteer into the company of Gonzalo Rodriguez. Our heroine now gave her name as Pedro Diaz, of St. Sebastian. It was strange that she so far departed from her usual custom as to name the real place of her birth. The Spanish galleon and her freight of troops were most impatiently expected at Concepcion; and scarcely had the vessel entered the road ere an elegant boat put off towards her. Standing up in the stern sheets of the approaching boat was a richly-dressed officer, whose white plume waved proudly over his beaver, and who gave his orders in the short stern tone of one to whom command was familiar. The name and rank of that officer were well known to many of the crew, and the words, "Senor Miguel de Aranso, Secretary to the Governor-General," speedily flew from mouth to mouth. Miguel de Aranso! When the disguised Isabella heard that name, she started as though she had been stung by an aspic; but speedily recovering herself, she sprung to the side to obtain a better view of the approaching officer. Miguel de Aranso was her brother. She could not recognise him, of course; for he had left Spain when she was but two years old, but she was aware of his existence, though until that moment she had no knowledge of either his rank or his residence.

As soon as he had boarded the vessel, the governor's secretary had the troops paraded, under arms, and with the officer's list in his hand, called over the roll, and had each man passed in review before him. When he came to the name of Pedro Diaz of St. Sebastian, he, with a look of some interest, approached that disguised person, and observing in the Basque dialect that they were compatriots, inquired if the young recruit knew the Aranso family. The reply being in the affirmative, the officer made inquiries after his father, Don de Aranso, his mother, and the little Isabella. To all these questions the soi disant Pedro answered without the least apparent confusion, and quite delighted the officer with the quickness and good-breeding that he displayed. Much taken with his young compatriot, the Senor de Aranso, as soon as his troops were disembarked, asked and obtained the governor's permission to take Pedro Diaz into personal attendance upon himself.

It was under the immediate command of her own brother that Isabella, with a really frightful dissimulation, and without ever once betraying herself, made her first acquaintance with the stern business of war. For more than a year she ate, drank, and slept under the same shelter with him, and fought under his immediate command in a great number of expeditions against the Indians. At the end of that time, the governor took a new course. Fully resolved to finish once and for all with the enemy, he assembled his scattered troops upon one point, and with an army of 5,000 men, marched towards the plains of Valdivia. After a long and harassing series of marches and countermarches in a devastated country, in which the soldiery were destitute of everything, the Spanish army at length came up with the Indians and forced them to a general action. The fight was fierce, and victory was still undecided, when a horde of the barbarous enemy rushed from ambush in a ravine, and made a disorderly but gallant charge upon the battalion in which served our heroine and her brother; and so completely were the Spanish soldiers taken by surprise, that a perfect panic seized upon them, and they fled, leaving many of their officers dead upon the field, and the colours of the battalion in the hands of the savage foe. Delighted with their success, the Indians commenced a retreat, carrying their trophy with them. At this sight, Isabella, who had joined a little band of resolute soldiers, could not contain her fury. With a sublime rashness worthy of the most valiant heroines, she plunged the spurs into the reeking sides of her steed, and shouting "Al who love Spain, follow me!" charged the enemy.

She was followed only by two officers; and the Indians suddenly faced about to meet their imprudent pursuers. Nothing daunted, Pedro Diaz and he two officers plunged into the midst of the savage horde, cutting and thrusting right and left, wounding, and receiving wounds, utterly heedless of the numerous arrows that struck upon their cuirasses. One of the gallant three was speedily killed; but that sight only caused the two survivors to charge with redoubled fury. At the very moment when he was in the act of seizing the standard, the second officer was slain. Pedro Diaz, now left wholly unaided, severed the skull of the Cacique who carried the trophy, seized it as it fell, and using it as a lance, struck furiously in every direction, making his horse bound wildly at the same time; and at length, unheeding the wounds that he received from arrows, and from a pike-thrust that passed completely through his shoulder, cleared a way towards his own party, who were now charging down in force to his

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assistance. Diaz was the hero of that sanguinary day, and not a murmur was heard when Miguel de Aranso solicited and obtained for the valiant Pedro Diaz, the standard that he had so valiantly recaptured; and thus Isabella became an ensign in the company of Don Alonzo Moreno.

In that rank, he fought with great distinction in various affairs, and more especially at the famous battle of Parea, where she was again wounded fighting hand to hand with a celebrated Indian chief, whom our adventuress had the honour to make prisoner. So many gallant deeds necessarily procured Isabella, or, rather Pedro Diaz, a certain renown in the Spanish army; and proud of the glory he had acquired, the soi disant Don gave full career to his inherent ambition and arrogance. With such a disposition and temper as we know our Diaz to have possessed, it will readily be supposed that living among those cruel and greedy soldiers actual freebooters, whose frightful excesses are matter of history our ex-novice of St. Dominic lost all notions of morality, even supposing her to have brought any with her from the convent.

The taste for gaming, especially, soon seized upon her with all the violence that might be anticipated from what we have already seen of that wild nature that spurned all restraint; and ere long there was not a gaming house in the whole country of which Pedro Diaz was not the invariable guest and the redoubtable hero. Intoxicated with her first successes, and jealous of the pre-eminence alike in good and evil, Diaz seemed to be determined to be as much distinguished for coolness and intrepid risks at the play-table, as for courage in the field of battle. This sort of life is very productive of catastrophes, and of that fact, the young ensign Diaz was speedily made aware. One evening just as Diaz, according to his custom, had staked, not only all he possessed, but even more, he noticed at the table a stranger who staked wildly, played carelessly, and constantly won. The stranger was a man of tall stature, with an insolent bearing and upturned moustaches, a swaggering bully, who made his spurs and his sword clatter at every movement. Diaz, who was told that this personage had newly arrived from Lima, where he bore the surname of the Cid, took a huge dislike to him at the very first sight.

As the evening wore on the company got tired of striving in vain against the seemingly inexhaustible run of the stranger's good luck; and the Cid prepared to take his departure, when our Diaz signed to him to resume his seat. He did so; and scarcely had they began to play against each other, ere fickle fortune suddenly changed, and the dice were constantly favourable to Diaz; and by degrees the great heap of gold which the hitherto invincible player had won, passed into the possession of his young opponent. Pale with rage, the unfortunate gamester bestowed furious and threatening glances upon Diaz, who coolly burst out laughing and said, "What! Has your highness lost, that you should look so angry?"

The stranger, without uttering a word of reply, threw upon the table a very valuable diamond: Diaz staked against it and won!

"Incarnation of the devil! protect me!" shouted the enraged Cid, fiercely smiting the table with his clenched fist.

"Why what! has your grace lost that you should swear so terribly?" inquired the ensign, with a sneer.

"I have lost lost; but I will now stake "

"What have you now to stake?"

"I will stake a dagger thrust."

"Done!" cried Pedro Diaz. Gaily; and the two players resumed their seats and re-commenced playing, all the company crowding round the table, much interested in the result of so singular a game.

"Eight!" cried the Cid, throwing the dice.

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" Eleven!" said Isabella. " Seven!" called the Cid.

" Twelve!" responded our ensign.

And at the same time our disguised heroine rose and drew her sword and dagger, exclaiming, "I have won, Senor, and by heaven! you shall pay."

But the Cid had already drawn his dagger, and rushed furiously upon his adversary. Fortunately, in his hot haste, he stumbled against a chair, and his dagger—point merely grazed the dress of the ensign, while his false step threw him at full length upon the ground.

Far from endeavouring to take any advantage of the accident, our heroine stepped backward, and then giving the Cid a blow with the flat of her sword, exclaimed, "Back coward back! and defend yourself!"

The discomfited bully arose in great confusion amidst the hooting and jeers of all present, and defended himself so ill that, at the second pass, Isabella's sword passed through his chest, and he fell, bathed in blood. The ensign, on the urgent advice of his friends, immediately departed, and for several days kept himself in strict concealment; but as he had, in fact, received the original provocation, the result was that no proceedings were taken against him.

This duel, instead of taming down the temper of the ensign, intoxicated him still more, and it seemed that nothing could stop him in the fine career that he had chosen, when a frightful calamity occurred to give a severe and sudden check to his extravagances. For some time after the death of the bullying Cid the ensign had deemed it prudent to confine himself to his own apartment, and he was already pretty weary of his confinement, when one evening Juan de Silva, a friend of his, and holding the same rank in the army, called upon him, in, seemingly, a state of great agitation. Don Juan stated that about an hour previously he and Don Francisco de Rojas had been engaged in a warm discussion, which at length terminated in a challenge; and they had agreed to meet on that very night, at eleven o' clock, in an open space behind the convent of St. Francis. Each of them was to provide himself with a second; and assuredly the choice of a second could not but be a very difficult matter under circumstances which rendered it by no means improbable that this nocturnal duel might be taken for an assassination. Don Juan de Silva, however, preferring the ensign, as he said, to any other man in the world, had now come to beg his company on this occasion. But the ensign, Pedro Diaz, refused, upon the very reasonable plea, that considering how very recently he had been concerned in a fatal duel it would scarcely be prudent for him openly to brave justice again; and he had the farther plea for his refusal that there were many officers at hand, any one of whom would serve as well as himself, if not better. Don Juan urged the matter; but as Diaz remained firm to his refusal, the former slowly and sadly departed, saying that he would go unattended to the place appointed, and that perhaps his death would cause Diaz, when too late, to regret his refusal. The ensign was by no means ill-natured, and the clashing of swords had a very potent charm for his ears; so, after a moment's reflection, he retracted his refusal, and consented to accompany his friend. Fate willed it so.

After dining together, our two ensigns took their cloaks and swords, and set out for the appointed place just as the clock struck ten. It was one of those gloomy nights which, in the neighbourhood of the tropics, usually presage a violent tempest. The atmosphere, heavy and scarcely respirable, was full of that electricity which has so great an influence upon nervous people; and so deep was the darkness, that the two ensigns, though walking side by side, could scarcely discern each other. Although, as may readily be supposed, but little inclined, in general, to be affected by atmospheric influences, Pedro Diaz, whether from anxiety for his friend, or from some vague presentiment, felt exceedingly ill at ease, and he repeatedly endeavoured to dissuade his friend from the absurdity of engaging in a duel on such a night. All his representations of the folly of such a course were, however, useless, and they at length reached the walls of the convent; and exactly as they did so the name of Don Juan de Silva was called of Don Francisco de Rojas, and it was clear that the enemy were at their posts. The better to recognise each other, the two friends rolled a white handkerchief round their arms; and then, without farther preliminaries, the

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combatants crossed their swords the seconds, sword in hand, backing their respective friends, but without speaking a word. In so dark a night the combatants had neither need nor opportunity to exert their skill in fencing, nor could it be supposed that such a duel could be of long duration. And so it proved; for it was speedily terminated by a fierce random thrust: the two combatants staggered, and the two seconds, suddenly and simultaneously aroused to fury, now rushed upon each other. Scarcely had Isabella held out her steel ere it encountered an obstacle, and her adversary fell at her feet, exclaiming, " Ah! traitor, you have killed me!" The abyss of hell seemed to open at her feet. That voice! whose voice was that? "Miguel!" she frantically exclaimed: "Miguel is that you?"

