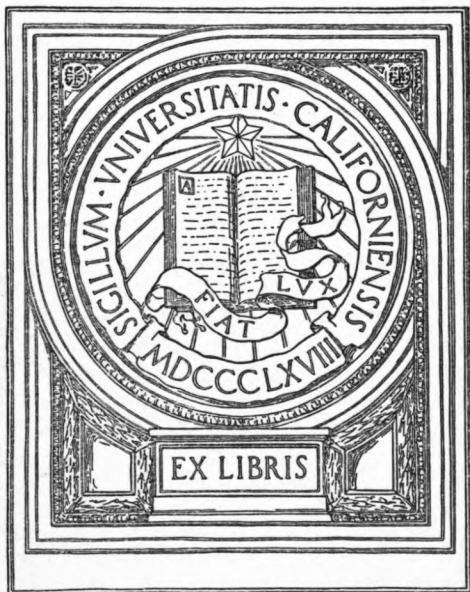


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THE ROAD TO MONTEREY

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TO THE
ABRAHAM



Don Abrahan

The Road to Monterey.

BY

GEORGE W. OGDEN

Author of *Trail's End*, *The Rastler of Wind River*,
The Land of Last Chance, Etc.



CHICAGO
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THE ROAD TO MONTEREY

The Road To Monterey

CHAPTER I

THE MUTINEER

DON ABRAHAN CRUZ Y GARVANZA rode leisurely ahead of his wagon, in the manner of a man upon whom occasions were accustomed to wait. The low hills at his right hand were green with wild oats; before him the waters of San Pedro Bay leaped gladly in the morning sun. Last night's rain had left pools in the roadside depressions, and ruts cut by lumbering cart-wheels in the clayey sand; the refreshment of its passing was still sweet to the nostrils, still gladdening to the eye in the sparkle of clinging drops on grass and verdant leaf.

Although the midwinter California sun was fair around him, Don Abraham's brow was corrugated with displeasure; in the mask of his gray beard he bit his nether lip as a baffled man sets teeth in his own flesh, or as a rattlesnake is said to turn in the frenzy of impotent anger to sink its fangs into its own loathsome side. When a man has been cheated and has redress at hand, it is one thing; when he knows himself cheated without recourse, it is another.

Don Abraham knew that the skipper of the

Yankee ship lying at anchor far out in the shallow bay had cheated him on yesterday's count of hides. It had happened because Don Abraham had been detained in the pueblo Los Angeles, leaving the count to the honor of the skipper and the watchfulness of a hired man. Three leagues back upon this morning's journey Don Abraham had met this hired man Felipe, designated by the high title of mayordomo, and received from him the count.

A trifling thing, this difference of forty-three hides, to a man whose dominion extended over scores of square miles of land, yet a rankling thing to brood upon, a matter touching the dignity and superiority of a don who stood high above these vile Yankees who came shouting and knocking men down with bare fists, raiding in their commercial ways like pirates up and down the California shore.

There, half a league from shore, lay this base captain's ship, a thing of beauty, Don Abraham was not reluctant to confess, even with its bare yards black against the holy blue of a rain-washed sky. The chains which held it secure in its berth were invisible from Don Abraham's distance. The ship seemed to float there by some secret power known to the indomitable ruffians whose life was barter and whose heaven was gain, lifting its long and graceful stem to the waves, turning a bit seaward, as if straining with impatience to be away on some new adventure of profit and wrangling trade.

An expedient man, Don Abraham Cruz y Gar-

vanza, a progressive man for his day and country. The wagon that came behind him was a Yankee wagon, brought from a New England factory by one of these hide-droghers such as lifted to yonder swell; the harness on the eight mules which drew the great wagon was Yankee-made, strong and reliable, even though from such tricky hands. Even the man who drove the eight mules, the confusing lines of leather familiar to him as the strings of a harp to a musician's hands, had learned the art from a Yankee freighter, across the mountains and desert in' distant Santa Fe.

More: the capacity of that one wagon, grinding over the sandy road on its broad tires, was that of twenty ox-drawn carts such as Don Abraham's conservative, tradition-serving neighbors employed. There was a tale of hides piled under that trifling Simon — good for nothing in the world but driving eight mules — to make a man's heart stretch with pride, even a Yankee captain's eyes open in sluggish surprise. To a man who could command such things, a man who graced a station of eminence, to whom men removed their hats, to be cheated of forty-three hides was a humiliation and affront. It was from that reason, all his might and consequence considered, that Don Abraham gathered his brows as he rode, with a thought of adjustment in his hour.

A boat was putting off from the distant ship, so laden with boxes, bales and barrels of goods that the next sea must overwhelm it, so it seemed to

Don Abraham's eyes. A man stood in the stern, urging the sailors at the oars to bend to their heavy task. Even at that distance Don Abraham knew him for the Yankee captain who had cheated him out of forty-three sound bullock hides in the count of yesterday.

Don Abraham halted back a little way from the point where the road bent down the steep hillside, directing by an imperious sweep of the arm his driver to bring the wagon around and halt on the level from which the cliffs fell away sharply to the ocean side. This was as far as any man of consequence went to meet the Yankee traders. From this point the hides were carried down, or thrown over the cliffs, by the sailors to be transported in small boats to the ship; to this point the sailors came laboring up the steep with the goods taken by the Californians in exchange. Here Don Abraham remained, seated in his saddle, waiting the coming of the captain.

Soon the boat came ashore, shooting through the breakers with such impetuosity that, it seemed to the Mexican rancher who watched in fear and admiration, it must be crushed on the hard sands of the beach, its precious cargo swallowed by the sea. Instead, there seemed scarcely a drop of water to reach the goods heaped between the thwarts, piled high in bow and stern.

The sailors, wearing shoes without stockings, their loose trousers rolled to mid-thigh, leaped out when the withdrawing breaker surged back toward

the sea, laid hold of the boat, and ran it inshore until its keel grounded, all with such admirable dexterity that spoke of long training at the hazardous work. Vikings, thought Don Abrahan, pirates of a species, who were insensible to all things but sharp liquor, sharp curses, heavy blows. A gentleman did not stand waiting on foot the arrival of such as these.

The Yankee captain had no such feeling of nicety in the case. If Don Abrahan could have seen into his mind, indeed, he probably would have been rudely disturbed in his stand upon ancient privileges, for aside from the Yankee captain's feeling of condescension and patronage for a people so unenlightened in religion and politics, his one concern was to be done with this dangerous harbor and standing out to sea. He came bounding up the steep shore now, his long legs cutting the distance as shears in a tailor's hands devour their way through a width of cloth.

"Well, Don Abrahan!" the captain hailed, making it hearty, and warm as he knew very well how to put friendliness and equality into a trade salutation. "Glad to see you here so early with them hides. Does this wind it up for you?"

"Wind it up?" Don Abrahan repeated, displeased with what he took for an unwarranted familiarity of address, rather than mystified by the meaning. "If you mean is this all, then this is all — for me."

"Of course that's what I meant," the captain

returned, both thought and eyes on the immense load of hides.

He hurried on past Don Abrahan as he spoke, to clamber on a hub, and from there to a wheel-top, where he stood lifting the corners of the hides, as if counting them to form an estimate of the number.

“Must have a hundred and fifty here,” he ventured, turning sharply to Don Abrahan.

“Two hundred,” Don Abrahan corrected him loftily, yet with gentlemanly indifference.

“That’ll bring you up to twenty-eight hundred,” the captain said briskly, descending from the wagon, bristling with business.

“And forty-three,” Don Abrahan amended, fixing the Yankee captain with accusing eye.

“Not by a dam’ sight!” the captain blustered, his weathered face darkening.

“My mayordomo reports to me”—Don Abrahan spoke slowly, each word standing precisely and distinctly alone—“that your count disagreed with mine by forty-three on yesterday.”

“I don’t doubt you had that many when you piled them up here, colonel,” the captain allowed. “We had a hard off-shore blow here at the harbor night-before-last, it’s just likely some of your hides were whisked out to sea. I know I didn’t git ’em, anyhow.”

“We will balance the difference. Perhaps some mistake——”

“Not by a jugful, we won’t, old feller! You can take my count or you can leave it, but I tell you

once for all that my clerk never makes mistakes."

Don Abrahan crossed his gloved hands on his saddle-horn, and sat so a little while, head bent in consideration, it might be, of the infallible clerk aboard that lifting ship.

"Your mayordomo accepted payment for them hides accordin' to our count of 'em," the captain pursued. "That settles the matter, as far as I'm concerned. I'd like to have these, but if you're not satisfied with the way I do business you can drive off. There's your stuff down there to pay for this lot. Take it or leave it. That's me!"

Still Don Abrahan considered the situation. Shrewd as the captain believed himself to be, crafty at a bargain as he undoubtedly was, and great as the profit between what he gave and what he received, he was only a crude and inelegant savage compared with the finesse of Don Abrahan. There were peones on Don Abrahan's great ranch who labored three months for a pair of those Boston-made shoes which the sailors were unloading from the boat. His pose of consideration was but acting. He wanted it to appear that he yielded only after solemn deliberation, foregoing much that a man should stand for because a squabble and contention in the Yankee way was beneath him.

It might be a fitting thing to his dignity to order Simon to turn and drive away with the load of hides; it might put the blustering pirate of a Yankee in his place, cause him to leap and dance, shout

and run after them to stay them, for Don Abrahan knew the cargo was almost complete, that the captain was keen to be setting his prow in the direction of home.

On the other hand, such a move might result only in loss. Don Abrahan needed shoes and cotton goods, sugar, codfish, mackerel, pork. He needed trinkets of combs, buttons, buckles, and gauds for women's hair, the vain adornments of a weak and simple people such as lived in servitude beneath his hand. Fifty thousand cattle fed in his valleys and hills, each one of them representing no more than the value of a hide.

"Very well," said Don Abrahan, lifting his face, the wind from the sea flattening his beard against his breast. "Bring up the goods."

Sailors came running at the captain's shouted command, swarmed upon the wagon, throwing off the hides. The captain himself checked them off as they fell, Simon, the teamster, sitting placidly on the ground beside the mules, smoking in sleepy-eyed indifference of the haste and turbulence around him.

Don Abrahan dismounted, drew off his gauntlets, put them away in his saddle-pouch. He must, by force, accept the captain's count of the hides which were already in his hold; there was no argument that would compel him to accept the captain's count of shoes, or weight of sugar-boxes, or number of bales of cotton goods. He signaled forward several Indians who were loafing somnolently

in the sun around a mean camp pitched a little way off, retainers of his who had been employed with the hides already aboard. They brought at Don Abraham's direction a tripod of strong timbers in which a steelyard swung, setting it up near the wagon for weighing the goods.

Don Abraham took his stand beside the scales, waiting the coming of four sailors who were toiling up the steep shore bluff of yellow sand and clay. The way was slippery from last night's heavy rain, rough and insecure. Between them the sailors bore upon two oars, held in the manner of a barrow, a large box of goods. Their approach was laborious and slow. Don Abraham watched them narrowly, thinking only that a slip might precipitate the box down the sharp pitch of the shore into the sea.

Don Abraham was tall, almost grotesquely thin. His sharp features seemed given an edge by the narrowness of his great nose, no broader it looked than the back of a saber. His dark, languishing, oriental eyes attested to the Moorish stock upon which his foundation was built; his beard, reaching half-way down his breast, was of a fineness and luxuriance that repudiated any charge of Indian blood.

California-born, of Spanish stock, Don Abraham had been quick to align himself with the Mexican patriots when he saw which way the day was likely to go in the uprising against Spanish oppression. His foresight had saved his lands, where his less sagacious neighbors in many instances had lost

theirs and been harried out of the country by the victorious Mexicans. Don Abraham was fully in the confidence of the new government. He was a magistrate in the name of liberty and equality, yet a despot and an aristocrat to whom the commonalty cringed, in whose presence men removed their hats.

The magistrate's boots of tawny soft leather reached to his knees; the legs of his dark, ribbed velvet pantaloons were gathered into their broad tops. There were silver trinkets and adornments of silver cord on his immense sombrero; the long rowels of his silver spurs goaded the ground as he stood, as if Don Abraham would urge it beyond its usual bounty to yield according to his desires.

The four sailors came laboring up the shore, a quick, panting word of caution now and then breaking their otherwise silent approach. There was no gaiety in them, no willingness for the work of carrying to the feet of this bearded barbarian, as they esteemed him, the goods which he was too proud or too indolent to come down to the water's edge and take away, after the manner of men in civilized places, everywhere. Now, as the two men in advance reached the top, one of them who held the blade-end of an oar stumbled and fell. The weight of the box thrown thus suddenly and completely on the dropped oar snapped it.

In a commotion of curses and shouts the sailors set their shoulders to the box of goods to hold it, while the captain, lithe as a leopard, came spring-

ing forward to add his commands and abuse to the general uproar. In a moment the box was safely heaved to the level near Don Abraham's feet.

"Who let go his holt on that oar?" the captain demanded, passing his accusing look from face to face.

It was evident in the silence of the men, their averted faces, their dark frowns, that there was no friendliness for the captain among his crew.

"Who was it?" the captain demanded again, his evil temper mounting. He stood with feet set as for a spring, bent forward from the hips, hands fixed before him like a wrestler prepared to engage. "You can't cover it up that way, men, I tell you — you know me, you know my way. I'll fine the butter-fingered dock-loafer that broke that oar ten dollars, and if you don't speak up I'll make it ten dollars apiece!"

"I'm responsible for it, Captain Welliver, as far as there is any responsibility."

The sailor who had missed his footing and precipitated the disaster stepped forward as he spoke. Don Abraham, bored by the interruption of his business, scornful of the captain's enlargement of a thing so trivial, looked quickly at the speaker, struck by the quality of his word and tone.

The sailor was a man of twenty-three or twenty-five, medium of stature, rather slender, yet nothing about him that suggested weakness or frailty either of body or soul. His bare limbs were smeared with the yellow mud through which he had toiled

to his disastrous climax; his sinewy arms were fouled with it, splashes of it flecked his ruddy-brown face. His countenance was frank and handsome, his eyes were quick and blue, a certain merri-ness in them that seemed the expression of the man's unconquerable hope. His fair hair was long, a waviness in it as irrepressible as the soul that looked out of his eyes. It was tossed and disordered; sweat glistened on his face.

