

La Tinaja Bonita

Owen Wister

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"And it came to pass after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land." — I Kings, xvii, 7.

A pretty girl was kneeling on the roof of a flat mud cabin, a harvest of red peppers around her knees. On the ground floor below her stood a swarthy young man, the bloom on his Mexican cheeks rich and dusky, like her own. His face was irresponsible and winning, and his watching eyes shone upon her with admiration and desire. She on the roof was entertained by her visitor's attention, but unfavorable to it. Through the livelong sunny day she had parried his love-talk with light and complete skill, enjoying herself, and liking him very well, as she had done since they were two children playing together in the Arizona desert. She was quite mistress of the situation, because she was a woman, and he as yet merely a boy; he was only twenty-two; she was almost sixteen. The Mexican man at twenty-two may be as experienced as his Northern brother of thirty, but at sixteen the Mexican woman is also mature, and can competently deal with the man. So this girl had relished the thoughtless morning and noon as they passed; but twice lately she had glanced across the low tree-tops of her garden down the trail, where the canyon descended to the silent plain below.

"I think I must go back now," said the young man, not thinking so. He had a guitar from the cabin.

"Oh! said she, to whom he was transparent. "Well, if you think it is late." She busied herself with the harvest. Her red handkerchief and strands of her black hair had fallen loosely together from her head to her shoulders. The red peppers were heaped thick, hiding the whole roof, and she stopped among them, levelling them to a ripening layer with buckskin gloves (for peppers sting sharper than mustard), sorting and turning them in the bright sun. The youth looked at her most wistfully.

"It is not precisely late — yet," said he.

"To be sure not," she assented, consulting the sky. "We have still three hours of day."

He brightened as he lounged against a water barrel. "But after night it is so very dark on the trail to camp," he sincerely objected.

"I never could have believed you were afraid of the dark."

"It is for the horse's legs, Lolita. Of course I fear nothing."

"Bueno! I was sure of it. Do you know, Luis, you have become a man suddenly? That mustache will be beautiful in a few years. And you have a good figure."

"I am much heavier than last year," said he. "My arm — "

"I can see, I can see. I am not sure I shall let you kiss me any more. You didn't offer to when you came this morning — and that shows you men perceive things more quickly than we can. But don't go yet. You can lead your horse. His legs will come to no harm, eased of your weight. I should have been lonely today, and you have made it pass so quickly. You have talked so much that my peppers are not half spread."

"We could finish them in five minutes together," said the youth, taking a step.

"Two up here among all these peppers? On no, Luis. We should tread on them, and our ankles would burn all night. If you want to help me, go bring some fresh water. The barrel is almost empty."

But Luis stood ardently gazing up at the roof.

"Very well, then," said Lolita. "If you like this better, finish the peppers, and I'll go for the water."

"Why do you look down the trail so often?" said the baffled love-maker, petulantly.

"Because Uncle Ramon said the American would be coming today," the girl replied, softly.

"Was it Uncle Ramon said that? He told you that?"

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"Why not?" She shaded her eyes, and looked where the canyon's widening slit gave view of a slant of sand merging fan—spread into a changeless waste of plain. Many watercourses, crooked and straight, came out of the gaps, creasing the sudden Sierra, descending to the flat through bushes and leaning margin trees; but in these empty shapes not a rill tinkled to refresh the silence, nor did a drop slide over the glaring rocks, or even dampen the heated cheating sand. Lolita strained her gaze at the dry distance, and stooped again to her harvest.

"What does he come here for?" demanded Luis.

"The American? We buy white flour of him sometimes."

"Sometimes! That must be worth his while! He will get rich!" Luis lounged back against his water—barrel, and was silent. As he watched Lolita, serenely working, his silver crescent ear—rings swung a little with the slight tilting of his head, and his fingers, forgotten and unguided by his thoughts, ruffled the strings of the guitar, drawing from it gay purposeless tendrils of sound. Occasionally, when Lolita knew the song, she would hum it on the roof, inattentively, busy rolling her peppers:

Soy purita mejicana;
Nada tengo espanol

("I am pure Mexican. I have nothing Spanish about me.") And this melodious inattention of Lolita's, Luis felt to be the extreme of slight.

"Have you seen him lately?" he asked, sourly.

"Not very. Not since the last time he came to the mines from Maricopa."

"I heard a man at Gun Sight say he was dead," snapped Luis.

But she made no sign. "That would be a pity," she said, humming gayly.

"Very sad. Uncle Ramon would have to go himself to Maricopa for that white flour."

Pleased with this remark, the youth took to song himself; and there they were like two mischievous birds. Only the bird on the ground was cross with a sense of failure. "El telele se murio," he sang.

"The hunchback is dead.
Ay! Ay! Ay!
And no one could be found to bury him except — "

"Luis, aren't you going to get my water for me?"

"Poco tiempo: I'll bring it directly."

"You have to go to the Tinaja Bonita for it."

The Pretty Spring — or water—hole, or tank — was half a mile from the cabin.

"Well, it's not nice out there in the sun. I like it better in here, where it is pleasant.

'And no one could be found to bury him except
Five dragoons and a corporal
And the sacristan's cat.'

Singing resentfully, young Luis staid in here, where it was pleasant. Bright green branches of fruit trees and small cottonwoods and a fenced irrigated square of green growing garden hid the tiny adobe home like a nut, smooth and hard and dry in their clustered midst. The lightest air that could blow among these limber ready leaves set going at once their varnished twinkling round the house. Their white and dark sides gleamed and went out with chasing lights that quickened the torpid place into a holiday of motion. Closed in by this cool green, you did not have to see or think of Arizona, just outside; you could forget, and play at love—making, and be spiteful about

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hunchbacks.

"Where is Uncle Ramon to-day?" inquired Luis, dropping his music.

She sighed. "He has gone to drive our cattle to a new spring. There is no pasture at the Tinaja Bonita. Our streams and ditches went dry last week. They have never done so in all the years before. I don't know what is going to happen to us." The anxiety in the girl's face seemed to come outward more plainly for a moment, and then recede to its permanent abiding-place.

"There cannot be much water to keep flour-sellers alive on the trail to Maricopa," chirped the bird on the ground.

She made no answer to this. "What are you doing nowadays?" she asked.

"I have been working very hard on the wood contract for the American soldiers," he replied, promptly.

"By Tucson?"

"No. Huachuca."

"A way over there again? I thought you had cut all they wanted last May."

"It is of that enterprise of which I speak, Lolita."

"But it's October now!" Lolita lifted her face, ruddy with stooping, and broke into laughter.

"I do not see why you mock me. No one has asked me to work since."

"Have you asked any one for work."

"It is not my way to beg."

"Luis, I don't believe you're quite a man yet, in spite of your mustache. You complain there's no money in Arizona because the Americans get it all. Why don't you go back to Sonora, then, and be rich in five minutes? It would sound finely: 'Luis Romero, Merchant, Hermosillo.' Or perhaps, gold would fall more quickly into your lap at Guayamas. You would live in a big house, perhaps with two stories, and I would come and visit you at Easter — if your wife would allow it." Here Lolita threw a pepper at him.

The guitar grated a few pretty notes; otherwise there was silence.

"And it was Uncle Ramon persuaded them to hire you in May. He told the American contractor you owned a strong burro good for heavy loads. He didn't say much about you," added the little lady.

"Much good it did me! The American contractor—pig retained my wages to pay for the food he supplied us. They charge you extra for starvation, those gringos. They are all pigs. Ah, Lolita, a man needs a wife, so he may strive to win a home for her."

"I have heard men say that they needed a home before they could strive to win a wife for it. But you go about it the other way."

"I am not an American pig, I thank the Virgin! I have none of their gringo customs."

"You speak truly indeed," murmured Lolita.

"It is you who know about them," the boy said, angry like a child. He had seen her eye drawn to the trail again as by a magnet. "They say you prefer gringos to your own people."

"Who dares say that?"

The elated Luis played loudly on the guitar. He had touched her that time.

But Lolita's eye softened at the instant of speaking, and she broke into her sweet laugh. "There!" she said, recapturing the situation; "is is not like old times for you and me to be fighting?"

"Me? I am not fighting."

"You relieve me."

"I do not consider a gringo worth my notice."

"Sensible boy! You speak as wisely as one who has been to school in a large city. Luis, do you remember the day Uncle Ramon locked me up for riding on the kicking burro, and you came and unlocked me when uncle was gone? You took me walking, and lost us both in the mountains. We were really only a little, little way from home, but I thought we had got into another country where they eat children. I was six, and I beat you for losing me, and cried, and you were big, and you kissed me till I stopped my crying. Do you remember?"