At the same moment there was a frightful peal of thunder, and the whole sky was lighted up by a vivid flash of lightning; and by that lurid glare the wretched Isabella saw three livid corpses laying before her one was that of her brother, Miguel de Aranso. Struck with horror, she fell senseless beside his corpse, and when she again returned to recollection, her lamentable cries brought to her aid some monks from the convent. The three bodies were borne into the monastery, the sad procession being brought up by the weeping Isabella, supported by two monks. It was now discovered that Don Juan and his opponent, desperately as they were wounded, were not quite past recovery; but Miguel de Aranso was dead. As for Isabella, she was now plunged into a dumb stupor; and as she stood there, so pale, silent, and tearless, she might have been mistaken for a statue. Touched with this excessive grief, of which, however, they could not imagine all the terrible extent, the good monks took pity upon the poor murderer, and concealed him in their chapel, such holy places being, at that period, inviolable sanctuaries in all the Spanish dominions.

However wretched and penitent a murderer he may be, he cannot, in these latter days, imitate Simon the Stylite, by standing upon the top of a column for forty years, or even perform the less arduous task of living a lifetime between the four walls of a church; and ere long, the monks failed not to hint as much to the disguised Isabella; and she was by this time quite as anxious to quit the scene of her crime as the monks were to be well rid of so unprofitable a charge. One of the brethren undertaking to convey a message to her friends, Isabella procured a horse and some money. The monks gave her an old arquebuse, which composed the whole armoury of the monastery; and thus equipped, she set forth by night resolved forever to quit a country that had been so fatal to her. It mattered not to her to which point of the compass she might turn her steps; for in every direction her remorse would follow her like a shadow. She went onward, then, without exercising a conscious will as to the direction in which she travelled; but the instinct of self-preservation directed her towards the ocean. For three days Isabella proceeded along the coast; but at the end of that time her jaded horse refused to proceed any farther, and she urged him towards a clump of trees that was near at hand, amid which she hoped to find some grass for the poor brute and shelter for herself. She gained the clump, and was in the very act of dismounting, when a loud voice exclaimed, "Who goes there?"

" Spain!" replied Isabella, mechanically; and two rugged men, thin, haggard, and wearing immense beards, made their appearance from the thicket and approached her. When first accosted, Isabella had prudently unslung the arquebuse; but she now replaced it, and waited til the two strangers came up to her. She then learned that they were two deserters: it was quite as likely that they had escaped from the galleys; but about that Isabella knew or cared naught, though it was pretty certain that two honest men would not have chosen such a place of shelter. But in the desert one is not very choice as to companions; and on the present occasion she was very well inclined to make a virtue of necessity, and by generously sharing with them her last morsel of bread, she made friends of these poor wretches who were literally dying of hunger. As these three ate their scanty meal their conversation made them better acquainted. If the two cavaliers were somewhat suspiciously cautious as to their starting point, on their journey they were abundantly candid as to its end and object. They were on their way to Tucuman, whence they counted upon making their way to the neighbourhood of the river Dorado, where, according to the opinion then prevalent among the Spanish soldiery, the sands were gold and the stones diamonds. The enterprise that they thus contemplated was no trifling one; for they had first to cross the Andes, and then a vast and chiefly desert tract of country. But others had succeeded in accomplishing that task, and why should not they? Should their enterprise prove successful, they would be richly repaid; and should it not do so, the worst that could occur

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would be their dying of cold and hunger in the mountains instead of in the plains. This argument struck Isabella to be an extremely judicious and decisive one: one sort of life was to her just as good as any other; and as she was at that very moment puzzled in which way to direct her steps, she at once agreed to join her two new acquaintance; and turning towards the mountain, they on the following morning commenced their ascent. But previous to setting out they took care to gather in the woods a rude supply of provision in the shape of roots and wild berries, with which they loaded Isabella's horse. These poor resources it will readily be supposed did not last them long; and when after a few days of the most trying fatigues they reached the regions of eternal snows, they suddenly found both their provisions and their strength totally exhausted. the horse was in even worse case than themselves, scarcely able to drag himself along, and continually falling down upon the icy steeps. Our heroine, who alone of the little party still preserved some remnant of hope and courage, proposed that the horse should be killed and cut up, and that each of them should carry a portion for their future support. The horse was accordingly killed, and with some dry grass and some thorny broom which they found at the foot of a rock, they kindled a fire, broiled some of the horseflesh, and with that and some thawed snow made a famous supper. On the following morning they again set out, and found the cold more cruelly intense at every mile that they proceeded. The two unfortunate soldiers, being half-naked, suffered so much that they could scarcely support themselves. At length they were seized with an invincible inclination to sleep, and they no longer had strength or courage to struggle against it, though they must have known that to yield to it was death. Isabella, at once more courageous and more warmly clad, for some time succeeded in animating them by her words and by her example; but at length a day arrived when they felt so utterly exhausted, that they declared that they could go no farther, and that they even preferred death to a longer continuance in their misery. Entreaties and threats were alike un-needed by them; and Isabella at length perceived that the utmost she could hope for was to mitigate the sufferings of their last hour.

At this eventful crisis our travellers had reached a region where enormous masses of rock rise like vague shadows amidst the snows. Our heroine in vain sought among the clefts of the rocks for some of those bushes which hitherto had from time to time enabled them to kindle a fire: all vegetation had now wholly disappeared, and man alone could live amid those tremendous and desolate summits. Not knowing what to do or what resolution to take, she determined to obtain the command of a more extensive view around her by climbing to the top of one of the loftiest of the surrounding crags, and with great difficulty she succeeded in doing so. Suddenly she gave utterance to a loud shout, and hastened back towards her companions. She had seen a man tranquilly seated and reclining against a neighbouring rock! Who and what could that calm traveller be? A liberator, perchance; and doubtless he had a company near at hand. Her announcement of the proximity of aid restored courage and strength to her dying companions. They rose and followed her, and on reaching within twenty paces of the spot described by Isabella, they all perceived the stranger who had not stirred a single inch. There he was, seated and half-concealed behind a point of the rock, in the position of a sharpshooter or a sportsman in ambush.

"Who is there?" shouted Isabella, with difficulty raising her arquebuse; but the stranger neither replied nor stirred: he seemed not to have heard the challenge; and again was it shouted; but her second challenge was as vain as her first one had been. She and her two miserable companions now cautiously advanced under the shelter of the rock, and got within two paces of the still silent stranger, whose back was turned to them. Annoyed by his seemingly obstinate silence, Isabella now went close up to him, and clapping her hand upon his shoulder exclaimed, "Halloo! friend, are you asleep?" But scarcely had she uttered the words ere she recoiled some paces and became pale with terror. At her touch the man had rolled down upon the snow like an inert mass!

It was, in fact, no living being, but a corpse, frozen to the stiffness of a statue. His face was completely blue, and his mouth was half opened in a frightful smile. Isabella and her companions had before their eyes one of those phenomena of which travellers have often made mention, and which might frequently have been met with at the period when the slave-merchants drove the wretched negroes from Buenos Ayres to Peru by the way of the Ceodilleras. Some corpses, it is affirmed, were in this horrible manner preserved perfect for a whole year. This terrible sight produced a very different effect upon the three spectators. One of the soldiers, he who was farthest gone in illness and debility, and whose life had been, so to speak, rekindled by the hope of speedy aid, received such a shock from the disappointment, that he fell down, stretched himself out upon the snow, and died. Our

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heroine and the remaining soldier, on the contrary, gathered new strength from their terror, and immediately resumed their march, after having despoiled the corpse of the few rags that might serve them as extra clothing. They deemed that they must now have passed the highest point of the mountains, and that thenceforth they would, with still increasing facility, descend into a milder and more fruitful country. Onward, then, they went; but the soldier speedily lost all courage and strength; the very blood seemed to be congealed in his veins by the intense cold; and at length, despite the entreaties of Isabella, he would seat himself to take breath. Scarcely had he done so ere his head fell forward upon his chest, his eyes closed, and his limbs stiffened: in a few minutes he was dead.

Thus, suddenly and awfully left companionless, our adventuress knelt down, and, perhaps for the first time in her life gave utterance to a fervent prayer; and when she arose from her knees she felt herself a little reanimated. Her first care was to examine the pockets of her companion, in which she found a fire box and eight doubloons, of which she at once possessed herself. The poor devil to whom they rightfully belonged had clearly no farther need of them. This done, Isabella took the remainder of the horse-beef upon her shoulder and proceeded on her way, Towards evening she imagined that she could see a tree in the distance, and her heart bounded with joy at this sign that she was once more approaching the land of the living. Collecting all her remaining strength and energy, she walked rapidly onward, and at length reached that tree of safety and hope; but scarcely had she done so when her courage failed her, her trembling knees sank under her, and she fell to the ground in a state which partook at once of swooning and of sleep. This stupor continued during the whole night; and when at daybreak she again returned to consciousness, the temperature of the air was so mild compared to that which she had recently suffered under, that the warm air seemed to stifle her, and she felt dying with hunger, thirst, and weakness. Her heart now completely sank within her, and she vainly endeavoured to move her aching limbs, and to stand upon her torn and bleeding feet. Despair seized upon her spirit, and invoking death which could alone release her from her sufferings, she lay there without an effort, as her companions had done, and fully expecting to die as they had died. Though she felt herself expiring, she suddenly raised her head from the earth, and listened with eager attention. The welcome sound of the trampling of horses met her ears, and in a few minutes two mounted travellers came up.

The two travellers were no a little surprised at thus suddenly finding in the desert a rugged, haggard, and seemingly dying young man who, though unable to speak, extended his hands towards them as if imploring their pity. The travellers stopped on the instant; one of them raised Isabella in his arms, and the other bathed her temples with some spirits, of which he also made her swallow a small quantity; and when by these means they had somewhat revived her, they placed her on one of their horses, and slowly went on their way. These two horsemen, as our adventuress now learned, were the servants of a very wealthy lady, who occupied a vast estate in that very neighbourhood; and in the course of about an hour they reached her house. Hope had now so far restored the but lately dying Isabella, that she was able to make some steps towards the mistress of the mansion and express her thanks. An excellent bed was immediately prepared for her; and when she was thoroughly warmed, a nourishing supper was taken to her, of which she partook with an appetite which abundantly proved how much it was needed.