Captain Welliver straightened from his threatening posture, triumph for his small victory glistening in his eyes.

"In your case I'll make it twenty dollars," he announced. "Now, get back to work!"

The other sailors who had brought up the box, joined by the four who had been flinging hides from the wagon, moved dispiritedly down the hill.

"I'll not go back to work until you modify that unreasonable fine, Captain Welliver," said the sailor whose unfortunate slip seemed in a way to cost him so dearly. "No oar that ever was turned is worth twenty dollars."

"Git back to work!" the captain ordered, whirling upon the insubordinate man.

"Not as long as that unjust fine stands against me, sir. I'm willing for you to deduct the cost price of the oar from my wages, although it wasn't my fault that it got broken."

"You'll go to work this minute, or by the Almighty! I'll knock your two eyes into one!"

"When you do me as much justice as your small

sense of honesty will allow, Captain Welliver," the sailor returned, unmoved by the captain's threat. "When you meet my terms, I'll go back to work."

The sailor was watching his captain as a fencer holds his opponent in his eye. The captain stood as he had turned, checked both in his physical and mental process, it appeared, by this expression of open defiance.

"I've taken your kicks and curses, I've stood by and seen you haul my mates up and lash them—I've taken your illegal severities in a thousand ways because I was cooped up in that floating kingdom with you," the sailor continued, holding the astonished, raging captain eye to eye.

"You'll take more—yes, by the Almighty! you'll take more than you ever got!" the captain threatened, gathering himself to lay on the chastisement then and there.

"You're ashore now, you're not a hard-tack king here," the sailor defied him. "We're man to man, Captain Welliver. I'm not going back to that ship, you tyrannous brute!"

"I'll learn you, you mutinous cur!"

Captain Welliver leaped as he spoke, sweeping with open hand a blow that must have knocked the sailor senseless if it had reached its aim. But the sailor, nimble as a fly, darted aside, stooped and snatched a piece of the broken oar, and struck with it in the vigor of his wrath and culminated vengeance. The captain seemed to stand a moment, checked so suddenly in his assault, as if surprise

persisted above concussion. Don Abraham drew back a step as he fell, to look down with cold satisfaction into his twitching face.

The mate in charge of unloading the boat came running to his chief's assistance. He scrambled up the steep, fury in his face, ordering his men up to seize the mutineer. The sailor dropped the fragment of oar, exchanging it for the other, and longer, piece. So armed, he stood where the slippery footway met the level.

"I'll brain the first man that comes!" he declared. "Mates, I've got no quarrel with any of you, but I'll brain the first man that tries to lay a hand on me!"

Valiant as he was against defenseless, cowed men on the deck of his ship, the mate stopped to deliberate his chances against the six-foot butt of the oar. The sailor backed away, his weapon ready; the mate, watching calculatively, came on again, the reluctant sailors at his back.

Captain Welliver flopped like a fish, rolled to his side, gathering his dispersed senses and strength with amazing rapidity, and righted himself to his knees, a pistol in his hand.

"No," said Don Abraham, placing himself between the captain's weapon and the retreating sailor; "there must be no violence on this shore. As a magistrate I command you to respect the law."

"Law hell!" said Captain Welliver, shifting to take aim at the sailor, "that man's desertin' ship!"

“Let him go, then; the world is full of men,” said Don Abraham, calm and undisturbed.

“My ship ain’t!” the captain retorted sharply. “Out of my way, damn you! or I’ll drill you through.”

Don Abraham waved his arm in what seemed nothing more than a slow, indolent gesture of denial. Simon, the driver, sprang out of his smoky lethargy, which even this affray among the Yankees had not disturbed. Captain Welliver found himself confronting a pistol, which Simon waited but the command of his master’s lifted hand to fire. The argument was good with the captain; he put his own weapon away, fairly inundating that shore, and all who stood upon it, with the stream of his profane abuse.

“It will be time to return to business,” said Don Abraham, cutting him short in such relief as he was finding in that wordy vent.

“Twenty-five dollars to the man or men that bring that deserter back!” the captain offered, bringing away his hand from the side of his face, seeing blood on it.

Nobody but the mate moved to win the reward. He sprang up the bank and started after the sailor, who was entering the thick tangle of brushwood a little distance beyond the Indians’ camp. Don Abraham interposed again.

“What is one man, more or less?” he inquired, the inflection of contempt in his words. “There is a good one, an Irishman with red hair, in the jail at

Los Angeles. For even fifteen dollars, probably ten, you can get him for your ship, friend captain."

"I don't know what your damned law in this country is, but I know it ain't goin' to stand between me and my man," the captain declared. "I'll make it fifty dollars to anybody that brings that mutineer back."

Still there were no takers, save the battered-face mate, who hesitated against the threat of Simon's great pistol, rusty though it was as if it had been fished up out of the sea.

"For as much as fifty dollars I will, myself, guarantee that your sailor returns again to your ship," Don Abrahan said. He depreciated the matter almost to nothing by the slight lifting of his brows, the waving of his hand, as if to say that a man must descend to small affairs when in the company of despicable inferiors.

"Hell! he'll be forty miles away before you fellows can turn around!" the captain swore.

"Let him go; it cannot be far," Don Abrahan returned. "There are mountains and deserts to turn a man back when he runs away in this country. I have only to give the word, and your man returns."

"And if you don't give the word?" Captain Welliver asked, looking at him sharply.

"Who knows?" Don Abrahan replied. "My hides blow out to sea and never find their way into your ship. Perhaps your sailor may be carried off by a wind, as well. How is any man to know?"

Don Abrahan seemed to beam kindly on the captain, a brightness in his eyes that was like the reflection of inner laughter. Captain Welliver's anger rose black to his face again, and cooled and fell when he saw the Mexican magistrate unmoved and serene, his face softened by the hidden laughter in his eyes as if his heart were warm within him in the satisfaction of some worthy deed.

"That's why you done it, was it? you damned old humanitarian!" Captain Welliver said.

"It will be time to get to business," said Don Abrahan, glancing up at the sun.

CHAPTER II

THE BENEFACTOR

IT WAS past the turn of day when Don Abraham concluded his business with the Yankee captain and took the road home again, his goods coming after him in the great wagon, his Indian servants tramping beside it. Night would settle long before they could reach the ranch, there was the taste of rain already on the wind; but there would be no halting on the way either for night or rain. When Don Abraham left an order behind him, men must forego all that was their right and their desire to carry it out to the final word.

As for Don Abraham himself, he rode in excellent spirits, already half-way to his hacienda, or estate, at least that part of it where his homestead lay. The estate itself would have required a day's journey to cross at its greatest width, although it did not extend so far as this toward the sea.

A matter of six or seven miles north of the pueblo of Los Angeles, Don Abraham's ranch buildings lay snugly against the hills. Although much of his secular and political interest centered in the town, there was more that was dearer to him, ambitious man that he was, which he loved to sequester and nurture in the quietude of the hills.

A few miles ahead of him as he rode, the pueblo

of Los Angeles lay, a dot of whitened walls and greenery of trees in the great plain spread between mountains and sea. Don Abraham's most direct way home passed to the westward of the town. A matter of business, incidental in his life of large affairs, but one that gave him satisfaction to contemplate, far out of proportion to its importance, called him to deflect from the direct road and visit the alcalde, or mayor, of the place.

There was certain information to be placed before this official, a certain request appended to it. As he pondered this thing, riding lightly as a cushion, that quickening of laughter, which yet was not laughter, but more a reflection of inward satisfaction, as the comfort of a fire is suggested but not felt by one who watches from without its dancing glimmer upon the walls; that quickening of light grew again in his eyes, spreading to his face, softening it with a kindly gleam. It is a trait of some men to appear benevolent only when satisfied.

Between the harbor and the pueblo, a distance of twenty-five miles, there were few habitations, two or three large estates holding jurisdiction over that immense sweep of land. Such houses as there were by the roadside were only the huts and small adobe dwellings of the servitors on these estates. Freedom from imperial Spain had not meant freedom for all men, any more than it had assured equality.

Grazing lands these were, mainly through which Don Abraham rode that day, patched by small culti-

vated areas, widely scattered, where grain was grown in its season, where orchards and vineyards were green in their time. Just ahead of him, a little way from the point where the highway branched to the pueblo, a homestead of considerable pretensions had been established many years. Here olive trees had been planted by the roadside. They had grown until their branches almost met above the narrow highway, speaking eloquently to one familiar with their slow increase, of the age of that hacienda. Such a man would have known, passing that way for the first time, that the hands that planted the olives had gone back to the dust long ago, as well as Don Abrahan was cognizant of that fact as he entered the aisle of gray-green sentinels.

As he rode between the olives, Don Abrahan quickened his pace, his head lifted alertly. It seemed that he would not be under the necessity of visiting the pueblo, after all. At the farther end of the avenue a man was plodding, that moment passing from the shadow of the olives into the sun. From the white trousers that he wore, from the light color of his uncovered hair, Don Abrahan knew him for the sailor who had deserted the Yankee captain's ship, with his own crafty assistance, only a few hours past.

It was a lucky thing that the sailor was such a poor traveler on land. A peon would have been in the pueblo long enough to have made himself drunk three hours ago. It was well, indeed, that

the fellow had not yet come to the junction of the road, where the trend of traffic as marked in the soil would have told him on which hand the pueblo lay. The lucky circumstance saved Don Abrahan five or six miles; very likely, almost certainly, it saved him something more. What that additional gain to him might be, one who did not know Don Abrahan never could have read from the humane softening of his rather bony, harsh face. But it was sufficient in its hour to make Don Abrahan smile.

“It is you, then, my bold marinero?” said Don Abrahan, as the sailor drew aside to let the rider pass, scarcely lifting his head to mark who it was that came after him. It was certain that he had little fear of any of his mates pursuing him in that fashion.

The sailor’s eyes spoke the gratitude of his heart ahead of his tongue for the magistrate’s interference in his behalf that morning. He stopped, his brown-weathered face illumined by a smile.

“I’m grateful to you for stepping between me and that ruffian’s pistol,” the sailor said. “He’d have killed me if it hadn’t been for you.”

“It is nothing,” Don Abrahan disclaimed, waving his gratitude away.

“It may be a little thing to you, sir, but life means a great deal to me,” the sailor protested earnestly.

“Yes, you scarcely have taken hold of it yet. At your age a man has only one hand on the ladder,

it might be said. Would you be going to the north?"

"To the pueblo Los Angeles. Is it far?"

"A matter of six miles. Would you have friends there?"

"Neither there nor in all of California. But it seems a land of kind strangers."

Again the smile, frank, winsome, flashed like a sudden light, Don Abrahan thought, and passed on as quickly, leaving the dark face with a fixed sadness that seemed a settled melancholy.

"Perhaps we are a kinder people, we Mexicans, than we are given credit for in your country," Don Abrahan said.

Even as he spoke he was weighing the sailor, marking his light bone structure, his small feet and hands, the evident hardness of his muscles, the promise of endurance in his deep chest. Not a common man, Don Abrahan, who had been among the Yankees even in their own Boston, recognized at a glance.

"Still it was not misfortune that made a sailor of you," he ventured, speaking what had come into his thought.

"Misfortune enough to be cursed by a romantic hunger for adventure that drove me to ship with that beast, Welliver," the sailor answered in bitter contempt for his own weakness.

"It is to be regretted that you lose your pay, as Captain Welliver assures me you will, by leaving the ship this way," Don Abrahan said, his voice

finely modulated with regret, as only one of Spanish blood can seem to sympathize while the heart is as indifferent as wood. "How long were you on board of that vessel?"

"Fourteen months," said the sailor, speaking it with a heavy sigh that was at once relief for his redemption to freedom and marvel that man could, unbroken, endure oppression for so long.

"It is considerable money to lose. Have you any in your pocket?"

"Very little. But enough to keep me till I can find something to do — or I hope so, at least."

Don Abraham rode on slowly, accommodating his pace to that of the man on foot, who went a bit lamely on account of his salt-hardened shoes having dried, and shrunk until they were unyielding as sheet-iron. Still, he could endure the galling of the leather better, he knew, than venture on the road in his bare feet, for the wheel-tracks were strewn with crushed cacti which grew close by and obtruded into the road. There were many prickly weeds, and broken bits of branches from thorny shrubs, besides, strewing the highway.

The sailor trudged on beside the man whom he regarded as his benefactor and friend. If Don Abraham could have known that this man from the sea even yielded him the concession of social equality, as a just due for his humane interference, it is a question whether he would have been moved to laugh or sneer.

"So you would go to Los Angeles, even without

a hat, and on foot," said Don Abrahan. "Only peones, servants of the so low class, go on foot in this part of California. They will think it strange to see an American brought to this level. In the pueblo the alcalde, I have no doubt, will put you in jail at once."

"I've been told there are some Americans in business at Los Angeles," the sailor said, plainly disturbed by the prospect Don Abrahan had revealed. He looked up almost appealingly as he trotted beside the horseman, who had quickened his gait as if impatient to be on his way.

"There are a few American-born men in business there, Mexican citizens now. The others are such as can drive eight mules to a freight wagon. Can you drive eight mules at one time?"

"No-o," doubtfully, "I don't believe I could."

"You cannot speak Spanish, you have little money, no hat to cover your head. Well, I tell you plainly, there will be no door open to you in the pueblo but the jail. You are an educated man; you have been to college, no doubt?"

"Not much to my credit in my present condition," the sailor said.

"But an educated man suffers more acutely than a peon, whose lot is suffering between the cradle and the tomb. I myself have been in one of your New England colleges. I know the pride of the Yankee heart. I would not go to the pueblo, young man. A wiser course would be to continue on with me to my ranch. There I can employ you, there

you can learn the *idioma española*, the speech of the country. After that——”

Don Abraham finished it with a flourish of the hand, a lifting of the brows. After that, it was to say, as Dios might fashion, or a man's own merit might place him. The sailor brightened with the offer; it seemed a hand stretched out again in the moment of his need.