"No."

"Don't you remember?"

"I don't remember a child's tricks."

"Luis, I have come to a conclusion. You are still young enough for me to kiss quite safely. Every time you

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fight with me — I shall kiss you. Won't you get me some fresh water now?"

He lounged, sulkily, against his barrel.

"Come, querido! Must I go all that way myself? Well, then, if you intend to stand and glare at me till the moon rises — Ah! he moves!"

Luis laid the guitar gradually down, and gradually lifting a pail in which the dipper rattled with emptiness, he proceeded to crawl on his journey.

"You know that is not the one we use, muchacho, little boy," remarked Lolita.

"Keep your kisses for your gringo," the water-carrier growled, with his back to her.

"I shall always have some for my little cousin."

The pail clattered on the stones, and the child stopped crawling. She on the roof stared at this performance for an open-mouthed moment, gloves idle among the spicy peppers. Then, laughing, she sprang to her feet, descended, and catching up the water-jar, the olla de agua, overtook him, and shook it in his face with the sweetest derision. "Now we'll go together," said she, and started gayly through the green trees and the garden. He followed her, two paces behind, half ashamed, and gazing at her red handkerchief, and the black hair blowing a little; thus did they cross the tiny cool home acre through the twinkling pleasantness of the leaves, and pass at once outside the magic circle of irrigation into Arizona's domain, among a prone herd of carcasses upon the ground. Dead cattle, two seasons dead now, hunted to this sanctuary by the drought, killed in the sanctuary by cold water.

A wise man, with a man's will, may sometimes after three days of thirst still hold grip enough upon his slipping mind to know, when he has found the water, that he must not drink it, must only dampen his lips and tongue in a drop-by-drop fashion until he has endured the passing of many slow insidious hours. Even a wise man had best have a friend by his side then, who shall fight and tear him from the perilous excesses that he craves, knock him senseless if he cannot pin him down; but cattle know nothing of drop by drop, and you cannot pin down a hundred head that have found water after three days. So these hundred had drunk themselves swollen, and died. Cracked hide and white bone they lay, brown, drying gaping humps straddled stiff askew in the last convulsion; and over them presided Arizona — silent, vast, all sunshine everlasting.

Luis saw these corpses that had stumbled to their fate, and he remembered; with Lolita in those trees all day, he had forgotten for awhile. He pointed to the wide-strewn sight, familiar, monotonous as misfortune. "There will be many more," he said. Another rainy season is gone without doing anything for the country. It cannot rain now for another year, Lolita."

"God help us and our cattle, and travellers!" she exclaimed.

Luis musingly repeated a saying of the country about the Tinaja Bonita,

"When you see the Black Cross dry,
Fill the wagon cisterns high"

— a doggerel in homely Spanish metre, unwritten mouth-to-mouth wisdom, stable as a proverb, enduring through generations of unrecorded wanderers, that repeated it for a few years, and passed beneath the desert.

"But the Black Cross has never been dry yet," Luis said.

"You have not seen it lately," said Lolita.

"Lolita, do you mean — " He looked in her troubled eyes, and they went on in silence together. They left behind them the bones and the bald level on which they lay, and came to where the canyon's broader descent quickened until they sank below that sight of the cattle, and for a while below the home and trees. They went down steeply by cactus and dry rock to a meeting of several canyons opening from side rifts in the Sierra, furrowing the main valley's mesa with deep watercourses that brought no water. Finding their way in this lumpy meeting-ground, they came upon the lurking place of the Tinaja Bonita. They stood above it at the edge of a pitch of rock, watching the motionless crystal of the pool.

"How well it hides down there in its own canyon!" said Luis. "How pretty and clear! But there's plenty of water, Lolita."

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"Can you see the Black Cross?"

"Not from here."

They began descending around the sides of the crumbled slate-rock face that tilted too steep for foothold.

"The other well is dry, of course," said Lolita. In the slaty, many-ledged formation a little lower down the canyon, towards the peep of outlying open country which the clover hills let in, was a second round hole, twin of the first. Except after storms, water was never in this place, and it lay dry as a kiln nine-tenths of the year. Except after storms, water was never in this place; and it lay dry as a kiln nine-tenths of the year. But in size and depth and color, and the circular fashion of its shaft, that seemed man's rather than nature's design, it might have been the real Tinaja's reflection, conjured in some evil mirror that gave all of its likeness except alone the living water that made it precious.

"It must have been a real well once," said Luis.

"Once, yes."

"And what made it go dry?"

"Who knows?"

"How strange it should be the lower well that failed, Lolita."

The boy and girl were climbing down slowly, drawing near each other as they reached the bottom of the hollow. The peep of open country was blocked, and the tall tops of the mountains were all of the outer world they could see, choked in down here below the mesa's level, amid a silence more ancient than the spheres.

"Do you believe it ever can go dry?" asked Luis. They were now on the edge of the Tinaja.

"Father Rafael says that it is miraculous," said the girl, believably.

Opposite, and everywhere except where they were, the walls went sheer down, not slate-colored, but white, with a sudden up-cropping formation of brick-shaped stone. These also were many-layered and crumbling, cracking off into the pool if the hand hung or the foot weighed on them. No safe way went to the water but at this lower side, where the riven, tumbled white blocks shelved easily to the bottom; and Luis and Lolita looked down these natural stairs at the portent in the well. In that white formation shot up from the earth's bowels, arbitrary and irrelevant amid the surrounding alien layers of slate, four black stones were lodged as if built into the wall by some hand — four small stones shaping a cross, black against the white, symmetrical and plain beyond need of imagination.

"It has come further — more uncovered since yesterday," Lolita whispered.

"Can the Tinaja sink altogether?" repeated Luis. The arms of the cross were a measurable space above the water line, and he had always seen it entirely submerged.

"How could it sink?" said Lolita, simply. "It will stop when the black stones are wholly dry."

"You believe Father Rafael," Luis said, always in a low voice; "but it was only Indians, after all, who told the mission fathers at the first."

"That was very long ago," said she, "and there has always been water in the Tinaja Bonita."

Boy and girl had set the jar down, and forgotten it and why they had come. Luis looked uneasily at the circular pool, and up from this creviced middle of the canyon to the small high tops of the mountains rising in the free sky.

"This is an evil place," he said. "As for the water — no one, no three, can live long enough to be sure."

But it was part of Lolita's religion. "I am sure," said she.

The young Mexican's eyes rested on the face of the girl beside him, more beautiful just then with some wave of secret fear and faith.

"Come away with me, Lolita," he pleaded, suddenly. "I can work. I can be a man. It is fearful for you to live here alone."

"Alone, Luis?" His voice had called her from her reverie back to her gay, alert self. "Do you consider Uncle Ramon nobody to live with?"

"Yes. Nobody — for you."

"Promise me never to tell that to uncle. He is so considerate that he might make me marry somebody for company. And then, you know, my husband would be certain to be stupid about your coming to see me, querido."

"Why do you always mock me, Lolita?"

"Mock you? What a fancy! Oh, see how the sun's going! If we do not get our water, your terrible Tinaja will go dry before supper. Come, Luis, I carried the olla. Must I do everything?"

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He looked at her disconsolate. "Ah!" he vibrated, revelling in deep imaginary passion.

"Go! go!" she cried, pushing him. "Take your olla."

Upon any passing puff of sentiment the Southern breast can heave with every genuine symptom of storm except wreck. Of course she stirred his gregarious heart. Was she not lovely and he twenty-two? He went down the natural stairs and came slowly up with the water, stopping a step below her. "Lolita," he said, "don't you love me at all? not a very little?"

"You are my dearest, oldest friend, Luis," she said, looking at him with such sweetness that his eyes fell. "But why do you pretend five beans make ten."

"Of course they only make ten with gringos."

She held up a warning finger.

"Oh yes, oh yes! Strangers make fine lovers!" With this he swelled to a fond, dangerous appearance, and muttered, "It is not difficult to kill a man, Lolita."

"Fighting! After what I told you!" Lolita stooped and kissed her cousin Luis, and he instantly made the most of that chance.

"As often as you please," he said, as she released herself angrily, and then a stroke of sound struck their two hearts still. They jumped apart, trembling. Some of the rock slide had rattled down and plunged into the Tinaja with a gulping resonance. Loitering strings of sand strewed after it, and the boy's and girl's superstitious eyes looked up from the ringed waving water to the ledge. Lolita's single shriek of terror turned to joy as she uttered it.