Isabella's iron constitution triumphed over even this terrible trial; and when she awoke from a long sleep, she felt, if not completely recovered and rested, at least in a fair way for being so. A servant who had been watching for her awakening, presented her with a bowl of hot spiced wine, and placed beside her an almost new suit of blue cloth apparel, together with linen, shoes, and hat, which the kind lady of the house had borrowed from one of her people. A moment afterwards, on Isabella expressing a wish to bathe, a vast bathing-tub of warm water was taken into her chamber. When she had enjoyed a most luxurious bath, arranged her splendid black hair, of which she seems to have been at all times very proud, and dressed herself in the borrowed suit, which by good fortune fitted her to admiration, she felt herself filled with new vigour and proudly conscious of her good looks. The inmates of the house, on their part, when they saw their guest in this improved condition, could scarcely recognise in that seeming young man, so smiling and so handsome, the squalid poor creature whom they had taken in on the previous night.

PART III

CHAPTER IV

The kind-hearted lady to whom our heroine was thus indebted, was a Mistico; that is to say, the daughter of a Spanish father and an Indian mother; she was a widow, and might at this period be about fifty years of age. She was an excellent woman, simple, charitable, rich already, and constantly growing richer by the profits of her large and excellently-managed property. She now very kindly questioned the seeming young man as to his name and history. Isabella, who had prepared for this inquiry, unhesitatingly replied that her name was Pedro Diaz, and that she was an ensign in the Spanish service; and this information she followed up by one of those tales which she could so admirably tell and so readily invent; and the ensign was on all hands allowed to be a very nice young man, and one of very military appearance, though still so young as to be absolutely beardless; and he was invited to make himself at home as long as he pleased, even for a permanency if he thought fit. He was even told that if willing, he might assist in the management of the estate, the inhabitants of which lived in great peace and enjoyment in that retired company which they scarcely ever quitted, save for the purpose of making their necessary purchases at Tucuman. Pedro Diaz who, as may well be conceived, had but a very slight inclination for a rural life, nevertheless appeared to be much gratified by the proposals of the kind lady, and even betrayed, or affected to betray, a lurking dislike to the military profession; for he felt the need of time to look around him ere he should proceed to seek his fortune elsewhere. However temporary it might prove to be, his new situation presented considerable advantages to his view, and he thought it prudent to enjoy himself in it as agreeably as possible, until something better should present itself.

The Ensign Diaz and his kind hostess had for about an hour been engaged in a very friendly conversation, when the door of the apartment was suddenly opened, and a lovely young girl made her entrance: this was Juana, the daughter of the hostess. Juana might be about sixteen years old, born of a Spanish father and an American mother, she united to the piquant Andalusian physiognomy that suppleness of figure, and that languid voluptuousness of eye and manner which forms the peculiar grace of the women of Peru. A necklace of coral threw into strong relief her pale but clear olive complexion; and her long ear-drops gave to her countenance a peculiarly foreign, almost a savage appearance. She saluted the ensign without the least embarrassment; and with that graceful and natural simplicity which, alas! we so seldom meet with in civilized lands. In that all but absolute desert in which Juana had hitherto passed her life, she had scarcely ever seen any other men than her mother's servants; and we may therefore readily imagine the simple curiosity with which she looked upon the young stranger, whose sudden coming partook so much of that mysterious and romantic character which at all times and in all countries has proved so seductive to female imaginations. Her scrutiny, it must be confessed, resulted in an impression by no means unfavourable to the ensign; and Pedro Diaz, on his side, was inspired with a lively feeling of sympathy and admiration by the aspect and bearing of the young girl. He held long conversations with her, and was quite delighted with the candour and grace of the young Juana, whom his tales most of them, as may be guessed, as apocryphal as they were marvellous filled her young head and heart with enthusiasm; and by the end of a week our ensign, established in the house on the footing of an old friend, felt himself detained there as if by some secret and irresistible charm. What was that charm? The great, but mischievous and ungrateful delight with which he perceived and encouraged the growing love of the deluded Juana, a delight all the greater, because it tallied so well with that taste for intrigue and mystery which formed one of the strongest passions of our most strange and incomprehensible Isabella. During their long evening interviews, she watched with the greatest interest every movement, and, so to speak, every thought and impulse of the graceful young girl; and that pure and untaught child of nature blushed more and more deeply under that scrutinising gaze which originated only in curiosity, but which she innocently attributed to love: and thus the days wore on. In the meanwhile, the anxious mother, she knew not why, at length guessed what was passing in the heart of her child, and then became doubly anxious from her uncertainty how she could best put an end to a situation that she deemed embarrassing, and which, in fact, was

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far more so than she could imagine. At length she determined at all hazards to put an end in some one or the other way to this state of things; and it was not long ere an opportunity for so doing presented itself.

The prudence of a mother, however instinctive and alert it might be, could scarcely prevent two young people, living thus beneath the same roof, from sometimes meeting without the presence of other witnesses; and in the private meetings which chance thus afforded them, though that chance was perhaps somewhat aided by the inclination of the young and innocent Juana, their conversation insensibly became more familiar; and the ensign sometimes ventured to take the hand of the young girl with what seemed a perfectly fraternal freedom. One day, urged by I know not what impulse of feminine coquetry, and wholly forgetting her disguise, Isabella played with the luxuriant and jetty hair of Juana, who blushed with agitation, and had not courage to repulse the seemingly daring ensign.

Thus thrilling and blushing, Juana looked beautiful as Young Love could render her; and her companion passed an arm round the slender and graceful waist of the young girl, and tenderly kissed her forehead. Suddenly recollecting herself, the disguised Isabella recoiled and withdrew to the seat that she had previously occupied; and at that very moment the Senora mother suddenly entered the apartment. While her daughter was present, the Senora said nothing, and preserved all the appearance of the most perfect calmness; but as soon as Juana left the room, the Senora said, "Senor Ensign, you have deceived me!" Pedro Diaz would have replied, but the Senora imposed silence upon him with a gesture, and continued: " Yes, Senor, I repeat that you have deceived me, and that in a most unworthy manner. You were unfortunate, a lost wanderer in the desert, and I received you into my house without knowing whom it was that I so received. Our cares restored you to life and health, and I offered to retain you as a son in this tranquil abode; and you now return my kindness by endeavouring to seduce my daughter, to seduce with all the impudence of a heartless soldier, a poor child whose innocence leaves her without defence against your arts!"

Though utterly confused for an instant, her young guest speedily recovered sufficient presence of mind to stammer out some words of apology, alleging that his affection for Juana was perfectly fraternal; that his caresses were very innocent, and that he was quite incapable of bringing dishonour upon the young heiress of the house in which he had been so kindly received. In that respect, the ensign, as we know, for once in the way, spoke truly far more truly than the excellent Senora could possibly have imagined.

When the accused paused, the kind-hearted Senora shook her head, and replied, "To what end should I complain? It is, alas! only too evident that my daughter loves you, and, perchance it is the will of heaven to punish me for my blindness. The evil is done, and it is only you who can repair it. If you speak truly in saying that you like our tranquil life, and if you love my daughter, remain with us altogether. I ask you nothing about your family; I don't wish to know whether you are rich or poor. Here, in this oasis of the desert goodness of heart is more precious than nobility, and industry procures all needful wealth. If you wish to marry my daughter, do so: I am quite ready to receive you and love you as my son."

Isabella was so utterly confounded by these most importune and unexpected proffers, that for some moments she could not utter a word of reply, and the Senora sternly added, "If, on the other hand, as your silence compels me to fear, you are, in fact, only a heartless and dastardly deceiver, go from us, Senor go this very evening. You shall have a guide to Tucuman; and may heaven reform and preserve you!"

The worthy Senora was undoubtedly an excellent mother; she adored her daughter; nevertheless we must not exaggerate her disinterestedness. In her estimation the Ensign Pedro Diaz, little as she knew of him, was an excellent match for her beloved Juana. Rich or poor, an officer or not, he at all events was a Spaniard; and in her eyes, a Spaniard was that superior being that a white man still is for a woman of colour in America. Now, Spaniards were at that period but rarely seen at the foot of the Cordilleras, and should her present guest depart, what Spaniard was likely to re-place him? I would not venture to assert that the excellent Senora had not maturely weighed all these considerations, and watched for that decisive moment that had at length presented

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itself. Be that as it may, the alternative was uncommonly embarrassing to the disguised Isabella. The master Urquiza, and the equally beautiful and artful Beatrix de Cardenas, reverted to her memory, and she felt that no other than the chief point was to gain time, and that she was now to find her best security in the repetition of the farce she performed then, only varied as the circumstances of the case might require; and she accordingly began to play her part with all the skill and grace of an accomplished actress.

"Juana," she replied, "was an angel of grace and beauty, and the Senora the most admirable of mothers. To become the husband of the one and the son of the other ah! what greater happiness could fate bestow upon a poor soldier lost and alone so far from his native land?"

And then a thousand protestations of equal sincerity followed that oratorical burst; afterwards came real tenderness on the one side and admirably acted rapture on the other; and then they embraced, and it was settled that the marriage should take place. To even the most superficial glance it will be abundantly clear that it would have been Isabella's far more simple plan to embrace the second proposition of the Senora, and to depart for Tucuman without other annoyance than the very immaterial one of the Senora's contempt. But we have already seen that simplicity was not made for our heroine; perplexity and scheming were her favourite elements; and at this precise moment it was repugnant to her to play the part of an ingrate; and the consequence of these mingled feelings was that she accepted the more difficult alternative.

A few days after this scene, it was, upon the proposition of the ensign, decided that the marriage should be celebrated at Tucuman. This proposal of the excellent Pedro Diaz seemed sufficiently justified, in the eyes of the mother, by the necessity of making some indispensable purchases, the difficulty of getting a priest and the requisite witnesses to her house, and a variety of other reasons. Pedro Diaz had but one motive for the proposition, the very sufficient one, that versatile and great as was his intriguing genius, he could not, on the instant, hit upon any better means of putting off the evil day and affording room for the operation of that very important chapter the chapter of accidents. To steal away alone across the unknown desert, and without leaving any traces behind him, was not practicable; he had not now, as he had had at Paita, the ocean at hand to facilitate his flight, and, as it were to absorb him like an atom in its immensity. At Tucuman, on the other hand, the noise and bustle of the town, and the numberless chances of a new way of life, were very likely to facilitate his retreat and hide his whereabouts.