“I'll be glad to go; thank you for the opportunity, sir.”

The sailor stopped, as if to give weight to his expression of gratitude with all the physical as well as mental force of his glowing young body. His face was bright with his engaging smile. Don Abraham halted beside him.

“There would be no liberty for you in any other place,” Don Abraham said. “The captain of your ship has offered a reward of fifty dollars for your return to him, here or at San Diego, where he intends to stop next. That would be a great temptation to the alcalde of the pueblo; it would be riches to many an Indian. It represents the price of ten beeves, almost riches to any man in these penurious days.”

“It's lucky for me that I fell in with you, sir, before I got to town. I didn't suppose Welliver would consider any man on earth worth fifty dollars to him. It is the anticipation of the cruelties he'd subject me to, cruelties beyond your humane understanding, that leads to an offer like that.”

“Captain Welliver is a hard-souled man, and a

dishonest one besides," Don Abrahan said, starting on his way again. "Shall we travel on?"

"I don't suppose you'll want to ride as slowly as I must tramp, but if you'll give me directions I'll follow you on to your ranch as fast as I can."

The sailor was plainly concerned by the information Don Abrahan had imparted. He looked back along the road as if in expectation of fleet Indians upon his track, the thought of what waited him on board the ship in the event of his capture drawing the blood out of his face.

"Take my stirrup," Don Abrahan instructed; "it will give you another pair of feet. You must travel with me. News passes quickly in this country; it may be known, I have no doubt that it is known, in the pueblo that you are on the way."

The young man accepted the offer. It was as Don Abrahan had said; holding by the stirrup gave him another pair of feet. In that fashion, like a feudal lord and bondman, they continued their way toward the distant ranch.

Don Abrahan looked down from time to time to see how the sailor bore the pace he set. It appeared to give him satisfaction to note that no indication of fatigue was apparent in the alert figure, no lagging in the long swing of the sea-toughened limbs. Perhaps it was the admiration of one good man for another that stood in the magistrate's eyes, or perhaps it was another thing. The pleasure in them was unmistakable, at any rate, honest or calculative as it may have been.

“What is the name you want to be called by in this country?” Don Abrahan inquired.

“There is no reason why I should change the only one I ever had for this or any other country,” the sailor replied, trotting easily with hand on the big leather-covered stirrup. “I was Gabriel Henderson aboard the ship; I am Gabriel Henderson here.”

“Gabriel; that is a good name for a Spanish-speaking country; they will have no trouble with it here. And mine is Don Abrahan Cruz y Garvanza. It is a name not unknown to California, perhaps other places as well.”

“I am certain it stands for honor and humanity wherever it is known,” Gabriel Henderson generously declared.

This part of the highway was more frequented than that portion lying between the pueblo and the harbor. The travelers met numerous people, from caballeros of Don Abrahan's class, who saluted him gravely, and managed their curiosity so well as to seem to overlook the sailor completely, to Mexican citizens of a somewhat lower order, farmers and drovers, who were not so respectful in their bearing to the magistrate. Some of them, indeed, passed stiff-necked and silent, not even turning their eyes. It seemed there must be some difference abroad in the land among men, the sailor thought, marking all that he met upon the road with shrewder insight, perhaps, than his conductor gave him credit for having.

There were still others lower in the social order than the independent small drovers, servile people, who almost cringed to Don Abraham, who rode on with eyes fixed ahead of him, ignoring them quite. Yet not one of these people passed who did not roll wondering eyes at the man who ran in the road beside the magistrate's horse like a captive, marking his foreign appearance, his incongruous strangeness in that land.

Indian and Mexican, the mongrel and mixed of both races, searched the sailor with swift, keen eyes. Now and again in a glance of these sharp, inquiring eyes, Henderson felt something that seemed to speak to him, something more than curiosity, more than wonder. More than once he seemed almost to grasp the meaning of this strange scrutiny, yet it was so fleeting, so elusive, as to escape like water in the hand. Once, in the eyes of a young Mexican woman who rode behind her husband on a sweat-drenched horse, he felt that the look was pitying.

CHAPTER III

THE PEON

ONE approached the seat of Don Abrahan's vast estate through a lane of olive trees when arriving from the south, as the master of the place and his strange companion came. These olives had been set by Don Abrahan's father, who had in mind the ancient Spanish saying when he made straight the two long rows of little trees:

“A man plants a vine for his son, an olive for his grandson.”

Even so, with this slow maturing to the stage of fruitfulness of the olive, the trees which the patriarch had planted were now great and tall. Perhaps they had increased, in that beneficent clime and strong soil, out of a man's knowledge and calculation, compared with the trees of the Iberian slopes; or perhaps the allotment of their years of building had been fulfilled, indicating that Don Abrahan was approaching the bourne of a man's numbered days. Fruit swayed their branches heavily, promise of a profitable gathering; their laden branches sometimes touched the peak of Don Abrahan's tall sombrero as he rode under them.

Don Abrahan's homestead seemed a village set against the foot of the hill that rose high before it. Many corrals and sheds flanked the outlying build-

ings, many small adobe huts, straw-covered, squat, unlovely, clustered on the slope below the master's house. Great encinas, or live-oak trees, stretched knotted branches over these poor cottages, lending a certain air of protection and security, even peace.

Children playing about the doors of these mud huts stood in respectful attention as Don Abrahan rode by. If they were curious of the strange man who walked beside his stirrup, they submerged their feelings under a show of respectful deference, a trait of those gentle brown people, old and young, which seems to invest them with a dignity and superiority sadly wanting in so many of our own.

Don Abrahan's dwelling stood on the first bench of the hill, elevated perhaps fifty feet above the vast plain through which the travelers had passed. It was a low, simple house, large in its ground plan, built, like the more humble dwellings which lay in the shadow of its comparative grandeur, of sun-baked bricks bound by chopped straw. It was roofed with dull-red tile, for the tile-makers had brought their art early to California and pursued it with success.

Don Abrahan's father built the house, after the Spanish fashion, a patio between its protecting wing-walls. It was a house with few windows and many doors, the Spaniard being the sort of man who does not desire either to look from his own privacy into the doings of others, or to have others peer through many casements upon his own. But a house with many doors, there again a trait of the

Spaniard appearing. There are exigencies in every gentleman's life when a door in every room becomes an expedient and convenient thing. This is doubly true when one's house stands all upon the ground, and the mere flinging open of a door introduces the world spread ready to his feet.

Pepper trees lifted their taller, greener branches among the somber encinas which sequestered the house so completely as to show but glimpses of brown wall and red roof to the eyes of those who passed upon the highway that wound on from that point through a pass in the hills, to Buena Ventura and the north. A pepper tree of immense girth, one of the first slips, it was said, brought by the Franciscans from Peru, grew in the patio of Don Abraham's house, a beautiful and notable tree. But there were no shrubs, no flowers, to fill and brighten the open spaces between the trees of the spacious grounds. Beneath them the brown earth was as bare and smooth as if painstaking hands swept away every fallen leaf.

"So we arrive home," said Don Abraham.

He looked down at the sailor, who had let go his supporting hold of the stirrup and was surveying with pleasurable surprise the scene of peaceful security. That wakening of something in his eyes which seemed the reflection of an inner smile animated for a moment the magistrate's thin and narrow face.

"You travel well; there is great endurance in your body," he said.

"The sea hardens a man's body, but I can't say as much for his feet," Henderson returned, looking ruefully at his worn shoes.

"Tomorrow will see you restored," Don Abraham assured him, kindly enough for a man on a horse to a man in the road, it seemed to Henderson at that time. "I will take you to Felipe Guiterrez, my mayordomo, that is to say my steward, who will relieve your present needs and provide for your future, at least such of it as lies just beyond our shadows."

This Felipe Guiterrez, called Don Felipe by those immediately under his hand, came hurrying forward across the courtyard as his patron rode in, the sailor going somewhat lamely by his side. Don Felipe emerged from a long adobe shed-like building, which appeared to be a warehouse for storing the products of the ranch, judging by such of its contents as were discovered to the eye. Hay was there, and sacks of grain; hides of sheep and cattle; wood piled in high ranks. The mayordomo's office was in one end of this building. He came out of it bareheaded, leaving the door open, showing its smoky interior like the secret of a man's life surprised out of his keeping.

Don Felipe was a slight, short man, pale of face as if he kept himself hidden from the sun. His hair was almost blue in its intense blackness; small raised blotches, black with extraordinary growth of close-shaved beard, roughened his countenance, giving his face the appearance of carrying barna-

cles which needed scraping to clear him for more comfortable sailing among men. He held his patron's stirrup with servile diminution of his own importance, an office quite ignored by the lofty Don Abrahan, who spoke to him in slow, precise English, as if for the ears of one to whom the tongue was strange.

"This is Gabriel Henderson, deserter from the Yankee ship at San Pedro. There is a reward of fifty dollars, gold, offered for his return. I have given him sanctuary; he is under my protection. Feed him, give him a place to sleep."

"It shall be done, Don Abrahan," the mayor-domo replied.

With that assurance, for which he seemed to be waiting, Don Abrahan dismounted, turned his back on them without more words, and walked off to his own refreshment.

Don Felipe clapped his hands as if applauding his patron's exit from the scene, a proceeding seen and heard by Henderson with astonishment. This feeling quickly passed to a better one of amusement when a Mexican youth appeared from among the piles of hides in the warehouse, all eagerness to relieve Don Felipe of the horse.

Don Felipe was master of more English than his patron's manner toward him would lead one to believe. It was rather abrupt, somewhat fragmentary, with misplaced tenses and a strong seasoning of profanity, yet it served very well. It was plainly that sort of English a foreigner would ac-

quire by contact with traders and "such as drive eight mules."

There seemed to be magic in the clapping of the mayordomo's hands which produced surprising results. He clapped a second Mexican youth out of somewhere, who departed on the run, to return in incredibly short time and deliver a panted, quick-spoken communication at the mayordomo's door.

Don Felipe turned Henderson over to this boy, who conducted him to the kitchen of the mansion, where an Indian woman who came and went as silently as a shadow served him a satisfying meal of cold meat and vegetables, bread, claret, and cheese.

The sun had set; the dusk, which settles almost immediately thereafter in southern California winter days, was softening the scars and canyons of the hills when Henderson rose from this cheering repast and thanked the slim, dark woman who had served his needs. She smiled, understanding the spirit of it if not the words. The youth, who had waited outside the door meanwhile, rose now and guided Henderson to the adventure that closed that day.

This was nothing more thrilling than the disclosure of the sleeping quarters the mayordomo had ordered prepared for the stranger while he refreshed himself in the kitchen. A bed had been spread for him on a generous heap of hay in a little room behind the mayordomo's office. This appeared to be a room given over to the carriage

harness of Don Abraham's coach horses. The walls were hung with the expensive gear; the smell of neat's-foot oil was heavy. Yet, compared to the forecastle smell when the wet boots and clothing of twenty sailors hung there, this was balsam in Henderson's nostrils. Footsore and fatigued, thankful for this haven that had opened to him out of the uncertainty of the morning, the sailor threw himself upon his pallet of hay and slept.

Henderson woke suddenly, according to his sea habit, after he had slept the period of what would have been his watch below. He sat up in palpitating bewilderment, not able for a moment to adjust his senses to his situation, expecting the hail down the forecastle hatch summoning his watch on deck.

There was the soft whisper of rain on the thatch, a movement of men in the courtyard. By the light of lanterns Henderson saw the muddy freight wagon, just arrived from its long journey from the harbor. It was covered over by a tarpaulin; they left it there, the mules jangling off to their stables with weary heads drooping in the rain.

The sailor sighed, stretching himself in the relaxation of confidence and security on a bed that seemed softer than any that ever had blessed his tired bones. He was comfortable in the sanctuary that Don Abraham had given him, thankful that no summons sounded on the deck overhead, hailing him out into the stormy night.

Early as Henderson left his bed next morning, Don Felipe was ahead of him in the business of

the day. The pale little man was in his office, although it was scarcely dawn, a candle at his hand, a paper under his eye. Henderson saw that this appeared to be a list, such as a manifest or bill of lading. He concluded, rightly, as events proved, that it was the account of articles in the freight wagon. He wondered where he was to fit in the strange and foreign scene into which adventure had transported him as he stood in the door waiting to catch Don Felipe's eye and give him good morning.

As if in answer to this speculation, Don Felipe beckoned him in, without word, without glance, his attention still fixed on the list. He produced a small book from the shadows behind the wavering candle, which he laid on the edge of his desk, turning then to Henderson with cold and distant mien.

"This book you will take and put in your pocket," he directed, in slow, studied correctness of speech that seemed a reflection of Don Abraham's own to the mayordomo on the day before.

Henderson took up the little volume, on the cover of which he read:

Diccionario Español-Ingles, Ingles-Español.

"You will assist in the store. There will be many to tell you what such and such a thing is called in Spanish. This little book will show you how the word is spelled. In that way you will learn fast the *idoma española*, of the great value and elevation to any man."

The mayordomo then directed Henderson to hasten to the kitchen where he had received his supper the evening before, get his breakfast and report back for duty.

It was a dun, melancholy morning. The lissom branches of the pepper trees drooped under the weight of clinging rain like weeping willow, the pleasant scent of their red berries strong in the moist air. The oaks showered sudden shakings of accumulated rain upon him as he passed under their far-spread, age-gray limbs.

The hills, which had stood forth with shrub and crumbling ledge, tawny brown blotch of barrenness, soft green of fresh leaf, bright quickening of winter flowers, in the sunlight of yesterday evening, were now hidden almost entirely in low-dragging clouds. Only the base of them could be seen, dark, drenched, forbidding, where the cloud-line reached, purred and dipped into canyon, swathed headland, changing the cheerful hacienda of yesterday into a sad and gloomy place. It seemed a lonely and unfriendly land.