"I thought — I thought you would not come!" she cried out.

The dismounted horseman above made no sign of understanding her words. He stepped carefully away from the ledge his foot had crumbled, and they saw him using his rifle like a staff, steadying its stock in successive niches, and so working back to his horse. There he slid the rifle into its leather sling along the left side of his saddle.

"So he is not dead," murmured Luis, "and we need not live alone."

"Come down!" the girl called, and waved her hand. But the new-comer stood by his horse like an apparition.

"Perhaps he is dead, after all," Luis said. "You might say some of the Mass, only he was a heretic. But his horse is Mexican and a believer."

Lolita had no eyes or ears for Luis any more. He prattled away on the stone stairs of the Tinaja, elated into flippancy after a piercing shock of fear. To him, unstrung by the silence and the Black Cross and the presence of the sinking pool, the stone had crashed like a clap of sorcery, and he had started and stared to see — not a spirit, but a man, dismounted from his horse, with a rifle. At that his heart clutched him like talons, and in the flashing spasm of his mind came a picture — smoke from the rifle, and himself bleeding in the dust. Costly love-making! But why else that rifle on the ledge? for a staff merely? Luis thanked the Virgin for the stone that fell and frightened him. He had chattered himself cool now, and ready. Lolita was smiling at the man on the hill, glowing without concealment of her heart's desire.

"Come down," she repeated. "Come round the side." And lifting the olla, she tapped it, and signed the way to him.

"He has probably brought too much white flour for Uncle Ramon to care to climb more than he must," said Luis. But the man had stirred at last from his sentinel stillness, and began leading his horse down. Presently he was near enough for Luis to read his face. "Your gringo is a handsome fellow certainly," he commented. "But he does not like me to-day."

"Like you? He doesn't think about you," said Lolita.

"Ha! That's your opinion."

"It is his opinion also — if you'll ask him."

"He is afraid of Cousin Luis," stated the youth.

"Cousin grasshopper! He could eat you — if he could see you."

"There are other things in this world besides brute muscle, Lolita. Your gringo thinks I am worth notice, if you do not."

"How little he knows you!"

"It is you he does not know very well," the boy said, with a pang.

The scornful girl stared.

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"Oh innocent one!" sneered Luis. "Grasshopper, indeed! Well, one man can always recognize another, and the women don't know much."

But Lolita had run off to meet her chosen lover. She did not stop to read his face. He was here; and as she hurried towards him she had no thought except that he was come at last. She saw his eyes and lips, and to her they were only the eyes and lips that she had longed for. "You have come just in time," she called out to him. At the voice, he looked at her one instant, and looked away, but the nearer sight of her sent a tide of scarlet across his face. His actions he could control, his bearing, and the steadiness of his speech, but not the coursing of his blood. It must have been a minute he had stood on the ledge above, getting a grip of himself. "Luis was becoming really afraid that he might have to do some work," continued Lolita, coming up the stony hill. "You know Luis?"

"I know him."

"You can fill your two canteens and carry the olla for us," she pursued, arriving eagerly beside him, her face lifted to her strong tall lover.

"I can."

At this second chill of his voice, and his way of meet her when she had come running, she looked at him bewildered, and the smile fluttered on her lips and left them. She walked beside him, talking no more; nor could she see his furtive other hand mutely open and shut, helping him keep his grip.

Luis also looked at the man who had taken Lolita's thoughts away from him and all other men. "No, indeed, he does not understand her very well," he repeated, bitter in knowing the man's suspicion and its needlessness. Something — disappointment, it may be — had wrought more reality in the young Mexican's easy-going love. "And she likes this gringo because — he is light-colored!" he said, watching the American's bronzed Saxon face, almost as young as his own, but of sterner stuff. Its look left him no further doubt, and he held himself forewarned. The American came to the bottom, powerful, blue-eyed, his moustache golden, his cheek clean-cut and beaten to shining health by the weather. He swung his blue-overalled leg over his saddle and rode to the Tinaja, with a short greeting to the watcher, while the pale Lolita unclasped the canteen straps and brought the water herself, brushing coldly by Luis to hook the canteens to the saddle again. This slighting touch changed the Mexican boy's temper to diversion and malice. Here were mountains from mole-hills! Here were five beans making ten with a vengeance!

"Give me that," said the American; and Luis handed up the water-jar to him with such feline politeness that the American's blue eye filled with fire and rested on him for a doubtful second. But Luis was quite ready, and more diverted than ever over the suppressed violence of his Saxon friend. The horseman wheeled at once, and took a smooth trail out to the top of the mesa, the girl and boy following.

As the three went silent up the canyon, Luis caught sight of Lolita's eyes shining with the hurt of her lover's rebuff, and his face sparkled with further mischief. "She has been despising me all day," he said to himself. "Very well, very well — Senor Ruz," he speechified aloud, elaborately, "we are having a bad drought.

The American rode on, inspecting the country.

"I know at least four sorts of kisses," reflected the Mexican trifler. "But there! very likely to me also they would appear alike from the top of a rock." He looked the American over, the rifle under his leg, his pistol, and his knife. "How clumsy these gringos are when it's about a girl!" thought Luis. Any fool could fool them. Now I should take much care to be friendly if ever I did want to kill a man in earnest. Comical gringo! — Yes, very dry weather, Don Ruz. And the rainy season gone!"

The American continued to inspect the country, his supple, flannel-shirted back hinting no interest in the talk.

"Water is getting scarce, Don Ruz," persisted the gadfly, lighting again. "Don Ramon's spring does not run now, and so we must come to the Tinaja Bonita, you see. Don Roman removed the cattle yesterday. Everybody absent from home, except Lolita." Luis thought he could see his Don Ruz listening to that last piece of gossip, and his smile over himself and his skill grew more engaging. "Lolita has been telling me all day that even the Tinaja will go dry."

"It was you said that!" exclaimed the brooding, helpless Lolita.

"So I did. And it was you who said no. Well, we found something to disagree about." The gadfly was mirthful now at the expression of the flannel shirt.

"No sabe cuantos son cinco," he whispered, stepping close to Lolita. "Your gringo could not say boo to a goose just now." Lolita drew away from her cousin, and her lover happened to turn his head slightly, so that he

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caught her drawing away. "But what do you say yourself, Don Ruz?" inquired Luis, pleased at this slight coincidence — "will the Tinaja go dry, do you think?"

"I expect guessing won't interfere with the water's movements much," finally remarked Don Ruz — Russ Genesmere. His drawl and the body in his voice were not much like the Mexican's light fluency. They were music to Lolita, and her gaze went to him once more, but got no answer. The bitter Luis relished this too.

"You are right, Don Ruz. Guessing is idle. Yet how can we help wondering about this mysterious Tinaja? I am sure that you can never have seen so much of the cross out of water. Lolita says — "

"So that's the place," said Genesmere, roughly.

Luis looked inquiring.

"Down there," Genesmere explained, with a jerk of his head back along the road they had come.

Luis was surprised that Don Ruz, who knew this country so well, should never have seen the Tinaja Bonita until today.

"I'd have seen it if I'd had any use for it," said Genesmere.

"To be sure, it lay off the road of travel," Luis assented. And of course Don Ruz knew all that was needful — how to find it. He knew what people said — did he not? Father Rafael, Don Ramon, everybody? Lolita perhaps had told him? And that if the cross ever rose entirely above the water, that was a sign all other water-holes in the region were empty. Therefore it was a good warning for travellers, since by it they could judge how much water to carry on a journey. But certainly he and Lolita were surprised to see how low the Tinaja had fallen to-day. No doubt what the Indians said about the great underground snake that came and sucked all the wells dry in the lower country, and in consequence was nearly satisfied before he reached the Tinaja, was untrue.

To this tale of Jesuits and peons the American listened with unexpressed contempt, caring too little to mention that he had heard some of it before, or even to say that in the last few days he had crossed the desert from Tucson and found water on the trail as usual where he expected. He rode on, leading the way slowly up the canyon, suffering the glib Mexican to talk unanswered. His own suppressed feelings still smouldered in his eye, still now and then knotted the muscles in his cheeks; but of Luis's chatter he said his whole opinion in one word, a single English syllable, which he uttered quietly for his own benefit. Luis, however, understood that order of English, and, overhearing, was glad, and commended himself for playing so tellingly the lover who but ill conceals his successes. He would sustain this part to a last delicate finish.

They passed through the hundred corpses to the home and the green trees, where the sun was setting against the little shaking trees.