For Tucuman, then, they departed, and arrived there safely and without accident. Ere a week had expired our ensign had contrived to make some excellent acquaintances in Tucuman, and to plunge once more and without reserve into his old habits of gaming. Dressed, thanks to the Senora, as a rich cavalier, he passed the chief portion of his time in the various gambling haunts of the place, playing furiously against a dozen of Portuguese, the most skilful sharpers there to be found. The eight doubloons which he had taken from the frozen soldier on the Cordilleras soon passed from his hands, and were followed by numerous others which, now on one pretence and now on another, he contrived to borrow from the intended, or to speak more correctly, the intending mother-in-law. The Ensign Diaz, usually very fortunate, was much astonished at so obstinate a run of ill luck, and at length began to feel some shrewd doubts about the honesty of his new friends. He thenceforth studied their countenances, and watched their every gestures and their every movement, and more especially every movement of their fingers; and as he was, I regret to say it, himself a very skilful trickster, he was not long in acquiring complete certainty that his new friends were very great knaves, and that he was very imprudently plundered. "Strip a Spaniard of ever virtue," says an old proverb, "and you will have a Portuguese." The proverb is somewhat ill-natured, but Diaz fully agreed with it; but notwithstanding all the contempt that he felt for his companions, he reflected that, as he was but one to twelve of them, it would be too perilous openly to quarrel with those knaves, who most probably resort to the dagger rather than be exposed and disgraced; and he therefore patiently watched and waited until he had lost his very last real.

The person who had played against him, and to whom, consequently, he had lost his money, Fernando de Acosta by name, rose at the termination of the game, took his hat and left the house. The ensign very soon followed him, but

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with all the appearance of the most perfect calmness. As soon, however, as he was in the street, he ran at full speed in the direction which he knew De Acosta to have gone, and only slackened his pace when he saw that person's figure sketched by the bright moonbeams upon the wall, and then Pedro contented himself with keeping of at about fifteen paces in the rear. In about a quarter of an hour Fernando de Acosta, who had been gaily whistling a march as he walked, suddenly stopped before a small door, took a key from his pocket, and inserted it into the lock. In an instant the ensign sprang forward, and hitting him suddenly and smartly upon the shoulder, said "Senor Portuguese, you are a cheat and a robber!"

The other turned round, recognised Pedro Diaz, and quite calmly replied, "Very possible, Senor; but I do not care to be told so!"

The Portuguese, as he spoke, drew his sword; for his adversary, not desiring to assassinate him, gave him time for preparation; but his exasperation was too great to allow of more delay; as scarcely had the Portuguese thrown himself into guard ere Pedro Diaz ran his sword up to the very hilt into his body, and he fell dead without a word or even a sigh.

The first movement of the victor was to possess himself of the dead man's purse, his next care was to look up and down the street, and to listen with a perfect agony of attention; but it seemed certain that no human being either saw or heard him. The whole town was still, and the lights had everywhere been extinguished for some time, and Diaz, completely reassured, carefully wiped the blood from his sword, and returned it to the scabbard. The next thing to be done was to dispose of the body; and after a few moment's reflection, our ensign determined how to do so.

The key still remained in the lock into which the Portuguese was in the very act of inserting it at the moment when he was so suddenly and so fatally interrupted. Pedro, therefore, cautiously opened the door, and dragged the corpse into the house as far as the foot of the stairs; then, having put the door-key into Fernando's pocket, he quitted the house, closing the door behind him with the least possible noise. When he had thus gained the street he again listened; but the most profound stillness completely reassured him. Feeling thus secure that the night had concealed the crime from all human eyes, he returned to his lodging in the house of the Senora, and retired to bed untroubled by any considerable remorse, reflecting that, after all, he had acted as a gentleman and a man of honour should act. It was late when Diaz went to bed, but early in the morning he awakened with a start, and saw two police officers standing by his bedside. Flight and resistance, it was only too clear, were alike impossible. The ensign, with his heart filled with despair, gazed at the intruders with well-affected astonishment, and in the most confident tone that he could command, demanded what they wanted. The reply was, of course, anticipated and on hearing it he rejoined "And of what, great God! of what am I accused?"

"Of assassination," coldly replied the officer.

Pedro, wishing to continue in the farce of surprise endeavoured to smile; but though a really skilful actor, the effort on the present occasion was, we are bound to confess, anything but a successful one. There was nothing for him to do but to dress and accompany his very disagreeable disturbers, who would not so much as allow him to stop to say a few words to the Senora; but as he, sadly enough, went down stairs, he heard a door opened, and fancied that he caught a glimpse of the pale and tearful face of poor Juana. Half-an-hour afterwards our poor heroine was at the wrong side of the gloomy door of the town prison. At that time accused persons were not suffered to remain long in suspense as to their fate; the law was exceedingly expeditious and proceeded to business without delay; and on the very day that the ensign was arrested, the preliminary examination took place, and the indictment was drawn up. When questioned, the prisoner denied everything so boldly and so firmly, that even the law officers were staggered. He declared, and so far he spoke truly enough, that he had never entered the apartment of Fernando de Acosta; but he also affirmed, which, as we know, was not true, that he scarcely was acquainted with the deceased, and that consequently there could have been no quarrel between them; and he added, that men of his stamp attacked their enemies face to face, and in the open day, and not assassin-like and

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stealthily in passages. Unfortunately for Don Pedro Diaz, and to his great astonishment, a witness now appeared against him, an ill-looking fellow whom the prisoner had never before seen. This man, however, declared that the ensign was perfectly well known to him; that it was well known in the neighbourhood that the accused paid court to the wife of the deceased De Acosta, and that it was most probably that the lover, being surprised upon the stairs by the injured husband, had killed him there and then, leaped from the window in the hope that suspicion would fall upon the inhabitants of the house; and to render his evidence the more fatally decisive against the ensign, he added, that a friend of his had seen that officer leap from the window. The friend, another miscreant of the same stamp as the first witness, and of similarly villainous appearance, next deposed that he had distinctly recognised the prisoner as he leaped from the window, but fancying that it was only a love affair, had said nothing to the officers of justice until he learned that Fernando de Acosta had been barbarously murdered. What reply could the unfortunate Pedro Diaz make to this overwhelming testimony of two perjured villains who, no doubt, had been suborned by the Portuguese gang of gamblers and cheats? He was so thunderstruck and confounded, that he made no reply save to affirm his innocence, and that the witnesses were infamous liars. But such mere assertion, supported by no shadow of proof, could of course be of no weight; and the ensign was there and then condemned to be hanged to death in the great square of the town on that day week at sunset.

This unexpected and terribly unequivocal sentence gave the disguised Isabella only too much cause for reflection. To suffer herself to be condemned as the lover of the Senora de Acosta, was to sport with misfortune and the hangman; and her first impulse was utterly to confound the abominable impostors by avowing her real sex; but just as she was about to make that declaration, a second thought restrained her. How would this avowal serve her? What legal, or even logical proof would it furnish of her innocence of the murder of De Acosta? Such an avowal would necessarily be much talked of, and would not the report of it travel beyond the Condilleras, and perhaps even to Spain. And even if, which was itself very doubtful, that avowal should serve to exculpate her of the murder of De Acosta, would it not lead to such an inquiry into her past life as would convict her of almost as grave offences? Would not the Inquisition take her case in hand? And in that case, would not the stern Judges of the Holy Office interpret her disguise and her strange adventurous life into proofs of sorcery, and perhaps send her to the stake? Death for death, if she needs must die thus young, the rope was to be preferred to the torture, and the gibbet to the burning pile. Nevertheless, the love of life was still strong within her, and Isabella still brooded over the avowal of her sex as a last hope and final effort. Meanwhile, amidst these hesitations, the seven days passed by, and the poor prisoner felt her heart sink within her, when through the bars of the narrow grating which formed her sole window, she saw the last rays of her last sun sinking behind the mountains. As she sat, plunged in the deep melancholy inspired by this sight, and the solemn terrors that it awakened, four monks entered her dungeon to assist her to prepare for death. The foremost of these monks was a man of ken and intelligent features. Isabella imagined that he made signs to her, and she trembled violently with emotion when he stealthily showed her a scrap of paper which he held between his fingers. With an air of penitence she threw herself upon her knees at his feet; and as she bent her head to his hands, contrived to seize and secrete the paper: then the monk said to her,— "My son, I am happy to find you thus piously and penitently disposed; but take a few moments to reflect and prepare yourself for confession."

The prisoner scarcely comprehended the monk's words; all her thoughts were concentrated upon the scrap of paper which he had so adroitly passed into her hands. Speedily, however, it flashed upon her mind that while pretending to recollect herself preparatory to confession, she might baffle the watchful eyes of the other monks; so she withdrew to her wretched pallet and knelt beside it as through plunged in serious reflection, but only occupied, as we may easily suppose, in perusing the contents of the mysterious note: it contained only these few words: refuse to confess. A moment's reflection sufficed to show the quick-minded Isabella all the importance of these words, few as they were; and suddenly springing up, she disdainfully exclaimed, "Caramba! my worthy brethren, Caramba! what do you want here?" And as the monks started back in astonishment and terror, she continued: "You want to confess me, you say? And pray who told you that I will confess myself, eh? Go go away, and leave me in peace; I have nothing to say to you."

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The monks, greatly surprised though they were, endeavoured to calm this sudden anger. They spoke to the prisoner of his death so close at hand, and of the eternal and unknown world to which that death was the mere portal; but the accused scornfully replied that he feared neither death nor eternity; that he had often faced the one and knew nothing about the other; and, moreover, was by no means certain whether he was a Christian or a Pagan. Born in the camp, he had from his childhood upward combated like a loyal soldier both upon the land and upon the sea; he was innocent of the crime for which he had been unjustly condemned, and what more could they want to know? After having vainly exhausted all their religious formula, the monks quitted the dungeon, loudly deploring the impiety and ignorance of one who was at the very point of death; and on the proposition of one of the number they proceeded in a body to the Corregidor to implore him to put off the execution and to leave time for that lost and wandering soul to be brought into the right way.

It was to Juana that the prisoner owed the mysterious advice; and the reader will now, of course, perceive her object in writing it, though at first even the shrewd Isabella had not been able to divine it. As for the Corregidor, he was at first inflexible; but at length he allowed himself to be so far prevailed upon by the earnest entreaties of the monks, that he granted a respite of twelve hours; but he added, "that the prisoner might, if he chose, go to the devil in his obstinacy, but at all events he should infallibly be executed on the evening of the next day." The whole of the following day was spent in prayers and useless exhortations; our heroine knowing the cause of her respite, and having thoroughly taken her cue, was in no hurry to allow herself to be converted; she saw at least a gleam of hope of escaping altogether. Towards evening, however, her courage began to fail her, and she turned deadly pale when, at the appointed hour, she heard the rusted bolts of her cell withdrawn, and the doors opened to admit three sinister-looking men: these were the executioners. Almost immediately afterwards they left the dungeon again, taking with them poor Isabella, with a white woollen robe thrown over her dress; and in a few moments she was led forth from the prison, with her feet bare, a lighted taper in her hand, and escorted by a detachment of foot soldiers. A long file of monks, with rosaries in their hands, and headed by an immense crucifix, waited the convict; and an immense multitude was assembled in the great square which still glowed beneath the fiery rays of the fast setting sun.