Several men were at breakfast in the kitchen, among them Simon, the teamster, all of whom, with the exception of Simon alone, seemed to Henderson borne down by some trouble or tragedy that had left a cloud upon their spirits. They greeted the stranger kindly, Simon himself making room for him at his side with an air of protectorship that had a bit of haughty condescension about it. Henderson soon found that the teamster's design, and

apparently sole design, in this was to air his knowledge of the English tongue.

He began to exercise this accomplishment upon the American with a volubility that was rather embarrassing, considering that expletives such as a mule-driver generally addresses to his animals formed the greater part of Simon's vocabulary. These he delivered with force and due regard for expression, coupling them up with words here and there that made a slender chain of sense which Henderson could, with great difficulty and nimble mental leaping, follow along its lurid course.

Henderson hurried through breakfast, uncomfortable under the fire of Simon's learning, anxious to get out of its range. He excused himself on the plea that the mayordomo was expecting him. He managed to gather from Simon's remarks that this was a bad precedent to establish, this concern for duty, this precipitate haste to rush away and work. It was a thing that would make a great amount of sadness in a man's lot. One fast mule in a team of slow ones, said the sage, was no end of distress, for its master, its mates, and itself. Simon was saying more as Henderson left the room, the gentle, silent Indian woman turning her head in slow gracefulness to watch him out of the door.

The nimbleness of the sea was in the sailor's legs, for the sea will purge young joints of their slothfulness as it will purify old ones of their ills. The pace that he set for those dreamy, sun-nur-

tured Indians and Mexicans in unloading the freight wagon was a thing that overturned the traditions of their lives.

Man was born but to traverse his way to the tomb. The dullest of them understood that fact as well as the most learned philosopher or theologian that ever wrote a book. Why should he hasten on his way, bringing the end quicker in the bitterness of unnecessary toil? Dark were the glances that followed the American in his bounding haste; deep the scowls that fixed upon their brows. If Don Abrahan should come, and see that foolish, hastening man, what exactions might he lay upon their shoulders in this revelation of the human capacity for work? Terrible thought! sorrowful, miserable thought!

Don Abrahan came. He stood under the eaves of the thatch smoking his cigar, watching this monkey of a Yankee, whose employment in the past had been clambering up high masts under the lash of the brutal task-master whose tyranny he had fled. Don Abrahan was seen to smile.

They remembered that day on Don Abrahan's ranch long after the American sailor had remedied his fortunes and mounted to his place; they judged him in the light of subsequent events by the bitterness he planted in them those first fevered hours of his service there. Not alone that day, but many days that came after, when the sailor was the quickening force of their sluggish endeavors.

When they worked at piling hides in the store-

house, the sailor set the pace which Don Felipe and Don Abraham expected the slowest, the oldest, of them to match. Instead of one hide, which was burden enough for any man, God stand as the judge, this sailor carried two, hoisting them to his head, which he covered by a cap of sheepskin to protect the small brain within it, and went off blithely as a man at a ball.

So it was in other labors; in bringing wood from the plain, where Don Abraham was clearing a great field, in all the fetching and taking about the place. Simon was disturbed by the haste this Yankee made among their hitherto untroubled ways; he complained that a man could no more than smoke one cigarette between the arrival and the unloading of the wagon. Almost at once he would have to turn around and go after more. It was a *molesta*, it was a trouble, it was a thing to damn by all the Yankee gods, which were not true, Catholic gods, to be certain, and useful only for damning worthless men and obstinate mules.

Six weeks of this activity passed; winter rains gave way, blending out almost imperceptibly into the blue of untroubled summer days. Henderson knew that the ship had gone its way homeward long since; the danger that had kept him close within Don Abraham's sanctuary was past. He felt that he might now look around a little, and see what this strange, this white-green, this beautiful, somnolent, lazy land contained.

All this time Henderson had seen nothing of

the life or members of Don Abraham's family. His duties had confined him to the back of the house; who inhabited the front of it, he did not know. His command of the Spanish language was limited to a few hundred words, most of which stood alone with no connecting web. If any of those among whom he lived and spent his active days had been disposed to tell him of the greatness of Don Abraham's house, he could not have understood. Only that there was a son, coming home on a ship from Mexico, expected in the harbor almost any day. Simon had told him this. Simon was going with Don Abraham in a day or two, with horses, to bring the young man home.

Henderson had not been beyond Don Abraham's possessions since his arrival at the ranch. The magistrate had warned him, Don Felipe had stressed the warning, that it meant either delivery to the captain of the ship or jail if he stepped out of their protection.

Now the ship was gone; Simon had been at the harbor twice since its sailing, the danger, the incentive for his capture, was past. Surely the alcalde of the pueblo would not arrest and lodge in his jail a man with money to pay his way, and a willingness in him to work. Money he would have when Don Abraham settled with him for his six weeks' work; a good reputation he would carry away with him, he felt assured. Don Abraham always spoke kindly to him, calling him son. So

thinking, he went to Don Felipe and requested an accounting.

Don Felipe received him coldly. That was something he knew nothing about; whatever arrangement stood between Henderson and Don Abraham was their arrangement; Don Felipe had not been a party to its making. But no; he must not seek Don Abraham in the mansion. Peones were not permitted to enter the mansion, save only the kitchen door.

Henderson started at the word, flushing with indignation.

“I’m not any man’s peon,” he denied.

“We speak of laborers so,” said Don Felipe, with stern correction. “It is not the same in this country as where you came from. Men are not equals here. If you want to speak to Don Abraham, he is there. Take off your hat when you approach him.”

CHAPTER IV

OF ONE WHO RAN AWAY

DON ABRAHAN had entered the courtyard as Don Felipe spoke. He was smoking his evening cigar, walking meditatively, yet with an eye to what had been put into the storehouse in the way of hides that day. Henderson approached him without formality, servility being the farthest thing from his bearing. Without preliminaries he placed his request for a settlement before Don Abrahan, respectfully, yet boldly, as a man confident in his rights.

“So you would leave me?” said Don Abrahan, after a little silence, looking up slowly from his meditative pose. “Is gratitude so short in your memory?”

Henderson protested that ingratitude was a stranger to him; that he had labored to prove, by every hour of his employment there, that he was glad to bear the hardest burdens, labor the longest hours, out of no other consideration than gratitude for a favor past.

“I couldn’t be more grateful to you than I am this moment, Don Abrahan. It isn’t that I’m not appreciative of your help, only that I don’t want to remain a laborer all my life. I want to take a look around this country and see if it holds any

chance. If not, then I'll manage to return to my own."

"It is very well, I have no objection," Don Abraham said, but coldly, with a distant withdrawing. "If you are prepared to make settlement with me in full, you are free to go your way."

"Settlement? in full?" Henderson repeated the words in uncomprehending amazement.

"Surely. There was fifty dollars that you owed me from the beginning," Don Abraham calmly claimed.

"Fifty dollars that I owed you? Is that the way you make a joke in this country, Don Abraham?"

"There was fifty dollars offered for your return to the ship. When I protected you I lost that sum. I had only to deliver you—is it not so?"

"It is a strange stand for a man of your consequence to take, Don Abraham," Henderson said, profoundly disappointed, saddened not a little by this revelation of the patron's crafty narrowness. "But let that go; grant that I did owe you fifty dollars on that account. I have paid it, and more."

Henderson's anger was slow to rise. That fact alone had saved him many a blow under Captain Welliver's calloused mate, spared him the responsibility for Captain Welliver's life that day he laid him low with the broken oar. He had not struck so much in anger as in defense. If he had allowed his just wrath to expend itself on the captain that day, he would have been branded this

hour with a name more detestable, more terrible, than that of debtor servant whose situation was that of a slave.

“To be added to that, twenty-five dollars for clothing furnished in your naked state when you arrived,” Don Abrahan continued, overlooking Henderson’s protest as if he had not heard.

“I’ve had two shirts, a pair of jeans trousers and a pair of Boston brogans. The whole outfit wasn’t worth more than five dollars.”

“You must consider the transportation, the freight,” said Don Abrahan mildly, advancing the excuse for extortion which became general among the commercial pirates of California of a later day.

Henderson had believed the ship’s slop-chest incomparable for high prices anywhere on the globe. Captain Welliver had been willing to trade on a profit of two hundred per cent.; Don Abrahan, benevolent gentleman, must have five hundred. Henderson saw that the longer he remained on that plantation the deeper he would be in debt. It seemed a marvel to him that Don Abrahan had not taken the thirty dollars which he carried with him when he deserted ship, and charged that up against him also.

“How much do you figure I’m in debt to you as we stand?” he inquired.

“It amounted to seventy-five dollars at the beginning. You have been here two months?”

“A little more than a month and a half.”

“You can see then how the account will stand.

Seventy-five dollars, at five dollars a month, will require fifteen months to pay."

"Five dollars a month! I'll not work for any man for five dollars a month, Don Abrahan!"

"That is the highest wages I pay to any peon on my ranch," Don Abrahan said loftily. "You can see how the matter stands."

"You didn't say what wages you paid, what you were going to pay me," Henderson protested, knowing as he spoke that his position was weak; that he had been foolish to go into the service of this man without a definite agreement from the beginning.

"You did not ask me, Gabriel, my son."

"I guess I'll have to owe you for a while, then," Henderson said, determination in his manner. "According to the value I put on my services, I've paid you the fifty dollars you charged me for helping me get away from the ship. That's all right; it was worth that to me, and a great deal more. I'll find something to do at better pay and send you the rest of it as soon as I can."

"It is impossible to permit you to desert me in this way," Don Abrahan said, gently enough, even a tinge of sorrowful regret in his soft tone for being under the necessity of taking this apparently unfriendly stand. Yet he was coldly firm beneath his suavity; merciless, inflexible. The threat that lay behind his manner caused Henderson's heart to grow cold in a foreboding of trouble.

"I give you my word that you'll be paid, even

though I consider your claim unjust and exorbitant," Henderson declared.

"What security have you to leave behind?" Don Abrahan inquired, with cynical humor. A smile glimmered in his slow dark eyes, twitched in his beard, died away slowly, leaving his thin face harsh and severe.

"Nothing but my word," Henderson returned, meeting him eye to eye.

Don Abrahan lifted his shoulders, tilted his chin, raising his well-groomed beard. It was a slight movement, yet expressive in its discount of the proffered security.

"The body and services of the debtor are a man's security in this country, my son," he said.

"You mean you'll not let me go—that you'll hold me here, a slave, till this contrived, preposterous debt to you is paid?"

"It is the law."

Don Abrahan seemed to disclaim all responsibility in the manner of his reply, laying it all upon the law. What was a creditor, he seemed to ask, in the invincible machinery of the law, but a creature to do its bidding?

"You may be able to make slaves of these poor Indians and Mexicans under that law, but I'm no man's slave, I'm free to come and go. Your law cannot be applied to an American citizen, Don Abrahan."

Don Abrahan beamed on the defiant young man kindly. Benevolence seemed to sit in his soft

dark eyes, to lurk in his fine gray beard. A little while he stood thus regarding the rebellious servant, his cigar held in his fingers daintily on a level with his mouth.

“You have much to learn,” he said at last.

So speaking, he turned and sauntered away, following, it seemed, his train of meditation with serene and unruffled mind.

Henderson felt the hot blood of resentment in his face as he stood looking after the benevolent tyrant, hotter words checked on his tongue. He realized that this was not a time for further words; that for Don Abraham the question was settled, not to be opened again. The man's carriage said as much as he walked on his slow, meditative way.

Henderson's contempt for this law that made a man's body the security for his debts was mounting with his determination to defy Don Abraham, the country and its institutions of slavery, by deserting the ranch that night. He was not ready to accept Don Abraham's word for it that the law would bind a citizen of another country in slavery. There would be some American at Monterey, where he had heard there was even a United States consul, who could inform him of his rights in this feudal land.

The mayordomo stood outside his office door as Henderson turned back in that direction. It was as if he waited for Henderson to be passed on to him from his patron's hands, like a tennis ball.

He stood so, his small hands on his hips, a despicable sycophant, Henderson believed, in his place of authority over men and women who were little better than slaves. Henderson would have passed without speaking, but Don Felipe raised a hand to halt him.

“You have had your accounting, you understand Don Abrahan?” he asked.

“I understand him perfectly,” Henderson replied, his indignation over the imposition that had been put upon him still outweighing all other concern.

“You think you will run away from this debt and cheat Don Abrahan,” the mayordomo said, squaring himself around to stand directly in front of Henderson, as if to block this treasonable intention with his own body. “That is a thought of foolishness. Look!”

Don Felipe laid hold of Henderson’s arm, turning him to face the hills at the foot of which the ranch buildings stood. Mangy, shaggy, harsh and forbidding as these hills, almost mountainous in height, appeared in the glare of day, they now seemed softened and subdued, friendly and secure, in the chastening twilight. There was a dying flush upon the sky, repeated faintly in the canyons where the mists were gathering; the gray of crumbling ledge, the brown blotches of barren soil, soothed out and blended in harmonious beauty with sage and greasewood, the dark green of chaparral and holly. Sharply the line of the hills stood against

the sky, as if the world ended there, as if nothing lay beyond.

“Look!” Don Felipe repeated, pointing to the hills. “And here again, look!” Don Felipe pointed to the east. “Mountains stand behind these hills, growing up into the clouds. And in the east here, there is a desert when a man goes over the mountains. There is no water there but the dew of night, no blade of grass for it to fall upon. Hundreds of miles, this desert, and when a man is done with that, mountains again, more terrible than any in all the world. But no man lives to pass that desert. Man dies there, he swells big, he bursts like a gun. No, there is no way to leave this land, only by the sea. There is death in many ways for the man who runs before the law in this country. Quick goes the word, a thousand hands are ready when he passes. Oh, yes. A man who runs before the law in this country is shot down like a wolf.”

“I suppose that might happen to him,” Henderson admitted, cooled considerably, his naturally diplomatic disposition and good sense asserting. “I wouldn’t try it; I’m not going to run before the law. Well, a man would have to have something to run for, in the first place.”

“If a man steals sheep,” said Don Felipe, his eyes still on the hills, “or kills a man, or owes his patron money, a man sometimes runs away.”

“If I stole sheep or killed a man, I might run away,” Henderson granted, soberly enough. “But

not because I owed my patron money. That would be a scoundrelly sort of trick."