"So you will camp here tonight, Don Ruz?" said Luis, perceiving the American's pack-mules. Genesmere had come over from the mines at Gun Sight, found the cabin empty, and followed Lolita's and her cousin's trail, until he had suddenly seen the two from that ledge above the Tinaja. "You are always welcome to what we have at our camp, you know, Don Ruz. All that is mine is yours also. To-night it is probably frijoles. But no doubt you have white flour here." He was giving his pony water from the barrel, and next he threw the saddle on and mounted. "I must be going back, or they will decide I am not coming till tomorrow, and quickly eat my supper." He spoke jauntily from his horse, arms akimbo, natty short jacket put on for to-day's courting, a gray steeple-hat silver-embroidered, a spruce pretty boy, not likely to toil severely at wood contracts so long as he could hold soul and body together and otherwise be merry, and the hand of that careless arm soft on his pistol, lest Don Ruz should abruptly dislike him too much; for Luis contrived a tone for his small-talk that would have disconcerted the most sluggish, sweet to his own mischievous ears, healing to his galled self-esteem. "Good-night, Don Ruz. Good-night, Lolita. Perhaps I shall come tomorrow, Manana en la manana."

"Good-night," said Lolita, harshly, which increased his joy; "I cannot stop you from passing my house."

Genesmere said nothing, but sat still on his white horse, hands folded upon the horns of his saddle, and Luis, always engaging and at ease, ambled away with his song about the hunchback. He knew that the American was not the man to wait until his enemy's back was turned.

"El telele se murio
A enterrar ya le llevan - "

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The tin pan Mexican voice was empty of melody and full of rhythm.

"Ay! Ay! Ay!"

Lolita and Genesmere stood as they had stood, not very near each other, looking after him and his gayety that the sun shone bright upon. The minstrel truly sparkled. His clothes were more elegant than the American's shirt and overalls, and his face luxuriant with thoughtfulness. Like most of his basking Southern breed, he had no visible means of support, and nothing could worry him for longer than three minutes. Frijoles do not come high, out-of-doors is good enough to sleep in if you or your friend have no roof, and it is not a hard thing to sell some other man's horses over the border and get a fine coat and hat.

"Cinco dragones y un cabo,
Oh, no no no no no!
Y un gato de sacristan."

Coat and hat were getting up the canyon's side among the cactus, the little horse climbing the trail shrewdly with his light-weight rider; and dusty unmusical Genesmere and sullen Lolita watched till they went behind a bend, and nothing remained but the tin-pan song singing in Genesmere's brain. The gadfly had stung more poisonously than he knew, and still Lolita and Genesmere stood watching nothing, while the sun — the sun of Arizona at the day's transfigured immortal passing — became a crimson coal in a lake of saffron, burning and beating like heart, till the desert seemed no longer dead, but only asleep, and breathing out wide rays of rainbow color that rose and expanded over earth and sky.

Then Genesmere spoke his first volunteered word to Lolita. "I didn't shoot because I was afraid of hitting you," he said.

So now she too realized clearly. He had got off his horse above the Tinaja to kill Luis during that kiss. Complete innocence had made her stupid and slow.

"Are you going to eat?" she inquired.

"Oh yes. I guess I'll eat."

She set about the routine of fire-lighting and supper as if it had been Uncle Ramon, and this evening like all evenings. He, not so easily, and with small blunderings that he cursed, attended to his horse and mules, coming in at length to sit against the wall where she was cooking.

"It is getting dark," said Lolita. So he found the lamp and lighted it, and sat down again.

"I've never hurt a woman," he said presently, the vision of his rifle's white front sight held steady on the two below the ledge once more flooding his brain. He spoke slowly.

"Then you have a good chance now," said Lolita quickly, busy over her cooking. In her southern ears such words sounded a threat. It was not in her blood to comprehend this Northern way of speaking and walking and sitting, and being one thing outside and another inside.

"And I wouldn't hurt a woman" — he was hardly talking to her — "not if I could think in time."

"Men do it," she said, with the same defiance. "But it makes talk."

"Talk's nothing to me," said Genesmere, flaming to fierceness. "Do I care for opinions! Only my own." The fierceness passed from his face, and he was remote from her again. Again he fell to musing aloud, changing from Mexican to his mother-tongue. "I wouldn't want to have to remember a thing like that." He stretched himself, and leaned his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, the yellow hair hiding his fingers. She had often seen him do this when he felt lazy; it was not a sign by which she could read a spiritual standstill, a quivering wreck of faith and passion. "I have to live a heap of my life alone," the loungeer went on. "Journey alone. Camp alone. Me and my mules. And I don't propose to have thoughts a man should be ashamed of." Lolita was throwing a cloth

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over the table and straightening it. "I'm twenty-five, and I've laid by no such thoughts yet. Church folks might say different."

"It is ready," said Lolita, finishing her preparations.

He looked up, and seeing the cloth and the places set, pulled his chair to the table, and passively took the food she brought him. She moved about the room between shelves and fire, and when she had served him, seated herself at leisure to begin her own supper. Uncle Ramon was a peon of some substance, doing business in towns and living comparatively well. Besides the shredded spiced stew of meat, there were several dishes for supper. Genesmere ate the meal deliberately, attending to his plate and cup, and only Lolita was as silent as himself, only occasionally looking at him; and in time his thoughts came to the surface again in words. He turned and addressed Lolita in Mexican: "So you see, you saved his life down there."

She laid her fork down and gave a laugh, hard and harsh; and she said nothing, but waited for what next.

"You don't believe that. You don't know that. He knows that."

She laughed again, more briefly.

"You can tell him so. From me."

Replies seemed to struggle together on Lolita's lips and hinder each other's escaping.

"And you tell him another thing. He wouldn't have stopped. He'd have shot. Say that. From me. He'd have shot, because he's a Spaniard, like you."

"You lie!" This side issue in some manner set free the girl's tongue. "I am not Spanish. I care nothing for Spaniards or what they may do. I am Mexican, and I waited to see you kill him. I wanted to watch his blood. But you! you listened to his false talk, and believed him, and let him go. I save his life? Go after him now! Do it with this knife, and tell him it is Lolita's. But do not sit there and talk any more. I have had enough of men's talk to-day. Enough, enough, enough!"

Genesmere remained in his chair, while she had risen to her feet. "I suppose," he said very slowly, "that folks like you can't understand about love — not about the kind I mean."

Lolita's two hands clinched the edge of the table, and she called upon her gods. "Believe it, then! Believe it! And kill me, if that will make you contented. But do not talk any more. Yes, he told me he loved me. Yes, I kissed him. I have kissed him hundreds of times, always, since before I can remember. And I had been laughing at him to-day, having nothing in my heart but you. All day it had rejoiced me to hear his folly and think of you, and think how little he knew, and you would come soon. But your folly is worse. Kill me in this house to-night, and I will tell you, dying, that I love you, and that it is you who are the fool."

She looked at her lover, and seeing his face and eyes she had sought to bring before in the days that she had waited for him, she rushed to him.

"Lolita!" he whispered. "Lolita!"

But she could only sob as she felt his arms and his lips. And when presently he heard her voice again murmuring brokenly to him in the way that he knew and had said over in his mind and dwelt upon through the desert stages he had ridden, he trembled, and with savage triumph drew her close, and let his doubt and the thoughts that had chilled and changed him sink deep beneath the flood of this present rapture. "My life!" she said. "Toda mi vida. All my life!" Through the open door the air of the canyon blew cool into the little room that the fire and the lamp oppressed, and in time they grew aware of the endless rustling of the trees, and went out and stood in the darkness together, until it ceased to be darkness, and their eyes could discern the near and distant shapes of their world. The sky was black and splendid, with four or five planets too bright for lesser stars to show, and the promontories of the keen mountains shone almost as in moonlight. A certain hill down towards the Tinaja and its slate ledge caught Genesmere's eye, and Lolita felt him shudder, and she wound her arm more tightly around him.

"What is it?" she said.

"Nothing." He was staring at the hill. "Nothing," he replied to himself.

"Dreamer, come!" said Lolita, pulling him. "It is cold here in the night — and if you choose to forget, I choose you shall remember."

"What does this girl want now!"

"The cards! Our cards!"

"Why, to be sure!" He ran after her, and joy beat in her heart at the fleet kiss he tried for and half missed. She

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escaped into the room, laughing for delight at her lover's being himself again — his own right self that she talked with always in the long days she waited alone.

"Take it!" she cried out, putting the guitar at him so he should keep his distance. "There! now you have broken it, songless Americano! You shall buy me another." She flung the light instrument, that fell in a corner with a loud complaint of all the strings together, collapsing to a blurred hollow humming, and silence.