When the prisoner appeared in the square, a long, low murmur was heard from every portion of the vast crowd: he was deadly pale; but his glance was bright and clear, and his step firm and majestic.

"What a young fellow! and how handsome!" murmured the women. At the moment that the procession was about to commence its march, that march which threatened to terminate so fatally for her, Isabella recognised amidst the crowd the shrewd-looking monk who on the previous evening had given her the mysterious note; and it seemed to her that he was looking about very anxiously in every direction, as though in eager expectation of some important event or person. Was there, then, she thought, still some hope for her? But the fatal spot was not close at hand, and already poor Isabella could discern the gibbet, looming dark and sinister, before her. It was in the form of a Roman capital F; and as she first caught sight of it, a boy astride upon the upper limb of it was fastening the fatal rope, while the police were busily engaged in beating back the crowd. She could see no more, for a film came over her eyes, and a strange and stupifying humming deafened her ears; but she still advanced as though urged onward by some power quite independent of herself, and at length arrived at the foot of the gallows. Here the Corregidor, mounted upon a white mule, delivered the written sentence to the chief of the police, who read it aloud to the assembled public of Tucuman. While this was going on a strange excitement seized upon Isabella, and a wild feeling of vanity restored her to all her accustomed coolness and audacity. Seeing that the executioner was very clumsily knotting a noose in the rope, she snatched it from him, exclaiming, "Give me hold of it, drunkard: you do not half know your trade!" and ere she had well concluded the words, she had made one of those knots at which seamen have an unequalled dexterity. At this the enthusiasm of the crowd was excited beyond all bounds, and a tremendous shout arose of "Pardon! pardon!"

On hearing this clamour, the Corregidor began to fear a riot and rescue, and he signed to the executioner to hasten the fatal business; but just as that revolting functionary was in the act of obeying, a horseman covered with dust galloped into the square and delivered a despatch to the Corregidor. A profound silence now succeeded to the

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wild clamour that had previously prevailed, and every countenance present, not even excepting that of the executioner himself, expressed the most lively curiosity. The Corregidor rapidly glanced over the brief despatch, and the moment that he had done so, he ordered that the execution should be suspended, and that the prisoner should be taken back to his dungeon. The suppressed agitation of the multitude now found vent in one long, loud shout that arose like thunder. The crowd swayed hither and thither, groups formed, and the monks themselves questioned, and debated, and wondered; and while all were thus lost in conjecture, the police officers conveyed safely back to his dungeon the prisoner who had so narrowly escaped the gallows.

The cause of this most unexpected occurrence soon became known: the despatch that had so opportunely arrived to save the life of the prisoner had been sent from La Plata by the president, Don Martin de Mendiola. A few days previously the two witnesses who had given evidence against Isabella had fallen into the hands of justice. They were two vile bravoes, ready to be hired by any one for the omission of any crime. Having been condemned to death for their misdeeds, and preliminarily subjected to the torture, they had confessed to a variety of crimes, and, among them, to that of having perjured themselves in the case of Pedro Diaz, whom they had been paid to swear against, but of whom they in reality knew quite literally nothing, good or evil. The president, on hearing this confession, had instantly written to the inferior authorities at Tucuman, ordering them to suspend all proceedings against the ensign, and to remit the case to the superior jurisdiction of La Plata. As may easily be supposed the Senora, the intended mother-in-law of the soi disant Pedro Diaz, had been no stranger to this event. After having vainly invoked the mercy of the Corregidor of Tucuman, and as vainly attempted to bribe him, she had hastened to La Plata, leaving Juana in the care of a confidential woman, and of an entirely devoted Franciscan monk. Received with great kindness and distinction by the president, Don Martin, who was an old friend of her deceased husband, she had greatly stimulated the activity of justice, and had doubtless much contributed to the departure of the courier who was to save the life of her intended son-in-law.

Isabella owed to the Senora not only the temporary salvation of her life, but also the favourable consideration of her new judges; for when, two days afterwards, she was removed to La Plata, her sentence was reverse there; and as there was no longer any serious charge against her, she was immediately set at liberty.

As may readily be supposed, this business made a great noise throughout the province. The ensign, Pedro Diaz, was the object of general curiosity, and his adventure became the inexhaustible subject of conversation. This situation was, in reality, equivocal and painful enough; for human justice has the melancholy power of most frequently setting a fatal mark upon the brow of even him whom it formally acquits; but such as it was, the situation was anything rather than unpleasant to that strange being, Isabella, who had in her composition a superabundance of vanity but not a spark of genuine or delicate pride. As for the Senora, wounded to the heart by all this melancholy bustle and notoriety, her sole wish now was to return with her daughter and the ensign to her peaceful home. But Don Martin gave her to understand that that particular time would be but ill-chosen for the marriage. He assured her that the interest of Juana required that time should be given for the affair of her betrothed to die away, or be cast into oblivion by some new wonder; and to all the objections and suggestions of the Senora, he replied with the authority and decision of a man who knows still more than he chooses to say. Thus urged, the Senora at length, though very reluctantly, consented to a separation which she was assured should be of but short duration; and she took her departure, but not without giving a liberal supply of money to the ensign, who feigned to be in absolute despair at parting from her, and swore that ere three months should elapse he would have the pleasure to be at the feet of the best of mothers and of the loveliest of betrothed brides. Scarcely had the very worthy and much deluded Senora taken her departure, ere the President Don Martin summoned Pedro Diaz to his presence, and said, "Senor ensign, have you not been at Concepcion? and when there did you not know Captain Miguel de Aranso? He was my particular friend."

Our heroine, who but a moment before had been in high glee at her escape, not only from death, but also from a marriage which she had dreaded not much less than the gallows itself, now felt all her terrors revive, and she trembled from head to foot, and became pale as a corpse. The president soon, however, relieved her from her worst fears by adding

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"If you will be advised by me, you will depart this very night, and keep straight onward as long as you have land beneath your feet, and then change your name, and take care never to venture into this country again. Safety to him who rightly understands!"

The ensign waited for no repetition of this very salutary advice; but proceeded on the instant to provide himself with a horse, and in another hour he had left the town, with a very full determination that he would never set foot in it again.

PART IV

CHAPTER V

The nearest city was La Paz, and towards that place the ensign now took his way, and, thanks to the speed of his horse, soon reached it. This horse, which he had purchased at a very moderate price, was a superb creature: black and glossy as the raven's wing, and without a white hair or a blemish, however trivial; and with its mane knotted and plaited in the Andalusian style, and its saddle of yellow leather embroidered with red worsted and stitched with white thread, looked a steed right fit for a gallant cavalier. Horse and rider, both, were remarked as they reached the great square of the town; and inquisitive idlers crowded round them and asked each other who this elegant and admirably-mounted stranger might be. Isabella, far from being abashed, but, on the contrary, gratified and flattered by the evident impression that she made, drew up in front of one of the curious groups and asked them to direct her to the best inn. Among those to whom she addressed her request, our adventuress noticed two soldiers of very sinister and knavish aspect, who seemed to watch her movements with a very peculiar interest, and more especially to examine her gallant steed with a most minute and suspicious curiosity. She had scarcely turned her horse's head in the direction of the inn that had been pointed out to her, when these two men, after a brief and whispered consultation together, respectfully approached a somewhat distinguished-looking personage, handsomely attired in black, and spoke earnestly to him, at the same time directing his attention to the ensign. Though Isabella merely glanced towards them without turning her head fully round, she was enabled to note all that passed; for her senses were quickened by anxiety.

"Suspicion haunts the guilty mind;" and our heroine's conscience was so ill at ease that, without any precise idea as to what she had to fear, her first impulse was to put her fleet and powerful horse upon his mettle and escape without knowing or asking from what; but on second and, as it proved, better thought, she checked her horse into a mere walk, and awaited the event with a very imposing appearance of indifference. She was not kept long in suspense. An alguazil approached, saluted our ensign very politely, and said that the Alcade, or chief magistrate, would be glad to speak with his lordship. The ensign courteously returned the police officer's bow, and followed him, assuming the composed and smiling air that was best calculated to serve him under the circumstances. The Alcade was still conversing with the two soldiers; and the idlers, anticipating an interesting scene, crowded as closely around him as respect for his official character would allow them. As the ensign drew up in front of the Alcade, one of the soldiers said, "Oh! yes, my lord, it is he: it is certainly the same man."

Isabella felt herself turn pale, but recovering by a strong effort, she bowed respectfully to the Alcade, and said, "May I ask what is your excellency's pleasure with me?"

The Alcade gazed upon the countenance of the stranger with a mingled sternness and scrutiny by no means calculated to reassure even the most innocent of persons, and said, "Senor Cavalier, I, for my part, do not know you; but these two soldiers assert that the horse upon which you are mounted belongs to them. They say that they have been robber of the animal, and that they can prove the fact. What have you to say in reply?"

Our unfortunate heroine, prepared for any other accusation rather than this, was, for the moment, so completely taken by surprise, that she could not find a word of reply, and fairly blushed with confusion. But the increased

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sternness with which the Alcade surveyed her, and the triumphant glances that were exchanged by her impudent accusers, restored her at the critical moment to all her accustomed coolness. Without uttering a word she unfastened her short cloak from her saddle bow, and threw it over her horse's head, so as completely to conceal it from the ears to the nostrils, and then said to the Alcade, "May I beg your excellency to inquire of these gentlemen which of his eyes this horse has lost? It must be either the right or the left, that is quite certain so they can make no mistake."

"Good!" said the Alcade. "Now, soldiers, which eye has the horse lost? Answer me at once," said the Alcade, somewhat sternly; for the soldiers were silent and evidently confused. "Answer me at once I say!"

One of the soldiers then said that the horse had lost the right eye, the other the left; and the Alcade sarcastically remarked that considering the simplicity of the question the answers were rather inconsistent. Thus admonished, the two soldiers at once exclaimed that it was the left eye that the horse had lost; that though in their haste and in the confusion arising from their being unused to speak to so important a personage as the Alcade, they had at first contradicted each other: they were perfectly certain and perfectly agreed in now stating that the horse had lost his left eye.