"How much more sensible for a man who owes his patron money to stay in the reach of his arm," said Don Felipe, with unctuous, persuasive argument. "Only a fool runs away."

"That's what I think about it," Henderson agreed.

He had come around, in the past few minutes, to a decision on a more diplomatic course. He saw at once the obstacles that would present in the way of an escaping debtor; he realized that Don Felipe was not boasting when he said the word went abroad quickly, that a thousand hands would be ready to pull him down. How much more eager these hands would be to snatch at a foreigner, one of a nation for which there was already much jealousy, suspicion and hate.

"Still, you considered running away only a little minute ago," Don Felipe charged.

"It was only because I forgot for the moment how much I really owe the good patron," Henderson replied contritely, by way of confession. "He saved my life the day I deserted ship, the captain would have shot me if he hadn't stepped in front of his pistol and made him put it away. If I owed him money only, Don Felipe, I would run away. But when a man owes another his life he does not run away and forget—if he is a man."

Don Felipe was *caballero*, gentleman, in spite of

his subordinate position in Don Abraham's service. His fortunes were in eclipse, his father having been ruined by his loyalty to Spain during the Mexican revolt for freedom, and banished the country, his vast possessions confiscated. Don Felipe, his only son, a stripling then, had taken up the cause of freedom, but had not been well received on account of his hidalgo extraction. Yet he was free to remain in California, the land of his birth, and lay the foundation of a new fortune if he might.

So Don Felipe swelled a bit on hearing this expression of loyalty to his employer. He offered his hand with an impetuosity that surprised Henderson; his face glowed with pleasure; a glistening as of tears was in his eyes.

"A man that sees the way of honor is my friend!" Don Felipe declared. "What is the misfortune of a day that it should debase one man below another? Nothing! I, also, have had my day of misfortune, Don Gabriel. We are both gentlemen; we can forget our differences in our present situation — for this hour."

It seemed an approach with reservations, an unbending with one hand behind the back. Yet Henderson was vastly surprised by it. It was the first word without a taint of oppression and contempt that Don Felipe had spoken to him since his coming to the ranch. He took the proffered hand, clasped it warmly, not without a feeling of friendship and gratitude for the little man who stood

upon feet smaller than most women's, and was proud of them.

"It will be my pleasure to inform Don Abrahan of your deep sense of gratitude, of your wise decision to remain here. A man with capability may rise to great heights here in Don Abrahan's employment; like an eagle he may sail over the heads of little men."

Don Felipe looked skyward, describing the evolutions of his figurative eagle by a circling sweep of the arm. Those who crossed the courtyard, going slowly through the dusk about the interminable tasks of that place, looked with wonder on Don Felipe fraternizing on terms of equality with the *yanqui*, for whom there was little liking on the ranch.

"A man needs the comfort of a woman in his youth," Don Felipe said. "There is old Cecilia's Liseta, ready for marriage now. Don Abrahan, the good patron, will give her to you, with the house by the pepper tree where Francisco, the what-you-call-him — zapatero — make-shoe, used to live. A little straw to the roof of it, a new goatskin in the window, and there is happiness for any man with a young wife on his knee."

"It's a comfortable picture you make of it, Don Felipe," Henderson said, as gratefully and as cheerfully as he could bring himself to speak. "But a man who is working out a debt isn't in much of a situation to marry."

"His capital doubles when he marries," Don

Felipe declared, warm in his eagerness to bring about the establishment of another family to serve his patron in the working out of never-ending debt. "With a wife to help him, a man soon stands on his feet."

Henderson thought of Liseta, the proposed partner of his sacrificial years. She was about seventeen, a result of that peculiar cross-breeding of Spaniard, Mexican peon and native Indian, to the abasement of all involved. Her dark face was heavy and sullen; there was little promise in her but that of the capability to plentifully reproduce her kind. Liseta herded goats upon the scabbled hills for her mighty patron, working out the debt that had been her inheritance, that would increase with her years and bind her in slavery all her life. Her mother, old Cecilia, was old indeed at little more than forty, sad in her peonage, a vessel worn out by the burdens of men.

"I will speak the word to Don Abraham if you wish," Don Felipe offered.

"I think I can serve my patron better without a wife," Henderson replied, laughing the matter aside as if he considered it but a jest.

"Perhaps there is another in the land you left?" Don Felipe ventured.

He sighed, as if to let it be understood that he was a man who had known his romance, whatever tricks time might have played him since.

"Who knows?" Henderson returned, with as much sentimentality, softness, and longing as he

could compress into his words on such short preparation for an excuse so splendid.

“I will say no more,” said Don Felipe. “Do you go to your repose?”

“I’m going to the stable to see the black stallion; he cut his shoulder on a stake in the corral today. I must put sulphur on the wound to keep the gangrene down.”

Don Felipe went into his office, where his dim candle seemed always burning, yet never burned out. It was never a full candle, never less than half, yet it was going at twilight, glimmering at dawn. How Don Felipe managed it, Henderson could not guess. It seemed to him that the fragmentary candle was emblematic of the little man in some mystical relation, a thing burning palely, not illuminating much of the world, yet doing more, perhaps, in its unremitting effort than many a greater light. It was as if Don Abraham’s dignity and consequence were borne upon the shoulders of this small, subservient man, who had known his own day of misfortune.

Simon, the teamster, lived close by the stable, his adobe hut being somewhat larger, altogether more comfortable and nearer the requirements of a human abode, than those of the other laborers in that feudal village of huts. Simon was a free and independent man, whose wages were twenty dollars a month, it was said, a sum named by the poor peones with distended eyes and low breath. Added to this was the privilege of taking his meals

on work-days at the patron's expense, a privilege that Simon never had been known to forego.

Simon did not owe the patron. He was not obliged to pledge his services, and the services of his unborn, for the chunks of thick, age-yellow salt pork, the cuts of tenuous beef, the pounds of Yankee lard, issued from the great patron's store. Simon's lot was that of a man who could take his wife and children and depart on the day that suited his fancy to go.

Simon was loitering between his house and Don Felipe's office, where he had been dawdling in the aimless, lounging way that a Mexican can pass the time with his cigarette, as Henderson started on his merciful mission to the stable. He joined Henderson when he passed, continuing with him on his way after asking the object of his activities at that hour.

Lately Simon had installed himself as preceptor to Henderson in his struggle with the Spanish tongue. He insisted that the only way a man could learn a language was to use it, in the way that he must handle the lines for himself if he ever expected to drive eight mules. Henderson agreed with him in this contention, although it was a strain on his slender knowledge of the language to keep abreast with the fervid flow of the teamster's speech.

When a doubt rose in Simon's mind he made himself clear with an English word, if he had it; if not, with some expletive that was picturesque on

his tongue where it would have been only coarse on another's. In that way Henderson had made progress amazing to himself, satisfactory to Simon, although the pupil had grave doubt of the elegance that the muleteer boasted as the strong point of his expression in his native tongue.

Simon seemed to have a tender interest in the black stallion's injury, although he was as cruel in his treatment of beasts as the officers of the ship that Henderson had deserted were brutal to their men. Even the mules, unimaginative, indifferent creatures of short memory that they are, cringed and squatted when Simon approached them in their stalls. Now, as Henderson treated the ugly wound in the magnificent stallion's shoulder, Simon stood solicitously by holding the lantern.

"So, that is done," said Simon, putting out the light. "Do you go to your repose?"

"I think not immediately. The moon is so bright it seems like a comrade tonight," Henderson replied in his slow, halting Spanish.

Simon stood a little while looking at the moon, his head thrown back, his long gaunt neck showing a sharp protuberance like a bent elbow.

"It is a good night to talk to the girls," he said, his head still back, the light of the moon in his face.

Simon was a tall and shambling man, long of limb, and thin. He was dressed, as always, in loose trousers and jumper, his inseparable hat with silver filagree work on its pointed crown fixed on his small head. There was not much to

the upper works of Simon; he had little more head than a worm. The most impressive feature in his physiognomy was his mustache, which grew long, with a reddish tinge to its villainous blackness, distinctive mark in an otherwise indistinctive man.

“Yes,” said Simon meditatively, “it is a fine night to talk to the girls.”

He turned from the moon with that, having exhausted its possibilities in mundane affairs as far as he ever had discovered and applied them.

“Yes. And there was a peon who tried to run away from his debt to Don Abrahan about a year ago. I went after that man; I shot a hole in him that the bees could fly through.”

Simon turned away to go to his repose with that word. It was sufficient; he had delivered his message.

CHAPTER V

DON ROBERTO

DON ROBERTO, the magistrate's son, had been two years in Mexico City wearing off his rusticity, taking on the polish of a gentleman. On his arrival home the widespread connections of Don Abraham's house became apparent to the Yankee sailor.

Festivities in celebration of the heir's return extended over a period of two weeks, during which time the friends and relatives of the family arrived from great distances, even by ship from Monterey. Don Abraham's two married daughters came from the region of Capistrano; there was laughter of children under the grave encinas.

Daughters were not accounted very highly, in the houses of California gentry in those times, until married safely and set about the business of increasing the ranks of the dons. Prior to that felicitous event they were held to be rather a liability than an asset. These two ladies, on account of their prolific contribution to the cause of gentility in this respect, were highly esteemed by Don Abraham. Both were married to men of substance. Their arrival in the latest model of Yankee coaches was equal to a royal visitation, with such ceremony of outriding to meet them, such trooping of horse-

men on matters which seemed to begin in nothing and end in dust.

Musicians were quartered in the mansion for the period of the festivities; there was the sound of harp and violin far into the night. Carcasses of beeves were spread on spits over deep channels of coals; white bread, viands of the mighty of that land, were set out each evening when the laborers returned from the fields. It was a season of generosity for those under the hand of Don Abraham, transcending any event of the kind within the recollection of the oldest peon.

On the last day of this celebration Don Abraham feasted his guests on *cabeza de toro*, which is to say bull's head, a dish not unknown to Californians who are descendants of the dons of that period, even in this unromantic day. On this climax of the celebration of Don Roberto's return, four bulls' heads were served, a magnificence of entertainment unequaled, attesting to the love Don Abraham bore for his only son.

The manner of preparing *cabeza de toro* grew out of expediency in the beginning, perhaps; in the end it had become a thing almost reverential, equal to a sacrificial rite. The head was taken, just as separated from the body, horns, hair, ears, eyes, and all, and singed as carefully as might be over a blaze of light brushwood. No water ever touched the head in process of preparation. Water would have been a profanation of ancient customs; perhaps one drop would have spoiled the dish.

When the head was duly singed of such hair as burned readily, the mouth and nostrils were crammed with seasoning that gladdened the palate of the don, in such manner as garlic, strong pepper-pods, spices of the orient, and sage. Thus charged, the dainty thing was put into a large stone oven heaped over with earth, in which a wood fire had burned a long time, heating it to the temperature required.

A stone was set to close this oven, earth was heaped around it to seal it against the loss of one little savory whiff of vapor, and the *cabeza* was left to cook without the further interference of man. Hours afterwards the oven was unsealed, the sweet roast was withdrawn, cooked to such tenderness that the flesh shredded from the bones. Ah! that was a dish for a gentleman of so barbaric magnificence as the Spanish don. *Cabeza de toro!* There is romance in the name.

Henderson bore a curious part in these festivities. His good sense had shown him, on the night of his talk with Don Felipe, that it would be impossible to escape from Don Abraham's tyranny by running away. Simon had been delegated to make this plainer to him than the mayordomo's reasoning. The sailor had done well to pretend that gratitude rose in him and bound his feet in the service of the great patron. Don Felipe had spoken his good word, as he promised; Henderson was restored in Don Abraham's patriarchal regard, at least to all outward appearances.

That this show of gentle patronage was only a form, Henderson was certain, even before the son of the family returned from Mexico. Don Abraham did not like Americans. He held them in contempt as a lower order of humanity, an aggressive, rough-handed order, to be certain. Once Henderson had heard Don Abraham say, the patron not being aware of his ward's progress in the Spanish tongue, that Americans were heavy-stamping ruffians who must be excluded from that pastoral land.

Don Roberto had taken a sort of humorous fancy to the American, as toward some strange, or perhaps fantastic, creature from a distant land. Almost immediately on his arrival he selected Henderson as his personal attendant, elevating him, if advancement this peculiar preferment could be called, from a life of drudgery and long hours in the storehouse and fields to one of comparative luxury and ease.

Henderson was fitted out with a wardrobe that would have gladdened many of his late sailing mates, clothing of no less distinction than off-cast articles of Don Roberto's own. The tailor that Don Roberto kept as part of his personal entourage adjusted these garments to Henderson's body, little alteration being necessary, the young men being almost of exact height and general build. Velvet and silk garments these were, jackets braided in silver and gilt, pantaloons of gray, green, black, and fawn velvet, large at the bottom

to cover the foot in the stirrup, strapped beneath the instep to prevent them crawling up the *caballero's* leg when he rode.

The duty of personal attendant on Don Roberto was not heavy, outside the irksome waiting with the horses while he played the bear beneath some lady's window, or sat with another in company with her mother or *duenna*, or danced the night out on nimble, leaping, tireless legs. Dressed in his fine garments, Henderson made a handsome figure, a servant, indeed, who drew and held longer the glances of many a fair one met upon the road than the master who rode two rods ahead.

Always behind the master the man rode, a distance between them so great there could be no mistaking them for friends and comrades. This distance, in fact, was the one distinguishing mark of their relation in the case of Don Roberto and his man, as has been the case between master and man in other lands before and since that day.

During the two weeks of the festivities Don Roberto had ridden far and near between his home and the ranches of his neighbors, paying his respects to old and young, smirking and bowing, easing himself of the vacuous insincerities which smother the little of genuineness in the polite speech of the Mexican *hijo de familia*. Henderson's duty was to dismount in the courtyard or at the gate where his master visited, receive Don Roberto's reins as he threw them imperiously, without so much as a glance in his varlet's direc-

tion. There he must stand, let it be minutes or hours, hot sun of noonday or chill wind of midnight, until Don Roberto appeared.