"Now you have done it!" said Genesmere, mock serious.

"I don't care. I am glad. He played that to-day. He can have it, and you shall give me a new one. 'Yo soy purita mejicana; nada tengo espanol,'" sang the excited, breathless Lolita to her American, and seated herself at the table, beginning a brisk shuffle of a dim, dog-eared pack. "You sit there!" She nodded to the opposite side of the table. "Very well, move the lamp, then." Genesmere had moved it because it hid her face from him. "He thinks I cheat! Now, Senor Don Ruz, it shall be for the guitar. Do you hear?"

"Too many pesos, senorita."

"Oh, oh! the miser!"

"I'm not going broke for any senoritas — not even my own girl."

"Have you no newer thing than poverty to tell me? Now if you look at me like that I cannot shuffle properly."

"How am I to look, please?" He held his glance on her.

"Not foolish like a boy. There, take them, then!" She threw the cards at him, blushing and perturbed by his eyes, while he scrambled to punish her across the table.

"Generous one!" she said. "Ardent pretender! He won't let me shuffle because he fears to lose."

"You shall have a silk handkerchief with flowers on it," said he, shuffling.

"I have two already. I can see you arranging those cards, miser!"

It was the custom of their meetings, whether at the cabin or whether she stole out to his camp, to play for the token he should bring for her when he next came from town. She named one thing, he some other, and the cards judged between them. And to see Genesmere in these hours, his oldest friend could not have known him any more than he knew himself. Never had a woman been for him like Lolita, conjuring the Saxon to forget himself and bask openly in that Southern joy and the laughter of the moment.

"Say my name!" he orderd; and at the child effort she made over "Russ" he smiled with delight. "Again!" he exclaimed, bending to catch her R and the whole odd little word she made. "More!"

"No," pouted the girl, and beat at him, blushing again.

"Make your bet!" he said, laying out the Mexican cards before him. "Quick! Which shall it be?"

"The caballo. Oh, my dear, I wanted to die this afternoon, and now I am so happy!"

It brought the tears to her eyes, and almost to his, till he suddenly declared she had stolen a card, and with that they came to soft blows and laughing again. So did the two sit and wrangle, seizing the pack out of turn, feigning rage at being cheated, until he juggled to make her win three times out of five; and when chance had thus settled for the guitar, they played for kisses, and so forgot the cards at last. And at last Genesmere began to speak of the next time, and Lolita to forbid such talk as that so soon. She laid her hand over his lips, at which he yielded a little, and she improvised questions of moment to ask him, without time for stopping, until she saw that this would avail no longer. Then she sighed, and let him leave her to see to his animals, while she lighted the fire again to make breakfast for him. At that parting meal an anxiety slowly came in her face, and it was she that broke their silence after awhile.

"Which road do you go this time, querido?" she asked.

"Tucson, Maricopa, and the straight here to you."

"From Maricopa? That is longer across the desert."

"Shorter to my girl."

"I — I wish you would not come that way."

"Why?"

"That — that desert!"

"There's desert both ways — all ways. The other road puts an extra week between me and you."

"Yes, yes. I have counted."

"What is all this, Lolita?"

Once more she hesitated, smiling uneasily beneath his scrutiny. "Yo no se. I don't know. You will laugh. You

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do not believe the things that I believe. The Tinaja Bonita — "

"That again!"

"Yes," she half whispered. "I am afraid."

He looked at her steadily.

"Return the same road by Tucson," she urged. "That way is only half so much desert, and you can carry water from Poso Blanco. Do not trust the Coyote Wells. They are little and shallow, and if the Black Cross — Oh, my darling, if you do not believe, do this for me because you love me, love me!"

He did not speak at once. The two had risen, and stood by the open door, where the dawn was entering and mixing with the lamp. "Because I love you," he repeated at length, slowly, out of his uncertain thoughts.

She implored him, and she studied her in silence.

Suddenly hardness stamped his face. "I'll come by Tucson, then — since I love you!" And he walked at once out of the door. She followed him to his horse, and there reached up and pulled him round to her, locking her fingers behind his neck. Again his passion swept him and burned the doubt from his eyes. "I believe you love me!" he broke out.

"Ah, why need you say that?"

"Adios, chiquita." He was smiling, and she looked at his white teeth and golden mustache. She felt his hands begin to unlock her own.

"Not yet — not yet!"

"Adios, chiquita."

"O mi querido!" he murmured; "with you I forget day and night."

"Bastante!" He kissed her once for all.

"Good—by! Good—by! Mis labios van estar frios haste que tu los toques ostra vez. My lips will be cold until you touch them again."

He caught her two hands, as if to cling to something. "Say that once more. Tell me that once more."

She told him with all her heart and soul, and he sprang into his saddle. She went beside him through the cold pale-lighted trees to the garden's edge, and there stood while he took his way across the barren ground among the carcasses. She watched the tip of his mustache that came beyond the line of his cheek, and when he was further, his whole strong figure, while the clack of the hoofs on the dead ground grew fainter. When the steeper fall of the canyon hid him from her she ran to the house, and from its roof among her peppers she saw him come into sight again below, the wide foreshortened slant of ground between them, the white horse and dark rider and the mules, until they became a mere line of something moving, and so vanished into the increasing day.

Genesmere rode, and took presently to smoking. Coming to a sandy place, he saw prints of feet and of a shod horse in the trail leading the other way. That was his own horse, and the feet were Lolita's and Luis's — the record and the memory of yesterday afternoon. He looked up from the trail to the hills, now lambent with violet and shifting orange, and their shapes as they moved out into his approaching view were the shapes of yesterday afternoon. He came soon to the forking of the trails, one for Tucson, and the other leading down into the lumpy country, and here again were the prints in the sand, the shod horse, the man and the woman, coming in from the lumpy country that lay to the left; and Genesmere found himself stock-still by the forking trails, looking at his watch. His many-journeyed mules knew which was the Tucson trail, and not understanding why he turned them from their routine, walked asunder, puzzled at thus beingdriven in the wrong direction. They went along a strange up-and-down path, loose with sliding stones, and came to an end at the ledge of slate, and stood about on the tricky footing looking at their master and leaning their heads together. The master sat quiet on his horse, staring down where a circular pool lay below; and the sun rose everywhere except in his mind. So far had he come yesterday with that mind easy over his garnered prosperity, free and soaring on its daily flight among the towers of his hopes — those constructions that are common with men who grow fond: the air-castle rises and reaches, possessing the architect, who cherishes its slow creation with hourly changes and additions to the plan. A house was part of Genesmere's castle, a home with a wife inside, and no more camping alone. Thus far, to this exact ledge, the edifice had gone forward fortunately, and then a blast had crumbled house and days to come into indistinguishable dust. The heavy echo jarred in Genesmere, now that he had been lured to look again upon the site of the disaster, and a lightning violence crossed his face. He saw the two down there as they had stood, the man with his arms holding the woman, before the falling stone had startled them. Were the Mexican present now

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in the flesh, he would destroy him just for what he had tried to do. If she were true — She was true — that was not thanks to the Mexican. Genesmere was sorry second thoughts had spared that fellow yesterday, and he looked at his watch again. It was time to be starting on the Tucson trail, and the mules alertly turned their steps from the Tinaja Bonita. They could see no good in having come here. Evidently it was not to get water. Why, then? What use was there in looking down a place into a hole? The mules gave it up. Genesmere himself thought the Tinaja poorly named. It was not pretty. In his experience of trail and canyon he knew no other such hole. He was not aware of the twin, dried up, thirty yards below, and therefore only half knew the wonders of the spot.

He rode back to the forks across the rolling steepness, rebuilding the castle; then, discovering something too distant to be sure about, used his glass quickly. It was another rider, also moving slowly among the the knolls and gullies of the mesa, and Genesmere could not make him out. He was going toward the cabin, but it was not the same horse that Luis had ridden yesterday. This proved nothing, and it would be easy to circle and see the man closer — only not worth the trouble. Let the Mexican go to the cabin. Let him go every day. He probably would, if she permitted. Most likely she would tell him to keep away from her. She ought to. She might hurt him if he annoyed her. She was a good shot with a pistol. But women work differently from men — and then she was Mexican. She might hide her feelings and make herself pleasant for three weeks. She would tell him when he returned, and they would laugh together over how she had fooled this Luis. After all, shooting would have been too much punishment. A man with a girl like Lolita must expect to find other men after her. It depends on your girl. You find that out when you go after other men's girls. When a woman surely loves some other man she will not look at you. And Lolita's love was a sure thing. A woman can say love and a man will believe her — until he has experienced the genuine article once; after that he can always tell. And to have a house, with her inside waiting for you! Such a turn was strange luck for a man, not to be accounted for. If anybody had said last year — why, as late as the 20th of last March — that settling down was what you were coming to — and now — Genesmere wondered how he could ever had seen anything in riding a horse up and down the earth and caring nothing for what next. "No longer alone!" he said aloud, suddenly, and surprised the little horse.