"Very well," said the accused, coolly removing the cloth from his horse's eyes. "Now, if your excellency will condescend to look closely at the head of my horse, you will see that he has lost neither one eye nor the other."

The Alcade just glanced at the horse, and then exclaimed to the alguazils:

"Arrest the two accusers: this cavalier is perfectly right, and they are two impudent cheats!"

The fellows were accordingly dragged away to prison while the amused crowd escorted the laughing and victorious ensign in triumph to his inn; but scarcely had he been there long enough to repair the derangement of his attire, when a servant informed him that Don Antonio Calderon wished to speak to him on behalf of the Alcade. Once again our heroine was much puzzled and even somewhat alarmed. What could be the meaning and object of this visit and message? However, be the meaning and result of the visit what they might, it was impossible for the ensign to deny himself to the announced messenger of the Alcade and accordingly he desired that the cavalier in question should be forthwith admitted; and the polite bearing and very jovial countenance of Don Antonio, at once and entirely dispelled all fear from the mind of Isabella. Don Antonio announced himself as the nephew of the Bishop of Cuzco and the cousin of the Alcade of Paz, by whom he was now commissioned to express his great regret for the annoyance that might have been caused to the ensign by the absurd scene about the horse. The knavish soldiers, he said, would infallibly suffer the punishment that they so richly merited; but the Alcade could not feel perfectly at ease until he should personally have given the accused cavalier that assurance; and though he as yet had not the pleasure to know the name, rank, or even country of the traveller, he had sent Don Antonio to beg the cavalier's company to dinner. On hearing herself thus plainly however delicately called upon to give a name, Isabella remembered the sound and significant advice of the President of La Plata, and replied,

"My name is Don Jose de Salta; I am an ensign in the service of his Most Catholic Majesty; I am a native of Biscay, and I am on my way to Cuzco on my private business."

"Ah!" exclaimed Don Antonio, "How very fortunate: my cousin, also, is a Biscayan; and he, like yourself, sets out for Cuzco to-morrow; so if it be agreeable to you, Senor Ensign, we can all travel in company."

Nothing, it will readily be imagined, could have been more agreeable to our heroine than thus to travel in company with a sage and dignitary of the law, whose presence seemed to afford the best possible guarantee against the recurrence of any of those too numerous adventures of which she now began to be thoroughly wearied. Accordingly, she eagerly accepted the invitation, and accompanied Don Antonio to the residence of the Alcade.

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That eminent functionary, by name Don Pedro de Chavarris, gave a most polite reception to our adventuress; and after again expressing his regret that so amiable a gentleman should have been put to even a moment's inconvenience by the impudent trickery of a couple of knaves, hastened to introduce him to Donna Maria, a most lovely Andalusian lady to whom he had been married about a year. Donna Maria was a true type of the Seville beauty; a style of beauty, by the way, about which much erroneous impression appears to exist. The true Seville beauty, admirably typified, as we have said, by Donna Maria, is not petite, lively, piquant, and dark, like the beauties of Cadiz, nor fair and voluptuous like the women of Valentia, but fair, tall, slender, and yet most admirably proportioned; and the fairness of her complexion was at once contrasted and heightened by the darkness of her eyes and of their long and silken lashes. Her brilliant and strikingly southern glance contrasted at once strangely and pleasingly with her fair complexion and hair; in a word, her countenance united the utmost Germanic sweetness with the utmost Arab energy. Of her feet I say nothing; she scarcely had any. Our ensign found this fair lady very much to his taste; and the excellent reception which the whole household gave him, put him upon his very best mettle, and he gave very brilliant and amusing, if not very scrupulously accurate, little narratives of his travels and adventures; discoursing well of what he knew, and even better of what he did not know, and turning the conversation with such infinite art, as never to allow his auditors a moment's fatigue. In a word, he speedily became quite a lion in that provincial party which, assuredly, had never before entertained or been entertained by so brilliant a converser. His host rightly thought that he would prove a most precious addition to their travelling party; and not even our ensign himself was more delighted than the Alcade was at the odd chance that had brought them together. Clear-sightedness was by no means the distinguishing quality of the excellent Alcade; his companion speedily perceived that, and remarked, too, that the beautiful eyes of the Senora constantly met the glance of the cousin Calderon, and seemed to have a thousand secrets to tell him. In short, long before the pleasant party broke up, the ensign felt convinced that the Alcade was so far like sundry great men of both ancient and modern time, that he had "a faithless friend and a wife to match." However, that was a matter in which, as we know, our distinguished heroine had not the slightest interest; and when the pleasant party at length broke up, he took leave of his new friends and departed to make preparations for his journey.

For a long time Isabella had not felt so entirely at ease in her mind as she did at this moment; the singular change which had put it in her power to travel under the imposing shelter of the Alcade seemed to smooth away every obstacle from her path. And who, in fact, could have predicted that that party which caused her to feel so much security, and that secret amour which her quick glance had noted, but to which the eyes of the injured husband seemed to be completely blind, enclosed the germ of a sanguinary tragedy which was so speedily to put an end to the wild and vagrant career of the disguised ensign? Yet, so it was; and, though armed by her scornful and virile nature against man's love so completely, that all vagrant and various as her career was, she could at the very close of her life boast, and we doubt not, quite truly, that, as far as concerned the one great virtue of her sex, she was still pure and unspotted; an amour in which she could have no earthly interest was not to prove the rock of her shipwreck! But we must not anticipate.

On the following morning, when Isabella at the appointed hour repaired to the residence of the Alcade, she found the whole party ready to depart nor was it a small party either. For the lovely Donna Maria there was prepared a sort of litter borne upon two mules, a mode of travelling much in vogue at that period in the Spanish countries and still used in Sicily. Four men servants, booted to the hips and armed to the teeth, were mounted on strong mules, and formed the immediate body-guard of the lady. A fine barb was held in hand ready for Don Pedro de Chavarris; and the cousin Calderon presently galloped up on one of those singularly shaded roans which we often meet with in the Spanish breeds. It was a long and difficult journey that we had to make from La Paz to Cuzeo; and our European belles, accustomed to the easy motion of their well-hung carriages, would have both pain and danger to encounter in such a journey through wild and desert countries and in rudely-balanced litters. Donna Maria was enveloped from head to foot in her satin cloak or mantilla; on each temple she coquettishly and prettily enough wore a red violet, and in her hand she carried the Spanish lady's inevitable weapon the fan. Saluting the ensign with a gracious gesture, and the cousin Calderon with a sweet glance, she stepped lightly into her litter; the gentlemen put spurs to their steeds, and the caravan for so it might be termed wended forth on its way.

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On those detestable roads, or rather no roads, from ten to twelve leagues a-day was as much progress as could be made by hard travelling for four hours in the morning and four more in the afternoon. At nightfall they halted at some wretched hut, or some unfurnished and dilapidated venta, that is to say, some mere stable, at the end of which a corner alone was reserved to serve for kitchen, dining-room, drawing-room, bed-room, and all. In such a place they dined as best they could; and then the Alcade's servants arranged cloths and cloaks, so as, after a fashion, to furnish a bed and chamber for Donna Maria, while the men made such shift as they could upon the straw. The lovely Donna, however, seemed to be unconscious of either the length or the fatigues of the journey. With her eyes fixed during the live-long day upon the handsome cousin, who displayed his "witching horsemanship" before her, she seemed, in fact, to have no thought of aught but him. The husband, on his part, sought not to display either his own graces or those of his horse, and trotted on quite quietly at the rear of the litter. But, though thus undemonstrative, our Alcade appeared to be by no means unobservant. He was one of those short, thick Spaniards whose glance is by no means of the mildest, and whose complexion reminds one of that of Othello; and after they had been travelling for a few days our heroine fancied that the naturally gloomy countenance of the Alcade grew more gloomy and less encouraging every hour. It was evident that suspicion was excited in that impassioned nature; and already the ensign began to anticipate a drama. But what could be done? Intoxicated with youth and love, the two lovers allowed themselves to drift down the stream of life, wholly unmindful of its dangers, just as the stately swans float carelessly down a river, unknowing that every instant brings them nearer within reach of the fatal shot of the sportsman. During the journey the ensign had become somewhat intimate with Calderon; but that young and joyous gentleman had spoken only of his house, his fortune, his horses, and especially of his uncle, the Bishop of Cuzco. Of his love he had not uttered a single word to his companion; and the latter, really anxious to give him a timely and charitable warning, could not but perceive the additional difficulty of doing so in the face of this delicate reserve.

Meanwhile, though they travelled slowly, they travelled constantly, and at length reached the last of their intended halting-places, a small and recently-built town, at only about ten leagues distance from Cuzco. Recent as was the origin of this little town or hamlet, it already possessed a municipal government, and it happened that the Corregidor was an intimate acquaintance of Don Pedro de Chavarria; and thanks to this circumstance, it was easy to procure for the fair traveller a somewhat more fitting lodging than she had met with since she had left home; and for her use they hastily fitted up a small pavilion or summer house in the garden of the Corregidor's dwelling. This pavilion, built of wood, and standing in the garden, consisted of one room on the ground-floor, and a mere loft above. The lower chamber had two windows, raised some six or eight feet from the ground, and a door with a porch prettily hung with climbing plants. Here it was that a lodging was prepared for Donna Maria, who did not fear to pass the night alone at so short a distance from the house, and, indeed, professed to prefer this solitary little summer house to the still damp and ill-closed chambers of the mansion, which she gaily said she was not at all too generous in leaving to the full and uninterrupted enjoyment of her husband and their host. As for the ensign and Calderon, they established themselves as well as they could, as far as lodging was concerned, in the best inn of the town.

All the most important arrangements being thus made, the whole party dined gaily together, and spent the evening in the summer house. It was a beautiful summer night: the flowers waved gracefully to and from in the warm and balmy breeze; the air was heavy with rich and enervating odours; and, in a word, it was one of those nights on which, as some poet says or sings "every woman must desire to be loved."

Seated by one of the open windows, Donna Maria, pale and absorbed, resting her head upon one hand, and picking a jasmin flower to pieces with the other, seemed with her half-closed eyes as though she were sleeping. But she slept not. Calderon had found a guitar, he would have been no true Andalusian if he could not sing a jalero or a fandango; and the handsome young man had one of those rich and vibrating voices which belong exclusively to Spain and Italy. Striking his guitar with the hand of a master, he sang a series of those Spanish quatrains which succeed each other we know not why, which have no sort of connexion, and the mystic, and even melancholy words of which form a strange contrast with the animated air which accompanies them.