Don Roberto did not speak English. He let it be known that the sound of it was distasteful to him, a discordant grinding of coarse consonants not fit for either the ear of God or man. Spanish was the one language worthy the ear of a *caballero*; but since Henderson made such lame going at it, they would speak French between them, seeing that the *yanqui* had been given some of the advantages of gentlemen of more enlightened lands to the extent of tutelage in that next most godly tongue.

The fact that Henderson would have been a gentleman in his own land, counted by his station in society, no other qualification being necessary in Don Roberto's world, gave the young Mexican added pleasure in his attendant. That pleasure came from his power to abase one whom he knew, in the core of such manhood and courage as nature had given him, to be a better man than himself.

Manhood seemed scarcely to have hardened upon Don Roberto yet, although he was a year or two older than Henderson. There was the softness of boyishness in his face, the petulance of adolescence in his lips. Only his eyes seemed mature. These were dark and heavy-lidded, languorously oriental, as his father's were. When he rode, or sat alone in a meditative way that seemed his inheritance, he held his lids half shut; yellowish-

tinted lids, thick, with a velvet softness in their appearance, like the petals of some rank, gross rose. When he talked, especially with women, his eyes were more expressive than his tongue. They dilated and glowed, contracted and glistened; seemed to retreat and to leap, to laugh and draw near, lending a charm of marvelous animation to his face.

The closing day of Don Abraham's celebration had come in a happy climax of *cabeza de toro*, as has been said. At midday the ovens had been opened, the savory bulls' heads withdrawn and served on long tables under the oak trees. The custom of this feast was immutable in this observance. All laws of tradition would have been transgressed in offering the *cabeza de toro* under a roof.

The guests, numbering more than a hundred, counting old and young, gathered at these tables with appetites which seemed to Henderson never satisfied, in spite of the long season of feasting that had gone before, gorging themselves to the very eyes. Large-waisted mamas became dull as sated toads after this last and greatest stuffing event. On the long veranda, supported by flying arches like a cloister of Franciscan friars, they dozed in arm-chairs, their ordinarily sharp vigil over their daughters relaxed.

But their generally tall and lank husbands, vinous of blood, worn down to sinew and hard muscle by continual life in the saddle, were as wide

awake as customarily. They sat at card games under the trees, or talked in close and confidential groups. That day many a match was arranged for sons and daughters among the heads of illustrious families in that land.

There were *mamas* sufficient, not under the lethargy of much bull's head and wine, to keep decorum according to the standards of Spanish tradition among the young men and women. These young ones were dancing in Don Abraham's great, cool hall. Henderson's not altogether enviable office during this diversion was to stand by holding his young master's cape, hat and cigarettes. No other *caballero* had a valet to attend him in such close relation as Roberto. This distinction alone would have been one affording great pleasure to the vain, shallow young man. The fact that Henderson was a foreigner, of a race at once proud and barbarous, added much to the pride and happiness that Don Roberto gathered from his servile estate.

It was the custom of the young gallants, on the completion of a dance, to conduct their partners at once back to the jealous custody of *mamas*, aunts, or other *duennas* who sat severely along the wall. There was no strolling off together, even in the sunlight of day. A girl who would have ventured out of her *duenna's* eyes in company with a man, would have lost her good name forever. Between dances the young men went out to smoke brief, tiny cigarettes, walking up and down the deep

porticoes in the eyes of the palpitating beauties whom they lately had relinquished from their arms in the furious dance.

Henderson's duty was to proceed with respectful dignity, as became a gentleman reduced from his own estate attendant on one whose authority and magnificence he never could hope to equal, throw the bright satin cape around Don Roberto's shoulders, present his flat Spanish hat, proffer his cigarettes with downcast eyes. All this done, according to previous instructions, he took his stand at the door to relieve the young *caballero* of his trappings when he came again to join the dance.

Alert, muscular, his head held high, a glimmer of something that was nearer amusement than contempt in his lively blue eyes, Henderson drew many a glance, many a wondering, warm sympathetic look from the fair ones who danced that afternoon across Don Abraham's polished floor. There was no man in the company as handsome in the manly strength that the female eye so quickly and surely appraises.

Don Roberto had ordered Henderson's long, unruly hair shorn short. His shapely head was revealed to added advantage by this sacrifice, the short hair glistening like the scales of a new-caught perch when he crossed the slant sunbeams falling through the windows upon the great hall floor. The barber had spared him a foretop which betrayed its crinkled unruliness under the pomade

that smoothed it, to the secret admiration of many a pair of young eyes. For it was known that this was a gentleman, an inferior one, certainly, who had fallen through pride and misfortune to this low estate.

A lagging spirit came over the dancers as dusk began to settle on the hills. The overfed mamas began to stir out of their heaviness to seek more *cabeza de toro*, now cold on the lantern-lit tables, but delicious to the palate when spread with thick sauce of chili peppers and tomato. The young ones, with appetite that needed no sauce after their hours of dancing, attended them, followed by their languishing cavaliers.

Don Roberto carried a few close friends off to the stable to see a new horse about which he had been making arrogant boasts all day. He graciously permitted Henderson a spell of relief to regale himself at the servants' end of the long table, where there was bull's body in abundance, but not a morsel of the noble head.

Henderson lacked the peculiar, not to say amazing, capacity for eating enjoyed by these happy people, who reminded him not so much of so many coyotes as sacks of grain, which a man only had to shake down to get a little more into, even when it seemed impossible to add another kernel. He made his way along the table, the humor of his singular situation somewhat dulled.

It was becoming a serious business, this standing about in spectacular prominence waiting the

nod of Roberto. He felt that he could not endure much more of it. Come what might, he was in the spirit for taking a flying chance at liberty, making his way to Monterey, even San Francisco, and finding a ship that would carry him home.

Don Felipe was among the guests, the equal of any of them, it appeared. His black pepperings of whiskered barnacles were more apparent than ordinarily, groomed up as he was in his finery. No amount of shaving could reduce their prominence. It seemed as if they must be exceptionally fertile spots in which his beard took prolific root, as the holly and sage thrived in little communities of green luxuriance where the soil was deep on the hills.

Don Felipe turned his back as Henderson drew near. Whatever had passed between them once on the level of man to man could not be renewed in that company, his action plainly said. Henderson was moved by a reckless desire to approach the mayordomo with familiar address, but put the temptation of humiliating the little man, who was not so bad in his way as he might have been, behind him, and made his way to the servants' end of the table.

There were many among his late companions in the fields who now looked on Henderson as a strong reflection of Don Roberto, such being the virtue of even the cast-off garments of the great. These were deferential to a degree little short of embarrassing as Henderson now came among

them. They made way for him, offered him wine, suggesting choice cuts of meat from the fire-blackened hunks which weighted down the bare oak planks.

Yet there were others who, envying his preferment after the manner of the mean in all society, held high heads and passed disparaging remarks. Simon was among these. He stood by the table, legs spread, a cup of wine to his mouth. He broke off his drinking as Henderson passed, wiped his great mustache with the back of his hand, turning eyes red with his long carousal to look after the Yankee in contempt.

"It is the vapor of Don Roberto's body that blows past," he said, with immeasurable disdain.

Henderson made a pretense of taking a bite and a sup among the older men who were neither afraid nor ashamed of him, who had lived too long in drudgery to envy with bitterness one who seemed rising above it. Then he left them, with as little notice as possible, withdrawing to have a few minutes to himself.

Under the slant of the hill, near the gate letting in from the harbor road where the olives grew, there was a bench built around the bole of an ancient live-oak, whose limbs extended far, whose foliage made dusk of noonday, darkness of moonlight. There, in its restful shadow, withdrawn from the noise of the closing celebration, Henderson sat down to ponder his situation once more.

It was coming to the point when he must clear

himself of the contempt of these provincial people by asserting his manhood in no uncertain terms. When Don Felipe had spoken of the impossibility of escape from that country by one under peonage, Henderson had not been entirely convinced. True, the mayordomo's picture of the thousand hands that would reach out to restore a man to his master, for the reward impelling the deed; the more direct and personal emphasis that Simon had added in his own picturesque manner; the charge of ingratitude laid to him by Don Abraham himself—all this had worked to the deferment of Henderson's intention. But to deferment only, not the abandonment for a moment. There was a means of escape for a man of the right temper. The time was approaching near when he intended to prove this in the face of their hostility and contempt of the Yankee breed.

How did his account with Don Abraham and his petulant, overbearing, shallow son stand by now? he wondered. Certainly, not a dollar less than at the beginning. There was no telling what they had charged up against him for this abandoned finery, but if the sum stood in proportion to the jeans and brogans, it would be sufficient to bind him a peon all the rest of his life.

He had been on Don Abraham's ranch almost five months now. Putting his services at twenty dollars a month—surely he was worth as much as Simon—the original debt, outrageous as it was, had been paid long since. As for gratitude, that

was a fabrication of his own. There could be no debt of gratitude to a man who had acted as Don Abrahan had that day at the harbor, planning in his deliberate craftiness to profit by the reward for the sailor's return or, failing in that, to add another slave to his plantation. There was nothing owing Don Abrahan on that score.

Henderson's conception of the inland geography of that country was vague. He only knew that it was a land of weary distances, guarded well, as Don Felipe had said, by mountains and deserts on the east, the sea on the west. Baja California, at the south, was a land of torment, he had been told by sailors who had been cast away on its shores. To the north there were leagues of dark forest, he knew from sighting them from the ship. Of the social and political conditions he knew no more than a sailor had opportunity of learning, which was very limited, indeed. This slight knowledge he had not been given any opportunity to enlarge during his enforced service with Don Abrahan. He had not talked with any of the Americans in the pueblo Los Angeles on his visits there in Don Roberto's company. A child of today knows more of California than Gabriel Henderson, graduate of a venerable New England university, knew in that summer time of the year 1846.

There had been talk of war breaking out between the United States and Mexico long before Henderson deserted his ship. News came so slowly, over such great distances to that seques-

tered land, that war might already have been declared, might even then be going forward, in which case he would be in double peril when his day came to leave Don Abraham's ranch. Don Felipe would know; it would be worth while to play the sycophant to Don Felipe to find out.

The moon stood full at the head of San Gabriel valley; the leaves of the olives turned and flashed in its strong beam like little fish in the sunlit sea. But beneath the gray old oak all was somber and unseen. It was as if it held its hand over this fugitive from a distant land, offering him the temptation of security to slip away from his bondage into the vast white freedom of the sleeping plain.

Henderson stood, this thought making his heart go faster, his breath quickened in a desire that was more than half a sudden resolution. A quick passage of the olive lane to the turn of the road, where the moon would reveal him for a moment as he crossed; a scramble up the shoulder of the hill, where the path worn by Liseta's goats was white like a scar; over that first range but a little way, into the valley that he had seen from the summit. From there, picking his way between hiding and foraging to keep himself alive, on to Monterey.

How far to the north the bay and town of Monterey lay he did not know. Computing by the sailing time of the ship, it must be nearly five hundred miles. It would take a hunted man weeks to make the journey. It was an appalling obstacle

between him and the bare hope, the gambling chance, of freedom.

There were many Americans in and around Monterey. Chance it that war had not begun, there was some sort of United States agent, consul, or what he might be, in the place; Henderson had seen his flag flying from a tall pole before his place. The road to freedom from this slavery which would have no end but of his own making, lay toward Monterey. A man might——

“Why are you masquerading here? Who are you?”

Henderson started; his muscles jumped. It was a woman's voice, soft and low; the words were English without a taint of foreign accent. But there was nobody in sight as he turned quickly to encounter the speaker, nobody behind the thick trunk of the tree.

It was incredible that anybody could have come, spoken and vanished in a breath, neither the sound of the approach nor the retreat heard by him. But there was nobody under the tree. His eyes, accustomed to the gloom of the deep shadow, would have found the speaker if she were there.

“Who are *you*?” Henderson demanded in vexed surprise, doubt, even, that he had heard a voice at all. “Where the devil are you, any way?”

“Here,” the voice answered, coming to him on a little laugh.

Above him it seemed, in the tree. He peered into the foliage of the oak and saw her there, sit-

ting on a limb a little above his head. Her dark dress was one with the shadows; he could not tell whether she was a guest, or some impertinent intruder.

"I think you'd better come down," he suggested, diverted by her unconventional prank, let her be whom she might prove.

"No, I just came up here this minute," she returned. He saw her lean toward him as she spoke, her voice scarcely more than a whisper. "I got up here," she hurried on to explain, "while you were standing over there by the gate looking at the hill. If you're waiting for somebody, I'll run away."

"No need," he said, putting out his hand in appeal to stop the suggested flight. "There's nobody in this land for me to be waiting, or who would wait for me."

"You're lonely, poor boy!" she said, sympathy in her tone that thrilled him. Then quickly, as if the words had broken from her and must be retrieved: "Of course not; a man never is lonely. But what are you doing here, out of your station, carrying Don Roberto's cloak and hat?"

"I am a servant in the house of Don Abraham," Henderson replied.

"Oh, I know," impatiently, "but what are you *truly*?"

"A sailor who ran away from his ship, a silly fellow who jumped from one hard master and ultimate freedom, to a soft-spoken one and pros-

pects extremely doubtful. Will you do me the kindness to come down and let me see your face? Surely I must not have seen you among the guests. Your English speech is not the kind that comes out of a Spanish mouth."

She made no movement to comply with his request, earnestly and respectfully, almost entreatingly, made. From the rustling of the leaves around her, he was certain that she shook her head.

"I climbed up here to be safe, in case they missed me and came hunting for me," she said. "Men cannot be trusted alone with women in this country. If they found me here talking with you, I'd be under a cloud all the days of my life."

"Damn them!" said Henderson, the sailor in him leaping ahead of the conventional man.

"I have, many a time," she said, in sober earnestness.

"You're not one of them, these lotus-eaters?"

"Yes, one of them. Perhaps only half would be better to say. My father was a Yankee, a Boston ship captain. His name was Isaac Sprague. It isn't fair to ask more than one is willing to tell, so I tell you this. Now, who are you, and what are you masquerading here to find out?"