The song about the hunchback and the sacristan's cat stirred its rhythm in his mind. He was not a singer, but he could think the tune, trace it, naked of melody, in the dry realm of the brain. And it was a diversion to piece out the gait of the phantom notes, low after high, quick after slow, until they went of themselves. Lolita would never kiss Luis again; would never want to — not even as a joke. Genesmere turned his head back to take another look at the rider, and there stood the whole mountains like a picture, and himself far out in the flat country, and the bare sun in the sky. He had come six miles on the road since he had last noticed. Six miles, and the air— castle was rebuilt, and perfect, with no difference from the old one except its foundation, which was upon sand. To see the unexpected plain around him, and the islands of blue sharp peaks lying in it, drove the tune from his head, and he considered the well-known country, reflecting that man could not be meant to live here. The small mountain-islands lay at all distances, blue in a dozen ways amid the dead calm of this sand archipelago. They rose singly from it, sheer and sudden, toothed and triangled like icebergs, hot as stoves. The channels to the north, Santa Rosa way, opened broad and yellow, and ended without shore upon the clean horizon, and to the south narrowed with lagoons into Sonora. Genesmere could just see one top of the Sierra de la Quitabac jutting up from below the earth—line, splitting the main channel, the faintest blue of all. They could be having no trouble over their water down there, with the Laguna Esperanca and the Poso de Mazis. Genesmere killed some more of the way rehearsing the trails and waterholes of this country, known to him like his pocket; and by—and—by food-cooking and mule-feeding and the small machine repetitions of a camp and a journey brought the Quijotoa Mountains behind him to replace Gun Sight and the Sierra de la Naril; and later still Genesmere counted days and nights to the good, and was at the Coyote Wells.

These were holes in rocks, but shallow, as Lolita said. No shallower than ordinary, however; he would see on the way back if they gave signs of failing. No wonder if they did, with this spell of drought — but why mix up a plain thing with a lot of nonsense about a black cross down a hole? Genesmere was critically struck with the words of the tune he now noticed steadily running in his head again, beneath the random surface of his thoughts. "Cinco dragones y un cabo y un gato de sacristan." That made no sense either; but the Mexicans found something in it. Liked it. Now American songs had some sense:

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"They bathed his head in vinegar
To fetch him up to time
And now he drives a mule team on
The Denver City line."

A man could understand that. A proud stage-driver makes a mistake about a female passenger. Thinks he has got a heiress, and she turns out to peddle sarsaparilla. "So he's naturally used up," commented Genesmere. "You estimate a girl as one thing, and she — " Here the undercurrent welled up, breaking the surface. "Did she mean that? Was that her genuine reason?" In memory he took a look at his girl's face, and repeated her words when she besought him to come the longer way and hesitated over why. Was that shame at owning she believed such stuff? True, after asking him once about his religion and hearing what he said, she had never spoken of these things again. That must be a woman's way when she loved you first — to hide her notions that differed from yours, and not ruffle happy days. "Return the same road by Tucson!" He unwrapped a clean, many-crumpled handkerchief, and held Lolita's photograph for a while. Then he burst into an unhappy oath, and folded the picture up again. What if her priest did tell her? He had heard the minister tell about eternal punishment when he was a boy, and just as soon as he started thinking it over he knew it was a lie. And this quack tinaja was worse foolishness, and had nothing to do with religion. Lolita afraid of his coming to grief in a country he had travelled hundreds, thousands of miles in! Perhaps she had never started thinking for herself yet. But she had. She was smarter than any girl of her age he had ever seen. She did not want him back so soon. That was what it was. Yet she had looked true; her voice had sounded that way. Again he dwelt upon her words and caresses; and harboring these various thoughts, he killed still more of the road, until, passing after a while Poso Blanco, and later Marsh's ranch—well at the forks where the Sonora road comes in, he reached Tucson a man divided against himself. Divided beyond his will into two selves — one of faith besieged, and one of besieging inimical reason — the inextricable error!

Business and pleasure were awaiting in Tucson, and friends whose ways and company had not been of late for him; but he frequented them this time, tasting no pleasure, yet finding the ways and the company better than his own. After the desert's changeless unfathomed silence, in which nothing new came day or night to break the fettering spell his mind was falling under, the clink and knocking of bottles was good to hear, and he listened for more, craving any sound that might wake him from his looming doubt. Abstaining himself, he moved his chair near others who sat lively in saloons. His boots, that for days had trod upon the unwatered earth beneath sun and stars, stepped now in spilled liquids on floors, and so beneath a roof among tobacco smoke he hid himself from the exorcism of the desert. Later the purring tinkle of guitars reminded him of that promised present, and the next morning he was the owner of the best instrument that he could buy. Leaving it with a friend to keep until he should come through again from Maricopa, he departed that way with his mules, finding in the new place the same sort of friends and business, and by night looking upon the same untasted pleasures. He went about town with some cattlemen, carousing bankrupts, who remembered their ruin in the middle of whiskey, and broke off to curse it and the times and climate, and their starved herds that none would buy at any price. Genesmere touched nothing, yet still drew his chair among three drinkers.

"Aren't you feeling good to-night, Russ?" asked one at length.

And Genesmere's eyes roused from seeing visions, and his ears became aware of the loud company. In Tucson he had been able to sit in the smoke and compass a cheerful deceit of appearance even to himself. Choosing and buying the guitar had lent reality to his imitated peace of mind; he had been careful over the strings, selecting such as Lolita preferred, wrapt in carrying out this spiritual forgery of another Genesmere. But here they noticed him; appearances had slipped from him. He listened to a piece of late Arizona news some one was in the middle of telling — the trial of several Mormons for robbing a paymaster near Cedar Springs. This was the fourth time he had heard the story, because it was new; but the present narrator dwelt upon the dodgings of a witness, a negress, who had seen everything and told nothing, outwitting the government, furnishing no proofs. This brought Genesmere quite back.

"No proofs!" he muttered. "No proofs!" He laughed and became alert. "She lied to them good, did she!"

They looked at him, because he had not spoken for so long; and he was told that she had certainly lied good.

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"Fooled them clean through, did she? On oath! Tell about her."

The flattered narrator, who had been in court, gave all he knew, and Genesmere received each morsel of perjury gavelly with a nod. He sat still when the story was done.

"Yes," he said, after a time. "Yes." And again, "Yes." Then he briefly bade the boys good night and went out from the lamps and whiskey into the dark.

He walked up and down alone, round the corral where his mules stood, round the stable where his bed-blankets were; and one or two carousers came by, who suggested further enjoyments to him. He went to the edge of the town and walked where passers would not meet him, turning now and then to look in the direction of Tucson, where the guitar was waiting. When he felt the change of dawn he went to the stable, and by the first early gray had his mules packed. He looked once again towards Tucson, and took the road he had promised not to take, leaving the guitar behind him altogether. Beseiged faith scarcely stirred in protest, starved in the citadel; victorious, well-fed reason hit upon the mockery that he had "come by Tucson," according to his literal word. It is a comfort to be divided no longer against one's self. Genesmere was at ease in his thralldom to the demon with whom he had wrestled through the dark hours. As the day brightened he wondered how he had come to fool a night away over a promise such as that. He took the face in the handkerchief, and gave it a curious defiant smile. She had said waiting would be long. She should have him quickly. And he was going to know about that visitor at the cabin, the steeple-hatted man he saw in his visions. So Maricopa drew behind him, small, clear-grouped in the unheated morning, and the sun found the united man and his mules moving into the desert.

By the well in the bottom of the Santa Cruz River he met with cattle and little late-born calves trying to trot. Their mothers, the foreman explained, had not milk enough for them, nor the cursed country food or water for the mothers. They could not chew cactus. These animals had been driven here to feed and fatten inexpensively, and get quick money for the owner. But, instead, half of them had died, and the men were driving the rest to new pastures, as many, that is, as could still walk. Genesmere knew, the foreman supposed, that this well was the last for more than a hundred miles? Funny to call a thing like that Santa Cruz a river! Well, it was an Arizona river; all right enough, no doubt, somewhere a thousand feet or so underground. Pity you weren't a prairie-dog that eats sand when he gets a thirst on him. Got any tobacco? Good-by.