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The Corregidor listened with emotion to those simple quatrains. No doubt they reminded him of his far off native land. The Alcade listened too, and a darker gloom overspread his stern countenance. As for the ensign, that worthy person was fatigued and with difficulty prevented himself from yawning. About eleven o'clock the Donna Maria dismissed her guests. The Corregidor quitted the apartment first, taking with him the Alcade, while the ensign sought for his hat, and the cousin Calderon lingered, too, as though he waited for something. Just as Don Jose, to call our heroine by his or her newly-assumed name, was about to leave, he noticed that Donna Maria glanced stealthily from the cousin Calderon to the door, and at the same time extinguished one of the lights, a sort of pantomime which in all times and in all places signifies, "Come in at the door as soon as you perceive that there is no longer any light." Calderon gave an almost imperceptible sign of assent, and then left the place, accompanied by the ensign. As they descended the steps of the porch, Donna Maria also made her appearance, saying, "that she would breathe the night air for a moment," and walked with them as far as the garden gate, which she herself took the trouble to fasten. As they passed a clump of shrubs beside the wall, the ensign fancied that he saw a pair of dark eyes flashing from amidst the foliage; and in another moment he heard the branches rustle and then the sound of rapid footsteps.

"What was that?" said Donna Maria; and Calderon carelessly replied "That it was only some bird that they had startled."

In five minutes more Calderon and our heroine had reached their inn and retired to their respective apartments; and in less than a quarter of an hour more Calderon's door was cautiously and noiselessly opened, and the happy gallant, wrapped to the ears in a ark cloak, was gliding from the house, when, to his great surprise, he was met on the threshold by the ensign.

"Excuse the freedom," said the latter; "but I must tell you the night air is not wholesome for you tonight."

Don Antonio de Calderon, who seemed not a little annoyed, begged that the gallant soldier would mind his own business; but the latter was not to be intimidated from his really good purpose, and he rapidly communicated his fears and a sort of sinister presentiment which he said that he could not shake off. His pains were all taken in vain: the bishop's nephew listened for a moment, twisted his handsome moustache, thanked his informant with a gesture, and then hastened on his way without uttering a word. The ensign, still hoping to prevent mischief, followed the young man so closely as to enter the garden with him, and saw the light shining like a beacon at the window of the summer house. Calderon, also, saw the light, and drawing his cloak tightly round him, leaned against a tree, and waited: our adventuress did the same. In a very few moments the light was extinguished; and Calderon, after listening attentively, approached with stealthy steps to the porch of the pavilion. The ensign now kept some twenty paces in the rear of the imprudent lover, and, by the faint light of the stars, could see him ascend the steps of the porch, and gently push the door open. At that moment a sort of yell, followed by the shriek of a woman, sounded from the interior of the summer house. Antonio recoiled, and a dark shadowy form rushed upon him a stifled groan was heard, and the two bodies fell together. Almost at the same moment one of the windows was noisily thrown open, a white form leaped out, and with a piercing shriek ran full against the astounded ensign. It was the unfortunate Donna Maria, disheveled, bewildered, and half-dead with terror. Just as she had thus gained the garden, one of the dark shadows rose within the porch; the ensign wrapped his cloak round Donna Maria, and, catching her in his, as we know, nervous arms, ran through the clumps of trees and made for the garden gate. There a new thought struck him, and instead of holding on his course, he stopped suddenly and pressed with his lovely burthen close against the wall. Most fortunate was it that he did so; for just at that moment Chavarria, with a formidable knife in his hand, appeared at the threshold of the gate, and strained his eyes eagerly in the direction of the town; and then, seemingly furious at seeing no one, shut the gate violently, and returned into the garden. Meantime, the urgency of the danger had restored Donna Maria to her consciousness and strength, at least so far that, supported by her companion, she was able to reach the stable of the inn.

Effectually to conceal the unfortunate lady in so small a town was obviously quite out of the question, and our ensign judged that the best plan would be to fly without the loss of a moment, and then trust to the swiftness of his

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horse. He saddled him in all haste, placed the frail lady behind, fastened her to him with his broad leathern belt, and set off at full gallop, but with scarcely any notion of the direction in which he was galloping. As he left the town a man passed close to him, in whom he fancied that he recognized one of the servants of the Alcade Chavarria. This sight caused him to spur his horse all the more furiously; and in a very brief space the fugitives found themselves in the open country. For fully half-an-hour they had thus been dashing headlong forward, without knowing whither, when they were suddenly stopped by a wide and rapid torrent that dashed between two steep banks. For a moment the ensign, bold as we know that personage to be, hesitated; but Donna Maria shrieked, "Forward!" and in a moment more horse and riders were struggling in the stream; and they were not six feet from the bank ere the noble animal had completely lost its footing.

Clinging to the mane with desperate energy, and with the water rising to their very shoulders, our heroine and Donna Maria allowed the horse to struggle as he best might, and trusted to his sagacity for selecting the best point to land at; and the generous creature, exerting a perfectly marvelous energy, reached the opposite bank, trembling in every nerve, and, for the moment at least, utterly incapable of any farther exertion. Happily the ensign, on looking around, perceived a light at no great distance, and he and the Donna dismounted and slowly led their exhausted horse in that direction and they reached the hut of a boatman. The man was not a little surprised at receiving two visitors at such an hour of the night and in such a state of disorder: but a piece of gold sufficed to render him polite and obliging to the utmost. Throwing a few bits of dry wood upon the burning embers on the hearth, he warmed them a little wine that he fortunately had in the hut, and then sold the ensign an old cloak in which the Donna Maria enveloped herself as well as she could. When they had pretty nearly dried their clothes, and the horse had had time to regain strength and wind, our adventuress, feeling that they had no time to lose, proposed to her companion that they should proceed on their way, the boatman having informed them that they were on the road to Cuzeo, and only about six leagues from that city.

The Donna was delighted at this intelligence, as one of her aunts was superior of the Convent of St. Augustine, the most considerable one in the city: with that lady she felt secure of finding an inviolable asylum [sic]. Again, then, they set forward; and just as the first gleams of daylight began to appear, they could see the roofs and belfries of the city shining in the distance. At this sight the ensign uttered an exclamation of joy; but his companion suddenly pressed herself more closely against him, and exclaimed, "Alas! Senor, I am lost!" and at the same moment the swift galloping of a horse was heard, and her protector, turning in the saddle, perceived that the pursuing horseman was the redoubtable Alcade. Resolved to save his companion, the ensign tightened the belt that bound her to him, and put their horse to his utmost speed. Their sole hope now lay in the rapidity of their course; and at the very first glance he saw that the Alcade was mounted on the exceedingly swift roan of the imprudent and ill-fated Calderon. That poor animal, indeed, was panting, covered with foam, and evidently much distressed; but, on the other hand, the horse of the pursued was carrying double, and our ensign was too practiced a rider not to be aware that on a level and easy road he could not long keep the advance. His best hope of escape, therefore, now lay in plunging into an uneven road, studded with obstacles, amidst which his own courage and address would compensate for his horse's want of speed. Still, however, he sped onward; and it was a strange race to behold, that between those two horsemen, one of whom supported a pale, disheveled and fainting woman, while the other bent over his saddle bow, encouraging his horse with voice and gesture, gaining ground every instant, and evidently feeling that at length his revenge was within his reach. Cuzco was still distant at least half-an-hour's hard galloping, and the scene of this chase was the slope of a hill covered with thick brush. On one side of the road was a wide gully, beneath which the ground, thickly covered with roots and stones, sloped steeply down towards the city. Had his horse been fresh or less heavily burdened, the ensign would not have hesitated to put him at the gully, wide as it was; but the strength of the poor exhausted animal might well fail him, and in their situation a fall would be utter ruin.

However, the Alcade gained more and more upon them; and it was absolutely necessary to come to a determination: so, suddenly turning his horse round, and lifting him with that resolution which a determined rider almost always communicates to his animal, the ensign fairly put him to the leap. The noble beast cleared the gully and struggled with his fore feet upon the opposite side; the firm grasp of the rider upheld and aided him, and he

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succeeded in getting in the broken road which we have described; and once again our fugitives felt hope as they frantically dashed over the stones and roots of that perilous descent. Our heroine now turned round in the saddle and perceived that the pursuer, also, had changed his tactics: the Alcade had halted at the edge of the gully, unstrung his carbine, and taking cool aim at the fugitives, fired. Ten balls whistled close to Donna Maria's ears without wounding her; one ball only grazed the horse, which bounded with the pain and terror, and then dashed forward more furiously than ever. Encouraged well nigh to madness at seeing his prey thus escaping from him, the Alcade now in his turn made his horse dash at the perilous leap of the trench; but, either less fortunate or less skilful than the ensign, he fell, and from a distance the fugitives had the inexpressible gratification of seeing him roll in the dust.

They were now almost close to the gates of the city. At that very early hour the streets of Cuzco were deserted, and it seemed that without any annoying meeting they might reach the convent of St. Augustine, situated in the great square. They succeeded in doing so, and the ensign alighted, left his horse in the street, and having led Donna Maria to her aunt's apartments, rapidly descended to the street again, well knowing, that though the Donna was now safe, he, the ensign had not a moment to spare. But already it was too late. On the very threshold our poor heroine was furiously rushed upon by the Alcade; with his hands and face bleeding, his apparel torn, and the unhappy man seemed to be absolutely mad with rage and disappointment. The ensign, drawing his sword, pushed the Alcade from the door, and loudly swore that he should not enter excepting over his dead body. The sole reply of the Alcade was to throw himself into guard, and a furious combat commenced, though both of the combatants were so exhausted with fatigue, that they could scarcely support themselves. The wild galloping of the horses had awakened the neighbours, and the clashing of swords had drawn them to their windows. Some curious spectators gathered round and were about the separate such strange combatants, when three fresh horsemen made their way into the square; they were Calderon's valet and two of the Alcade's servants. At this critical moment the ensign was wounded. Excited by the pain, he pressed the Alcade closely: the two servants of that personage hastened to aid him: while Calderon's valet ranged himself on the opposite side and then the fight became general. Pale, her eyes flashing, and her hair in disorder, Isabella for a moment forgot her fatigue and exhibited all the agility and energy of her best fighting days; and after remaining for some time on the defensive, attacked the Alcade, thrust him through the heart, and he fell. At this moment, when more than at any other, his aid would have been decisively useful, Calderon's valet took to his heels and left Donna Maria's saviour to deal single handed with the two robust servants of the Alcade. With her back to the wall of the convent our brave heroine bore stoutly up against all attack: it was in vain that the bystanders endeavoured to separate the combatants. At length the alguazils came up, and Isabella, refusing to yield, and fighting with all the fury of a tiger, would doubtless have been slain, when a most unexpected incident suddenly occurred to save her.