"I have told you, Miss Sprague. My name is Gabriel Henderson——"

"I know that."

"And I am a foolish chap who didn't know any better than to get into debt to the benevolent Don Abraham. He says I shall not leave this place until

the last penny is cleared. At the rate I'm going, that will never happen in the course of my natural life."

"I know all of that. But I don't believe you'd stay, I don't believe Don Abraham and all the powers he can command, could keep you here a minute longer than you wanted to stay."

"I am afraid I'm neither so brave nor so resourceful as you seem to do me the honor of believing," Henderson told her.

He wondered if her desire to know about him, to penetrate the mystery that she had clothed him with in her own romantic imagination, could be entirely her own, unprompted by some dictator who stood out of sight.

"I must go back," she said, rustling in the tree as if she were coming down. "I left my aunt asleep in a corner of the porch; she will be frantic if she wakes and does not see me near. Please walk away and look at the hill again, and I will come down."

"Give me your hand; let me help you, Miss Sprague. Make me happy by standing in the moonlight just one moment, so I may see and remember your face."

"You're talking like a native," she said, between disappointment and scorn. "I ran away from them. I risked everything, just for a minute's speech with a natural man. You're letting the insincerities of our tinkling little language get hold of your tongue, Mr. Gabriel Henderson."

"I would like to see your face," he pleaded, downcast and reproved.

"If you'll not go and look at the hill, I must stay in the tree," she said. "You'd only be disappointed if you saw the face I'd have to show in the bright moonlight, Mr. Henderson. I am the red-haired beauty with freckles, hovered over by a large lady in green. You couldn't have missed seeing me; I was as prominent as a worm on a leaf. The lady is my aunt; she is Don Abraham's cousin, and I—I am to marry his devoted son. So there, you know it all. Go away and look at the hill."

"Somebody is coming," he warned her, his words quick, cautious.

"God help me! I am lost!"

Henderson saw her standing on the great branch, unsteady as if she might fall in the tremor of her fright.

"Climb higher; hide among the leaves," he directed her.

He began walking back and forth, his head bent, in the manner of a sorrowful man who unburdens himself to his own heart.

Don Roberto and a companion, laughing in the merriment of their confidences, strolled in the moonlight not a rod beyond the fringe of the great tree's shadow. In the leaves overhead Henderson heard the rustling of the girl's movement to conceal herself, and a little gasp when something came falling among the close-knit small branches,

and struck the ground softly a little distance from where he stood.

Don Roberto and his companion were approaching along the broad roadway that ran down beneath the old encina to the gate; there was no time to search for the thing she had let fall. Henderson could not see anything against the intensified darkness of the bare ground. Some trifle, he supposed, that a branch had wrested from her. He hoped Don Roberto and his friend would pass.

“Ha, it is our friend, Don Gabriel,” Roberto said, applying the name of honor to his valet in slurring levity.

“Keeping a tryst for a lady,” the one who walked with him laughed. He stooped, his foot striking something in the dark. “And by my life, here is her shoe! Don Roberto, we have broken a romance; we have frightened her away.”

CHAPTER VI

IN THE PATH OF THE GOATS

HENDERSON felt his wits revolving for a moment like a straw in a whirlpool. The unlucky arrival of Don Roberto, the doubly unfortunate chance upon the lost shoe by his companion, had forced him into a situation that would require either great audacity or greater diplomacy to come out of with the lady's honor untouched in the eyes of those jealous and biased moralists.

He recalled her vividly in the light of the brief description she had given of herself, but with nothing of either the insignificance or the humility of the worm. She had not been present at the celebration before that day; her appearance among the belles of the ranchos, whose dark beauty was becoming rather tiresome, had been like a green hill to the mariner's eye.

He had puzzled over her that day, trying to account for the wide difference of type she presented, not knowing that Yankee marriages were common among the first families of California. Her hair was of a reddish brown, dusky in its depths where the Saxon strain mastered the Latin; her fair skin was dashed, as she had said, with a little partridge flight of freckles across her nose. Not of a prettiness such as would be appealing to

these fast-maturing youths; rather a sober and melancholy type, her gray eyes wise and clear of the small pretenses and subterfuges of feminine vanity. There was a thinness in her cheek, as if whetted by a sorrow, the reflection of trouble in her eyes. This he remembered, picturing her again, swiftly, as he stood trying to make fast a line to his swirling thoughts.

He must get hold of the shoe; he must create some sort of diversion that would lead the two strollers away from the tree, whatever their curious humor to pry into his supposed romance might be. The girl must be brought down out of the tree and taken to the house by some sequestered way, and all must be done in a matter of minutes, before her absence from the side of her *duenna* could connect her with the lost shoe.

The two young men had stopped beneath the tree, laughing over their discovery. Henderson feared the girl's fright might betray her, not knowing how improbable it was that a Mexican gentleman would look in a tree for a lady, though the rustling of her movement might be plain in his ears.

"What kind of a shoe is this—a sheepskin sandal?" Don Roberto inquired, a laugh in his voice over the thought of this interrupted love-scene between his valet and some day-laborer's girl. "Come to the moonlight with this precious discovery, Don Fernando; let us see."

Don Fernando, the young man who had stum-

bled upon the shoe, hesitated, the small thing in his hand.

“It seems to be a lady’s dancing-shoe. I believe such as might be meeting your servant under a tree by night would not wear a shoe of this kind, Don Roberto. Somebody has lost it in a stroll, and could not find it again in the dark.”

“Is it possible?” Don Roberto asked, something more than surprise in his voice, a thing ominous, suspicious. “Let us have a look at it over here.”

“It is just a little thing of silk and kid,” said Don Fernando, temporizing as if undecided what to do.

“Step into the moonlight, Don Fernando—it is half as bright as day. We’ll see this pretty shoe, then watch for the mate of it. What a joke it will be to give back her shoe!”

“Oh, Don Roberto, Don Roberto!” his friend protested gently.

“But the shoe—give me the shoe, then, Don Fernando.”

“If you will pry into a lady’s misfortune,” Don Fernando laughed, passing the shoe to his friend’s outstretched hand.

“Permit me,” said Henderson, snatching the shoe from Roberto’s fingers.

“Impertinent dog!”

Roberto sprang back a step with the malediction thrown in his servant’s face, as if to be out of reach of violence that he expected to follow it. The leap carried him into the moonlight, where he stood

with hand at his sash, feeling for the weapon which, for the occasion, was not there.

“Restore me the shoe! This instant give it back!” he commanded.

“I was sent for it; I will restore it to the owner,” Henderson replied, his manner lofty and severe.

“Who commands you?”

“That is for me to know, Don Roberto.”

“Very well,” said Roberto, indifferently, as if the humor of the situation had mended the affront given him by his valet; “go on, then, and take the shoe to its owner. We will accompany you; we will go by your side, to see the pretty foot that it fits.”

“No, Don Roberto. Let the poor fellow have his hour of romance, if he can. I am not one with you to pry into it, or into the lady’s confusion, let her be whom she may.”

Fernando turned away with these words, going toward the house. Henderson felt his heart warm to the young fellow, glad to know there was some of the delicacy of chivalry still living in that race.

“Yankee thief! you’ll feel the bite of rawhide for this,” Roberto threatened. “Come, take me to the owner of this shoe.”

Henderson stood in the bright moonlight confronting this petulant tyrant who believed himself master not only of the present situation but the future as well. The little shoe was soft in Henderson’s hand; he held its pliant, thin sole bent in his palm, hiding it from Roberto’s curiously hungry

eyes. It was a moment for swift consideration, quick arrival upon a course that would save the shoe's owner from the blight of scandal. Don Fernando was walking away rapidly; he passed out of sight among the low-hanging branches of the pepper trees.

"Very well," Henderson yielded, after what seemed a struggle against himself.

"Half of your lashes will be remitted for this, my fine Gabriel," Roberto generously declared. "But for snatching the shoe out of my hand, may rats eat my heart if I do not find your ribs with my whip tomorrow!"

"This way, then," said Henderson, leading off in the direction of the laborers' huts below the brow of the hill.

Where there had been merely contempt for Roberto's pampered pride, his oppression and disdain, there leaped hot in Henderson's breast this moment a desire to bring him low. The snarl of the fellow's heavy lips when he threatened the lash, the greedy tightening of his eyes, betrayed the cruelty that lay under his callow exterior. As quick as the flash of his vengeful desire, Henderson's lively mind contrived a way.

"Who is there in this direction wearing the shoes of a lady?" Roberto inquired, halting suspiciously after they had gone a few rods from the tree.

"It remains for you to see," Henderson replied. If Don Roberto had been schooled in the inflections

of the human voice, he would have turned back that moment.

“Here now, Gabriel, give me the foolish shoe and let us be friends,” Roberto coaxed, holding out his hand. “I promise you I will forgive you for taking it out of my hand, although you shamed me before a friend. Give it to me, and take my forgiveness.”

Henderson looked behind him. They were only a little way from the tree where the girl trembled among the leaves, fearful of losing the good name that was more to her than life; not far from the long tables spread under the trees before the mansion, from which the laughter and clatter of those who fed around them came clearly.

“Why do you hesitate, little Gabriel?” Roberto asked impatiently. “The shoe, and be forgiven.”

“Damn your generosity!” Henderson replied. The weight of his body was behind the blow that he struck Roberto under the ear.

Roberto fell as limp as wet leather, for the iron of salt-horse and hard-tack, and months of disciplinary labor, was in that blow. Roberto’s fine ruffled shirt made the gag that stopped his mouth, his silk necktie the bond for his hands; the sleeves of his shirt served well to secure his feet, and there the sailor left him, stretched behind the trunk of a great oak, his overfed heart fluttering like a moth caught in wax.

“Quick—your foot!” Henderson whispered, mounting the seat encircling the tree-trunk where

Don Roberto's betrothed prayed softly for deliverance among the leaves.

"You haven't killed him, Don Gabriel?" she asked.

She clambered down from her higher perch as she spoke, leaning to lay her hand on his shoulder. He felt the tremor of her body, the dread anxiety of her low-spoken word.

"He'll be ready for the wedding tomorrow, Miss Sprague, if you need him so soon," Gabriel assured her.

"I pray that day will never come!" she said, with such feeling that caution was forgotten. "But I would not have him dead, of all things dead at your hands, Don Gabriel," she added softly, her hand still on his shoulder, her breath on his cheek.

Henderson had found her unshod foot; he was replacing the slipper with such haste that impeded his work, anxious for her to come down and hurry back to her *duenna's* side. For his own road was calling to him; the moon marked its way over the hill among the greasewood and the sage.

"Now go," he said, having fastened the buckle on its silken strap across her vaulted instep; "run for it, Miss Sprague!"

She came down lightly, her hand in his, her weight thrown on his shoulder, and stood so a moment, as if she had climbed to give him some sweet confidence unseen among the boughs.

"Avoid the man called Fernando — the one who found your shoe," he whispered, his breath short

with something that was not fatigue from the fastening of her shoe.

“I know a way,” she panted. “I shall be safe now.”

It seemed as if shortness of breath were a contagion that had laid hold of both of them under the gray, solemn oak that moonlit night. Both of them knew well enough that they had no moments to gamble away, but she lingered. Her hand was still cold in the chill of her past fright.

“Have you heard from the north?” she asked eagerly, whispering close to his ear.

“The north?”

“I came to ask you; I wanted to know if you were—if you had a friend in the north who had sent you the news?”

“I haven’t a friend in California,” he replied, thinking in the same breath that he ought to be half-way up the hill by now.

“One, at least,” she corrected him, touching his shoulder in assuring comfort, speaking hurriedly, the necessity of the moment urging her now. “Where is Roberto? Have you hurt him much?”

“Behind that tree, not hurt. He’s likely to get loose any moment—I must go. Good-bye, Miss Sprague. My greatest wish is for your happiness.”

“Go to my estate in the valley over there—it is near San Fernando Mission, the Sprague ranch—everybody knows it. I’ll be there before you, unless you are taking a horse?”

“No.”

“It is better that way; there would be a legal accusation if you took a horse. Come straight to my home, then. I have something to tell you—there is news from the north.”

This last she emphasized as though she believed it had a meaning he would understand. He waited, standing as she left him on the seat, his head among the low branches, watching her until she disappeared under the pepper trees near the house. Then he leaped down and ran to the olive lane, and up the road by which he had arrived on a day that seemed to him now long ago, holding like a vassal to Don Abraham's stirrup, to be betrayed by the treacherous hospitality of that place.

Henderson was hatless; his finery, his light shoes, were not calculated to withstand the rigors of flight in the rough country where his small chance of safety lay. His velvet and bright satin would mark him in the eyes of every person that met him. He would leave a trail behind him like a fire. But he was confident; he was not flying friendlessly into the unknown.

He knew in a general way where San Fernando Mission was, across the first range of hills in the valley of the same name, twenty miles or more away. There was little likelihood that they would start the pursuit of him tonight, hot as Roberto would be for revenge; the vast assurance of their mighty ability to reach out and drag a fugitive back with their thousand hands would hold them in their beds till day. But the word of his escape

was sure to be sent abroad by Indian messengers the moment it was discovered.

Henderson proceeded on his way with a feeling of security in spite of his knowledge of this. He was certain there was no treachery in Miss Sprague's offer of a refuge, and profession of friendship.

Don Felipe had spoken frequently of Roberto's betrothed, but never by name. She had been away, in school at Santa Barbara, Felipe had said. She must have come home only a day or two ago. That accounted for Roberto never having ridden to San Fernando, his valet at his back. Unlucky chance, thought Henderson, for then he would have known the road.

Where the olive lane ended, and the road swept away eastward to the pass and on its way to Buena Ventura and the North, Henderson paused. There was no break in the sound of festivity around the tables beneath the trees; it was certain that Roberto had not broken his insecure bonds and given the alarm. Here the fugitive must leave the highway and take a shorter line across the hills. Little chance that any would find his tracks in the goat path that he must follow up the first steep slope. At dawn Liseta would come with her flock; the tracks of his passing would be cut out of the path by two hundred scrambling hoofs.