Think of any valleys that you know between high mountains. Such was southern Arizona once — before we came. Then fill up your valleys with sand until the mountains show no feet or shoulders, but become as men buried to the neck. That is what makes separate islands of their protruding peaks, and that is why water slinks from the surface whenever it can and flows useless underneath, entombed in the original valley. This is Arizona now — since the pterodactyls have gone. Nor does no rain to speak of for three years help things. In such a place the traveller turns mariner, only, instead of the stars, he studies the water-wells, shaping his course by these. Not seagulls, but ravens, fly over this waste, seeking their meal. Some were in front of Genesmere now, settled black in the recent trail of the cattle. He did not much care that the last well was gone by, for he was broken in by long travel to the water of the 'dobe-holes that people rely on through this journey. These 'dobe-holes are occasional wallows in clayey spots, and men and cattle know each one. The cattle, of course, roll in them, and they become worn into circular hollows, their edges tramped into muck, and surrounded by a thicket belt of mesquite. The water is not good, but will save life. The first one lay two stages from the well, and Genesmere accordingly made an expected dry camp the first night, carrying water from the well in Santa Cruz, and dribbling all but a cup of it among his animals, and the second night reached his calculated 'dobe-hole. The animals rolled luxuriously in the brown dungy mixture, and Genesmere made his coffee strong. He had had no shade at the first camp, and here it was good under the tangle of mesquite, and he slept sound. He was early awakened by the ravens, whose loose dislocated croaking came from where they sat at breakfast on the other side of the wallow. They had not suspected his presence among the mesquite, and when he stepped to the mud-hole and dipped its gummy fluid in his coffee-pot they rose hoarse and hovering, and flapped twenty yards away, and sat watching until he was gone into the desert, when they clouded back again around their carrion.

This day was over ground yellow and hard with dearth, until afternoon brought a footing of sifting sand heavy to travel in. He had plenty of time for thinking. His ease after the first snapping from his promise had changed to an eagerness to come unawares and catch the man in the steeple-hat. Till that there could be no proofs. Genesmere had along the road nearly emptied his second canteen of its brown-amber drink, wetting the beasts' tongues more than his own. The neighborhood of the next 'dobe-hole might be known by the three miles of cactus

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you went through before coming on it, a wide-set plantation of the yucca. The posted plants deployed over the plain in strange extended order like legions and legions of figures, each shock-head of spears bunched bristling at the top of its lank, scaly stalk, and out of that stuck the blossom-pole, a pigtail on end, with its knot of bell-flowers seeded to pods ten feet in the air. Genesmere's horse started and nearly threw him, but it was a young calf lying for shade by a yucca. Genesmere could tell from its unlicked hide that the mother had gone to hunt water, and had been away for some time. This unseasonable waif made a try at running away, but fell in a heap, and lay as man and mules passed on. Presently he passed a sentinel cow. She stood among the thorns guarding the calves of her sisters till they should return from getting their water. The desert cattle learn this shift, and the sentinel now, at the stranger's approach, lowered her head, and with a feeble but hostile sound made ready to protect her charge, keeping her face to the passing enemy. Further along gaunt cows stood or lay under the perpetual yuccas, an animal to every plant. They stared at Genesmere passing on; some rose to look after him; some lifted their heads from the ground, and seeing, laid them down again. He came upon a calf watching its mother, who had fallen in such a position that the calf could not suck. The cow's fore leg was caught over her own head, and so she held herself from rising. The sand was rolled and grooved into a wheel by her circlings; her body heaved and fell with breathing, and the sand was wet where her pivot nostrils had ground it. While Genesmere untangled her and gave her tongue the last of his canteen, the calf walked round and round. He placed the cow upon her feet, and as soon as he moved away to his horse the calf came to its mother, who began to lick it. He presently marked ahead the position of the coming 'dobe-hole by the ravens assembling in the air, continually rising and lighting. The white horse and mules quickened their step, and the trail became obliterated by the hundreds of hoof marks leading to the water. As a spider looks in the centre of an empty web, so did the round wallow sit in the middle of the plain, with threaded feet conducting from everywhere to it. Mules and white horse scraped through the scratching mesquite, and the ravens flapped up. To Genesmere their croaking seemed suddenly to fill all space with loud total clamor, for no water was left, only mud. He eased the animals of their loads and saddles, and they rolled in the stiff mud, squeezing from it a faint ooze, and getting a sort of refreshment. Genesmere chewed the mud, and felt sorry for the beasts. He turned both canteens upside down and licked the bungs. A cow had had his last drink. Well, that would keep her alive several hours more. Hardly worth while; but spilled milk decidedly. Milk! That was an idea. He caught animal after animal, and got a few sickly drops. There was no gain in camping at this spot, no water for coffee; so Genesmere moved several hundred yards away to be rid of the ravens and their all-day-long meal and the smell. He lay thinking what to do. Go back? At the rate he could push the animals now that last hole might be used up by the cattle before he got there — and then it was two stages more to the Santa Cruz well. And the man would be gaining just so many more days unhindered at the cabin. Out of the question. Forward, it was one shortish drive to the next hole. If that were dry, he could forsake the trail and make a try by a short-cut for that Tinaja place. And he must start soon, too, as soon as the animals could stand it, and travel by night and rest when the sun got bad. What business had October to be hot like this? So in the darkness he mounted again, and noon found him with eyes shut under a yucca. It was here that he held a talk with Lolita. They were married, and sitting in a room with curtains that let you see flowers growing outside by the window, as he had always intended. Lolita said to him that there was no fool like an old fool, and he was telling her that love could make a man more a fool than age, when she threw the door open, letting in bright light, and said, "No proofs." The bright light was the real sun coming round the yucca on his face, and he sat up and saw the desert. No cows were here, but he noticed the roughened hides and sunk eyes of his own beasts and spoke to them.

"Cheer up, Jeff! Stonewall!" He stopped at the pain. It was in his lips and mouth. He put up his hand and the feel of his tongue frightened him. He looked round to see what country he was in, and noted the signs that it was not so very far now. The blue crags of the islands were showing, and the blue sterile sky spread over them and the ceaseless sunlight like a plague. Man and horse and mules were the only life in the naked bottom of this cauldron. The mirage had caught the nearest island, and blunted and dissolved its points and frayed its base away to a transparent fringe.

"Like a lump of sugar melts in hot tod," remarked Genesmere, aloud, and remembered his thickened mouth again. "I can stand it off for a while yet, though — if they can travel." His mules looked at him when he came — looked when he tightened their cinches. "I know, Jeff," he said, and inspected the sky. "No heaven's up there. Nothing's back of that, unless it's hell."

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He got the animals going, and the next 'dobe-hole was like the last, and busy with the black flapping of the birds. "You didn't fool me," said Genesmere, addressing the mud. "I knew you'd be dry." His eye ran over the cattle, that lay in various conditions. "That foreman was not too soon getting his live-stock out of your country," he continued to the hole, his tongue clacking as it made his words. "This live-stock here's not enjoying itself like its owners in town. This live-stock was intended for Eastern folks' dinner. — But you've got ahead of 'em this trip," he said to the ravens. He laughed loudly, and hearing himself, stopped, and his face became stern. "You don't want to talk this way, Russ Genesmere. Shut your head. You're alone — I wish I'd never known!" he suddenly cried out.

He went to his animals and sat down by them, clasping and unclasping his hands. The mules were lying down on the baked mud of the wallow with their loads on, and he loosed them. He stroked his white horse for some little while, thinking; and it was in his heart that he had brought these beasts into this scrape. It was sunset and cool. Against the divine fires of the west the peaks towered clear in splendor impassive, and forever aloof, and the universe seemed to fill with infinite sadness. "If she'll tell me it's not so," he said, "I'll believe her now. I will believe her now. I'll make myself. She'll help me to." He took what rest he dared, and started up from it much later than he had intended, having had the talk with Lolita again in the room with the curtains. It was nine when he set out for the short-cut under the moon, dazed by his increasing tortures. The brilliant disk, blurring to the eye, showed the mountains unearthly plain, beautiful, and tall in the night. By-and-by a mule fell and could not rise, and Genesmere decided it was as well for all to rest again. The next he knew it was blazing sunshine, and the sky at the same time bedded invisible in black clouds. And when his hand reached for a cloud that came bellying down to him, it changed into a pretzel, and salt burned in his mouth at the sight of it. He turned away, and saw the hot unshaded mountains wrinkled in the sun, glazed, and shrunk, gullied like the parchment of an old man's throat; and then he saw a man in steeple-hat. He could no more lay the spectre that wasted his mind than the thirst-demon which raged in his body. He shut his eyes, and then his arm was beating at something to keep it away. Pillowed on his saddle, he beat until he forgot. A blow at the corner of his eye brought him up sitting, and a raven jumped from his chest.