The door of the episcopal palace was suddenly thrown open, and the bishop, accompanied by his secretary and followed by the servant of Calderon, appeared upon the threshold. The crowd reverentially opened before him, and the combat instantly ceased. The bishop then approached the disguised Isabella and ordered her to deliver up her sword.

"My lord bishop," replied the ensign, "I cannot I have too many fierce enemies here."

"Give up your weapon," replied the bishop, "and on my honour I answer for you."

The ensign threw down his sword, and the alguazils instantly threw themselves upon him and began to bind him; but a sign from the bishop withheld them; and the prelate taking the gallant ensign by the arm led him into the palace.

The Bishop of Cuzco, it will be remembered, was Calderon's uncle, and he had in a very few words been made aware of all the details of this sad adventure by the servant of his slain nephew, who had fled from the scene of combat to obtain the aid of this powerful auxiliary. When the prelate now found himself alone with the ensign, he begged him to relate all the particulars more clearly than the servant had been able to do, and also to state who

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and what he was, and whence he came. He added, that the business was a very serious one, the Alcade Chavarria being dead, and the death of so important a person demanding the fullest enquiry. Then, the prelate continued, the matter was strangely complicated by the assassination of Calderon, and the carrying off of Donna Maria. The affair was not one of those that could be hushed up: all the town knew it already. He, the bishop, had indeed been able for the moment to suspend the action of the law; but it was not in his power ultimately to set it aside. It wrung his heart to think that a gallant gentleman was to be so seriously periled through his devotion to the unfortunate Calderon. Nevertheless, he saw no other possible means of emerging from this peril, than for the ensign to produce proofs of his previous good conduct, if it had been good, to allege his services, and to urge the generosity of his intent as the best and only reason for oblivion of his crime.

We have said that at the commencement of the combat Isabella was wounded. The wound was in the breast, and she now suffered so horribly from it, that even while the bishop was speaking she felt that surgical aid was instantly necessary. Called upon for an explanation of her previous life, fearing the tidings that might arrive from Tucuman, and reflecting that any new falsehood would inevitably be discovered when the surgeon should dress her wound, weakened, moreover, by the fatigue and loss of blood, and perhaps weary at length of the unwomanly part that she had so long played, Isabella resolved to tell the good bishop the whole truth. Rising with great difficulty from her seat, she threw herself upon her feet, and clasping her hands said, "My lord bishop, I am not what I seem: I am a woman!"

As she said this her voice softened, her downcast eyes suddenly changed their expression, a lively carnation coloured her usually pale cheeks, and, her strength completely deserting her, she fell senseless upon the floor.

We may easily imagine the stupefaction of the poor bishop. He called for assistance, and his chieftains and servants rushed in. Isabella was conveyed to bed, and her wound was speedily dressed by the most skilful barber–surgeon of the neighbourhood. The bishop, though not quite convinced of the truth of her strange avowal, yet knew not exactly what to think, and he therefore gave orders that the surgeon should be left alone in the chamber of his patient; and when he had finished dressing the wound, he was able to assure the good prelate that the patient's assertion was as strange as it was true. Who and what could this woman be? What could this strange masquerade mean? The holy man was fairly puzzled to his wit's end. The wound of Isabella, though painful, was but slight; what she chiefly needed was rest; and on the following day she was able to rise. The bishop then kindly questioned her, and she related her whole history, veiling, we may suppose, certain of its details. She told him her name, her family, her entrance into the convent, her flight thence, her rambles in Spain, her embarkation, shipwreck, dues, and subsequent travels. This narrative lasted not less than two or three hours, and the good bishop heard her to the end without interrupting and almost without breathing. With his elbows on the table and his head between his two hands, he kept his eyes fixed upon her, and seemed completely petrified with surprise. When this strange confession was at length finished, he lifted his eyes towards heaven with a sort of terror, as if to implore the divine mercy, and the tears coursed down his venerable cheeks. Isabella, who herself was much moved, summed up her life thus:

"I have wandered from place to place, I have wounded, I have slain, I have deceived, I have lied; nevertheless " and she cast down her eyes "I have not been guilty of all the vices: I am a pure virgin as on the day of my birth."

Isabella's unexpected confession had completely changed the state of affairs. If the civil law on the one hand could still pursue the slayer of the Alcade, the church on the other hand could demand the Nun.

The Corregidor allowed himself to be convinced upon this point in a long conversation with the bishop. He rightly thought her the most extraordinary creature of the day; and by his orders she was provided with a suitable apartment and a capital collation, for which her long discourse had given her an excellent appetite. During the few following days she listened with seeming piety to the exhortations of the good bishop, and in a short time resumed the costume of her sex, and entered the Convent of St. Clara.

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When the hour arrived for her taking the habit and the metamorphosed Nun let the episcopal palace with the bishop, there was not a single inhabitant save the actually bed-ridden to be found within doors throughout Cuzco, and the procession could but barely make its slow way through the wondering crowd. At length it did reach the door of the convent; as for the church, that was not to be thought of; for it was already filled to overflowing.

The nuns, bearing torches, were drawn up in a double line; and the Novice, kneeling before the Abbess, respectfully kissed her hand, and then she embraced and was embraced by each of her future sisters. The procession assembled in the choir, the customary prayers were recited, and the massive doors of the convent closed upon the Nun-Ensign. The news of this metamorphosis and conversion spread rapidly; and for a whole week it was the sole topic of conversation throughout Peru.

How Isabella liked this new seclusion, and what sort of life her's was in the interior of that peaceful convent, it was not easy to say; but if we may judge from her own rapid and imperfect notes on this part of her career, she managed to win the love of the nuns and to earn by her own exemplary conduct the approbation of the Abbess. She was, no doubt, delighted for a few days with the noise made by her adventure, and her vanity profoundly gratified with the important part she had to play; but when all that brief excitement was passed, we can imagine her dying with weariness. And this view of the case is somewhat confirmed by the fact that, five months afterwards, the good bishop being dead, she succeeded in getting herself sent to a convent of the same order in Lima, and thence obtained leave to return to Spain.

On the 1st of November, 1624, the Nun-Ensign arrived at Cadiz. For the voyage, she had resumed male attire, and this precaution was by no means unnecessary; for her renown had crossed the Atlantic with her, and even her disguise did not always conceal her from public curiosity. After a few day's rest, she repaired to Seville and Madrid, where she presented herself to the Count D'Olivarez, for whom she had a letter. Her intention was by no means to return to the convent the cloister was decidedly unsuitable to her tastes; on the contrary, her purpose in waiting on the minister, was to solicit a recompense for her military services and the means of securing herself an independent subsistence; for after all our heroine had not enriched herself in the new world. The king was curious to see her, and the count having presented her to his majesty, he paid royally for his curiosity. By his order an annual pension of eight hundred crowns was settled upon her for life, and the Ordonnance to that effect, signed in August 1625, is still in the archives of Seville, as are several brevets and testimonials given by the officers under whom she had served.

Her temporal affairs being thus arranged to her satisfaction, Isabella now turned her attention to setting her conscience at rest; but this was in compliance with the wishes of her patrons; for, in truth, her conscience troubled her right little. It was the year of the grand jubilee, and she was urged to proceed to Rome to obtain all the indulgences possible from the holy father and to Rome she accordingly went. There she had the honour to be admitted to the presence of his Holiness Urban, who desired to hear from her own lips the account of her strange adventures. The Sovereign Pontiff then granted her permission to wear male attire during the remainder of her life; and he exhorted her to live thenceforth a worthy and retired life, to practice the forgetfulness of injuries, and constantly to bear in mind that commandment which says, "Thou shalt do no murder."

After six weeks' stay at Rome, Isabella set out for Naples. There, as she was one day walking upon the Mole, she perceived that she was pointed out, and laughed at by two girls of equivocal, or rather unequivocal appearance; and the style in which she rebuked them proved that her conversion was as mere an imposition as any other incident in her strange career.

Judging, in fact, from her foul language on this occasion, we may say that she ended her strange career pretty much as she began it; and what we know of her subsequent course is extremely little, equally vague, and related by other hands. In 1635 she was certainly at Corunna, and about that time she embarked for America. This we positively know from a letter, still extant, written by a Capuchin monk, who made the voyage in the same ship with her; and he describes her as being attired as a man, and as passing by the name of Antonio de Aranso. The

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vessel anchored before Vera Cruz, on a dark and tempestuous night; but in spite of the darkness and roughness of the sea, the captain of the vessel was resolved to go ashore that same night, and he proceeded thither in his boat, accompanied by several officers and Isabella, now called Don Antonio de Aranso. The captain and his officers landed without any accident, and proceeded to the best hotel in the town, and then they first perceived that their companion was not with them. After waiting in vain expectation that she would make her appearance, they caused her to be sought for in every direction; but from that evening she was never heard of. We need scarcely say that this strange disappearance of a personage so extraordinary gave rise to the most contradictory conjectures. Had she made her way into the desert country, in sheer irresistible love of her former adventurous and wandering life? But, in that case, how was it that not a trace of her passage could be discovered? Was it not more likely that in that dark and stormy night she had fallen unperceived into the sea in passing from the ship to the boat, or from the boat to the shore? This last opinion is by no means invalidated by the fact of her body not having been found in the port; for sharks abound there, and the shark's maw has been the only sepulcher of many better people than Isabella. However, her strange disappearance only added to her strange renown. Not a few saw in this event the visible work of the Demon; and some very worthy inhabitants of Vera Cruz went so far as to protest that they, on that particular night, smelt a strong odour of brimstone.

Whatever her fate really was, it occurred most opportunely to give a dramatic finish to her adventures. She was no longer young; her day was past for swaggering and quarrels, for adventures of the sword and dagger. She would soon have been, in the very scene of the mad exploits of her youth, a wrinkled and very ridiculous old woman. Thanks to this fortunate accident, she ended with a sort of apotheosis. "To quit life opportunely," says a great historian, "is one of the conditions of glory."

A Spanish writer, who had himself often seen her, represents this strange being as having been tall for a woman, but without having the figure of a handsome man. In her features, he tells us, she was neither handsome nor remarkably ugly, and she had no bosom. Her eyes were black, bright, and well opened, her countenance worn rather by fatigues than years, and her hair jet-black, cut short like that of a man, and fashionable dressed and pomaded. She dressed in the style of the Spanish gentleman of that day. Her gait was easy and elegant; her air military; and she carried her sword gracefully and well. Her hands alone had something of feminine in their appearance; and, as if to aid her in her odd fancy for simulating the man, her upper lip was covered with a slender dark down, which, says the writer to whom we have alluded, without exactly constituting a moustache, nevertheless gave her a somewhat masculine aspect.

THE END