"You're not experienced," said Genesmere. "I'm not dead yet. But I'm obliged to you for being so enterprising. You've cleared my head. Quit that talk, Russ Genesmere." He went to the mule that had given out during the night. "Poor Jeff! We might lighten your pack. Now if that hunchback had died here, the birds would have done his business for him without help from any of your cats. Am I saying that, now, or only thinking it? I know I'm alone. I've travelled that way in the world. Why?" He turned his face, expecting some one to answer, and the answer came in a fierce voice: "Because you're a man, and can stand this world off by yourself. You look to no one." He suddenly took out the handkerchief and tore the photograph to scraps. "That's lightened my pack all it needs. Now for these boys, or they'll never make camp." He took what the mules carried, his merchandise, and hid it carefully between stones — for they had come near the mountain country — and looking at the plain he was leaving, he saw a river. "Ha, ha!" he said, slyly; "you're not there, though. And I'll prove it to you." He chose another direction, and saw another flowing river. "I was expecting you," he stated, quietly. "Don't bother me. I'm thirsty."

But presently as he journeyed he saw lying to his right a wide fertile place with fruit trees and water everywhere. "Peaches too!" he sang out, and sprang off to run, but checked himself in five steps. "I don't seem able to stop your foolish talking," he said, "but you shall not chase around like that. You'll stay with me. I tell you that's a sham. Look at it." Obedient, he looked hard at it, and the cactus and rock thrust through the watery image of the lake like two photographs on the same plate. He shouted with strangling triumph, and continued shouting until brier-roses along a brook and a farm-house unrolled to his left, and he ran half-way there, calling his mother's name. "Why, you fool, she's dead!" He looked slowly at his cut hands, for he had fallen among stones. "Dead, back in Kentucky, ever so long ago," he murmured, softly. "Didn't stay to see you get wicked." Then he grew stern again. "You've showed yourself up and you can't tell land from water. You're going to let the boys take you straight. I don't trust you."

He started the mules, and caught hold of his horse's tail, and they set out in single file, held steady by their instinct, stumbling ahead for the water they knew among the mountains. Mules led, and the shouting man brought up the rear, clutching the white tail like a rudder, his feet sliding along through the stones. The country grew higher and rougher, and the peaks blazed in the hot sky; slate and sand and cactus below, gaping cracks and

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funnelled erosions above, rocks like monuments slanting up to the top pinnacles; supreme Arizona, stark and dead in space, like an extinct planet, flooded with eternal brightness. The perpetual dominating peaks caught Genesmere's attention. "Toll on!" he cried to them. "Toll on, you tall mountains. What do you care? Summer and winter, night and day, I've known you, and I've heard you all along. A man can't look but he sees you walling God's country from him, ringing away with your knell."

He must have been lying down during some time, for now he saw the full moon again, and his animals near him, and a fire blazing that himself had evidently built. The coffee-pot sat on it, red-hot and split open. He felt almost no suffering at all, but stronger than ever in his life, and he heard something somewhere screaming "water, water, water," fast and unceasing, like an alarm-clock. A rattling of stones made him turn, and there stood a few staring cattle. Instantly he sprang to his feet, and the screaming stopped. "Round 'em up, Russ Genesmere. It's getting late," he yelled, and ran among the cattle, whirling his rope. They dodged weakly this way and that, and next he was on the white horse urging him after the cows, who ran in a circle. One struck the end of a log that stuck out from the fire, splintering the flames and embers, and Genesmere followed on the tottering horse through the sparks, swinging his rope and yelling in the full moon. "Round 'em up! round 'em up! Don't you want to make camp! All the rest of the herd's bedded down along with the ravens."

The white horse fell and threw him by the edge of a round hole, but he did not know it till he opened his eyes and it was light again, and the mountains still tolling. Then like a crash of cymbals the Tinaja beat into his recognition. He knew the slate rock; he saw the broken natural stairs. He plunged down them, arms forward like a diver's, and ground his forehead against the bottom. It was dry. His bloodshot eyes rolled once up round the sheer walls. Yes, it was the Tinaja, and his hands began to tear at the gravel. He flung himself to fresh places, fiercely grubbing with his heels, biting into the sand with his teeth; while above him in the canyon his placid animals lay round the real Tinaja Bonita, having slaked their thirst last night, in time, some thirty yards from where he now lay bleeding and fighting the dust in the dry twin hole.

He heard voices, and put his hands up to something round his head. He was now lying out in the light, with a cold bandage round his forehead, and a moist rag on his lips.

"Water!" He could just make the whisper.

But Lolita made a sign of silence.

"Water!" he gasped.

She shook her head, smiling, and moistened the rag. That must be all just now.

His eye sought and travelled, and stopped short, dilating; and Lolita screamed at his leap for the living well.

"Not yet! Not yet!" she said in terror, grappling him. "Help! Luis!"

So this was their plot, the demon told him — to keep him from water! In a frenzy of strength he seized Lolita. "Proved! Proved!" he shouted, and stuck his knife into her. She fell at once to the earth and lay calm, eyes wide open, breathing in the bright sun. He rushed to the water and plunged, swallowing and rolling.

Luis ran up from the cows he was gathering, and when he saw what was done, sank by Lolita to support her. She pointed to the pool.

"He is killing himself!" she managed to say, and her head went lower.

"And I'll help you die, caberon! I'll tear your tongue. I'll..."

But Lolita, hearing Luis's terrible words, had raised a forbidding hand. She signed to leave her and bring Genesmere to her.

The distracted Luis went down the stone stairs to kill the American in spite of her, but the man's appearance stopped him. You could not raise a hand against one come to this. The water-drinking was done, and Genesmere lay fainting, head and helpless arms on the lowest stone, body in the water. The Black Cross stood dry above. Luis heard Lolita's voice, and dragged Genesmere to the top as quickly as he could. She, seeing her lover, cried his name once and died; and Luis cast himself on the earth.

"Fool! fool!" he repeated, catching at the ground, where he lay for some while until a hand touched him. It was Genesmere.

"I'm seeing things pretty near straight now," the man said. "Come close. I can't talk well. Was — was that talk of yours, and singing — was that bluff?"

"God forgive me!" said poor Luis.

"You mean forgive me," said Genesmere. He lay looking at Lolita. "Close her eyes," he said. And Luis did so.

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Genesmere was plucking at his clothes, and the Mexican helped him draw out a handkerchief, which the lover unfolded like a treasure. "She used to look like this," he began. He felt and stopped. "Why, it's gone!" he said. He lay evidently seeking to remember where the picture had gone, and his eyes went to the hills whence no help came. Presently Luis heard him speaking, and leaning to hear, made out that he was murmuring his own name, Russ, in the way Lolita had been used to say it. The boy sat speechless, and no thought stirred in his despair as he watched. The American moved over, and put his arms around Lolita, Luis knowing that he must not offer to help him do this. He remained so long that the boy, who would never be a boy again, bent over to see. But it was only another fainting fit. Luis waited; now and then the animals moved among the rocks. The sun crossed the sky, bringing the many-colored evening, and Arizona was no longer terrible, but once more infinitely sad. Luis started, for the American was looking at him and beckoning.

"She's not here," Genesmere said, distinctly.

Luis could not follow.

"Not here, I tell you." The lover touched his sweetheart. "This is not her. My punishment is nothing," he went on, his face growing beautiful. "See there!"

Luis looked where he pointed.

"Don't you see her? Don't you see her fixing that camp for me? We're going to camp together now."

But these were visions alien to Luis, and he stared helpless, anxious to do anything that the man might desire. Genesmere's face darkened wistfully.

"Am I not making camp?" he said.

Luis nodded to please him, without at all comprehending.

"You don't see her." Reason was warring with the departing spirit until the end. "Well, maybe you're right. I never was sure. But I'm mortal tired of travelling alone. I hope —"

That was the end, and Russ Genesmere lay still beside his sweetheart. It was a black evening at the cabin, and a black day when Luis and old Ramon raised and fenced the wooden head-stone, with its two forlorn names.