CHAPTER VII

A MESSENGER FROM SAN FERNANDO

DON ROBERTO rode into the courtyard at evening, dust on his shoulders. He flung himself from the saddle with impatience, throwing out his hands in baffled expression of emptiness when Don Abrahan came hastily from the house to meet him.

“The earth has swallowed him,” Don Roberto said.

He drew his shoulders up, lifted his eyebrows, pulled down the corners of his large, flexible mouth, emphasizing his report of complete failure in his quest.

“You have made his grave, then? It is very good.”

Don Abrahan spoke with well-simulated gratification, as a man hearing good news. But that light of something in his eyes that seemed laughter and was not, told Roberto that he was being scorned.

“I have not made his grave,” Roberto replied shortly, with surly tongue. “No man has seen him; he leaves no tracks.”

“The earth opens to swallow a man but once,” Don Abrahan said gravely. “That is when it makes the little grin called the grave. As long as this sailor is not in his grave, he walks the ground

to be brought back to this plantation and serve his time."

"I'll cut the heart out of him with a rawhide when I find him!" Roberto said.

"Cut him till his back runs blood, you may; but his heart you will leave whole in his body to suffer for the great insult he has put upon this house. Never mind," laying his hand on Roberto's shoulder in comforting caress, "we shall find him. There is no way for him to escape but through the mountains into the desert. He had no arms, no money; his shoes are cut to pieces on the rocks by now; he runs lame; he is hungry. Soon he must come out of his place to beg food. Then the word will come; we shall have him in our hands."

Don Felipe came for the horse, led it away unnoticed by father and son, clapped his genie signal for the young man who always seemed just out of sight in the warehouse. Don Abraham and his son, in close and earnest conversation, entered the dwelling.

This was the evening of the fourth day since Henderson's escape. The mystery of his complete evanishment troubled Don Abraham, not so much because his son had failed in the search which he headed, as that it seemed to show that his hitherto dependable machinery had failed and broken down. This would seem to indicate that the peon class was growing in defiance of the privileged few who had held them in subjugation so completely and so long. It was a state of affairs to cause a man to wrinkle

his brow and consider, with beard bent upon his breast.

And so Don Abrahan sat in what would have been called his library in an American house, but in this place termed office. Here the records of his business transactions were kept; here such books as the family owned, which were neither many nor important. Don Abrahan's father had occupied the room for the same purpose, contriving it when he built the house.

This was a room of two tall, narrow Venetian windows set in the deep adobe wall. There were dark beams of cedar overhead, a dark door of broad panels and great thickness shutting off the rest of the house. There was a picture of a cavalier in a ruff and pointed beard, a sword at his side, his hand on the hilt, hanging in a dark, deep frame between the windows. In the center of the room Don Abrahan's strong oak table stood, two silver candlesticks flanking the great inkstand.

There was more to trouble Don Abrahan than the thought of peon defiance in concealing a fugitive, or the revolution in the peon mind and conscience which would no longer permit one to seize and deliver an unhappy human chattel for the reward of five dollars. The greater thought that rose in the mind of Don Abrahan, like a cloud out of season upon the eye, was nothing less than that of American plotting and contriving to lay hold of California and add it to their domain.

That such plotting was going on, Don Abrahan

and others of his estate had proof; that it was being furthered and supported by men of his own nation who hoped to profit through it, and by Spaniards who had lost their lands, was more than suspected.

Proof was wanting there, but proof Don Abraham hoped to secure, to the happy hanging of some of his neighbors, the exile and expatriation of others. Then there would be land to divide as a reward among the patriots. The thought brought a smile to Don Abraham's face; it stood in twinkling reflection in his eyes long after its ripple had passed through his beard.

Roberto entered presently, refreshed by razor and clean garments. His face was gloomy for all the brightness of his raiment; there was a sulkiness in the corners of his drooping lips as of a resentful child. He sat at the end of the table, dark, handsome; soft in his habit of indolence, yet enduring from the very breed of him, more boy than man in spite of his years. There was promise in his well-carried head, capability in his small, compact hands. Experience, hardship, renunciation by force, might harden this indulged boy into a formidable man, such as the gray, sharp-featured one across the table.

"You are wrong, father, when you think he roams the hills without a friend," Roberto said.

He scarcely had settled in the rough chair with rawhide seat, but with the words he got to his feet again, walked rapidly across the room, stood at a

window where a last spear of sunlight came through, filtered of its white strength by the smoky haze of the hills.

“You believe some American in the pueblo is hiding him?” Don Abraham asked.

He was unmoved by his son's perturbation. He watched the young man furtively, head bent, fingers interlaced meditatively at the tip of his beard. It was as if he tried an experiment in psychology, and waited the result.

“No, there is no American in the pueblo who would risk it. But there is another, not in the pueblo. He is not without a friend.”

Don Abraham lifted his head, his eyes open wide. He put a hand to the table, leaning forward as if to rise.

“What is it you have learned today?” he asked.

Roberto turned from the window to stand with hands on the back of his chair, deliberating his next word, it seemed. He sat down, drew the chair close to the table, leaning confidentially toward his father, eye to the windows to see that nobody loitered near.

“There is something to be told to the shame of this house,” he said, with such intense feeling that caused his father to stare. “There is a thing I have kept from you since the night of this ruffianly assault. Now you must hear it, but it burns my heart with shame to speak the words.”

“How? What is this thing you preface with such terrible beginning?”

Don Abraham was thoroughly aroused. He glanced behind him to see that the door letting into the rest of the house was closed; and over his shoulder to make certain the door opening out of it into the convenient courtyard that might, in time of stress, contain a man's saddled horse, did not show a crack.

"It is infidelity and disgrace of one that was most dear," Roberto said, his head drooping with shame of the confession. "Helena — it was Helena who met him under the tree that cursed night. It was Helena's slipper that Don Fernando picked up. She lost it when she fled."

"But no, no. Did you see her, my son?"

"I held the shoe a moment before the dog snatched it from me. It was of the shoes I bought her in Mexico City, silk and fine kid. There is no mistake; there are no shoes of that kind in this country."

"And Don Fernando? You were not fool enough to betray this suspicion to him?"

"Don Fernando does not know, thank God! This affront to my honor is known only to you and me, and the guilty pair that shamed me. And by the breath of God I'll wash my hands in their blood before another sun goes down!"

"But Helena, that is not like her. I would not condemn Helena without greater proof than the circumstance of a shoe picked up under a tree. You did not see her run away. Perhaps she lost it, passing there for the air with Doña Carlota, and

could not find it in the dark. I will make inquiry of Carlota. Let us be calm; let us wait."

"It is well enough for you to say all this, but I, who know better, want no further proof."

"It is not like Helena," Don Abraham persisted. "Why should she want to meet a servant by night under a tree? It is preposterous!"

"It is her Yankee blood; there is a baseness in it," Roberto declared.

"Grant that it was Helena's shoe that caused you to suffer at this rough fellow's hands—and I am not convinced yet that it was, for ships from Mexico bring many shoes—there would be no harm in the prank of meeting this sailor for a word. Helena is more Yankee than Mexican. It is a strong blood; it is not always base. Captain Sprague was as much a gentleman as ever came to California from any land."

"No harm in meeting him!" Roberto repeated bitterly. It seemed that he had not heard his father beyond these words.

"No harm. It is the custom of Americans to permit their young of the opposite sexes together in all places, at all hours. Custom gives it a different color in their eyes than ours. It is likely she only wanted to practice a little English with one fresh from Boston, to get from him the latest words. She has dreams of going there some day; she doesn't want to go with a stiff tongue."

"It isn't her native speech, her native land. She is Mexican, as I am. Captain Sprague was a Mexi-

can citizen; there is no Yankee custom that can absolve her."

"I think she is innocent of any wrong intention, however bold her deed, if she is guilty of meeting him as you charge, my son. There is no smirch on Helena; she is a good girl, and a rich one. I cannot permit you to think of throwing aside this betrothal on account of a foolish episode such as troubles you so deeply, Roberto. It is our secret. Call it a child's prank and forgive it."

"And this Yankee sailor? Do you expect me to forgive him, as well?"

Don Abrahan sat in meditation a little while, his beard bent upon his breast. When he looked up presently there was that reflection of inner laughter in his eyes.

"The devil first tempted woman under a tree," he said. "If Adam had killed the devil in Eden, it would have been for the happiness of mankind."

Roberto sprang to his feet, his nostrils twitching, his face white.

"I know where to find him!" he said. "This country could not hide a man four days without a strong friend to cover him. Give me permission to go to San Fernando and demand this Yankee at her door."

"Without absolute knowledge that he is there, it would be an affront that Helena never would forgive," Don Abrahan returned in politic softness.

"Forgive! Helena forgive! I swear to you,

Don Abrahan my father, that I will not have her, polluted by his kiss."

"This is folly," Don Abrahan reproved him coldly. "What is a kiss more or less, if he kissed her? The sailor never met her alone, never spoke a word to her. But I give him to you. Do with him what your desire leads you to do — when you find him."

"If we find that she is hiding him, will that be proof enough for you of her guilt?"

"It is preposterous; she could not hide him — nobody could hide him," Don Abrahan declared, but contrary to his own deep conviction that somebody, indeed, must be concealing the fugitive. "He has crawled into a cave in the hills; hunger will drive him out tomorrow."

"It is a thing that touches a man's honor. One does not marry a woman whom he has discovered alone with a man."

Roberto judged Helena as Helena judged him and his kind, as revealed in her significant speech to Henderson, explaining why she had hidden herself in the tree. Men were not trusted alone with women in the Spanish-Mexican society of that time; they are not trusted in any greater degree in the same society today.

"Proof would be necessary," Don Abrahan insisted, with such firmness that Roberto knew could not be shaken. "You did not see her. The touch of a shoe, which seemed of the same material you brought from the capital——"

“Sixteen dollars, gold, they cost me!”

“Such evidence is weaker than the testimony of a blind man. It does not convict Helena, in my judgment. I will not consent to your throwing away her lands, her herds, her gold won by that magician Sprague as if he clutched it out of the air. It is too much for a trifle of suspicion to wreck. When you cool, when you are reasonable, you will see it as I do.”

“In my own heart she stands convicted. There is not another pair of shoes like that this side of the capital.”

“Who comes?” Don Abrahan asked, leaning to listen as the sound of someone riding into the courtyard in haste passed the window like a gust of wind.

Roberto turned to the window to see. The rider had passed; only the dust of his swift arrival could be seen. He opened the window and leaned out.

“Felipe is coming with the intelligence,” he announced.

“It is time for the fish to show himself in the net,” Don Abrahan said, going to the door which opened into the courtyard. “I knew we must have news of him soon.”

Roberto stood by the table, lips compressed, hands clenched, as if he struggled against vengeful emotions. Don Abrahan turned from the door, and closed it. He stood a moment reading the written message his mayordomo had put into his hand.

“It is a message from Doña Carlota, at the San Fernando ranch,” he said, looking his son straight in the eyes. Don Abraham stood then a moment, taking his breath in such long inspiration as a man draws it when he fortifies himself for some tremendous ordeal.

“Your suspicions are confirmed. She is hiding him,” he said.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TEETH OF A MAN

DONA CARLOTA, cousin of Don Abraham, kept her candle burning late that night. She drew the drapery of her chamber window aside to show that the house was awake, herself seated discreetly out of sight of any passing eye. With crochet needle and fine silk thread she worked upon the mantilla that had employed her fingers many months, and would so employ them until the ripening of grapes.

There was a weight of trouble upon the breast of Doña Carlota that night, a haven broad enough to harbor many troubles, yet in which few had come to anchor in her placid years. She was as round and fat as an old hen pigeon, small in the face, her chin merged into her neck, her black hair pulled rigorously back from her shallow forehead in what seemed an attempt to give sternness to a countenance that had no more severity in it than a cake. Even trouble could do no more than give it a comical little look of appeal.

Between love and duty Doña Carlota had suffered these two days. At the last she had yielded to duty, as she would have deferred to religion, and the thing was done. Now she waited as it drew on toward midnight, listening for the sound of

horses coming from the south. When she felt a flood of drowsiness coming over her, threatening to smother her like a clam on the beach, she fumbled beneath the half-finished mantilla for her rosary, moving her lips in a Hail Mary. In that manner of fending off sleep Doña Carlota felt that she had built a solid wall of Hail Marys around that house which harm could not surmount even with a dragon's wings. Yet she had quakings and doubts; she suffered tremors of cold fears.

At ten minutes before midnight, Doña Carlota believed she had expected too much of Don Abraham; he would not come that night. At five minutes past the hour, as she stood with hand on the drawn drapery to let it fall and shut the candlelight from the road, a dog barked before an Indian shepherd's hut. His alarm was taken up, as a cock's crow goes onward over the land from straining throat to throat, from the edge of the world in the west to the very shores of dawn. Men came riding into the patio. Don Abraham was at the door.

Doña Carlota hastened to open to the magistrate's command, even to the command of his presence, before his hand was lifted to the panel.

"So you have come," she said. "May Jesus protect us all! Enter, Don Abraham."

"There is no cause for your perturbation, my good cousin," Don Abraham said, laughing at her magnification of a thing that he considered only commonplace, troublesome, small. "A runaway peon is not a thing to disturb your tranquillity."

“But the anger of Helena! She will blast us with the passion that has come to her from that terrible captain. When she knows that I sent for you——”

“Peace, peace, Doña Carlota. Who is going to tell her, but yourself?”

“She is so shrewd, she can see through a wall, Don Abraham.”

Don Abraham laughed again, seeming in pleasant humor for one who had ridden so far from his bed. He pinched Doña Carlota’s cheek, finding no trouble to get his fingers full.

“A wall is another thing,” he said. Doña Carlota was not quick at a jest. She did not understand his mirth.

Roberto entered, a pistol at his belt; Simon, the teamster, stood in the beam of Doña Carlota’s candle outside the door.

“Where is the Yankee dog?” Roberto demanded, harsh, disrespectful, his hat insolently on his head.

“Gently,” Don Abraham cautioned; “not so loud. Lead us to the room where he is hidden—the house is guarded at every door; he cannot escape.”

“The house, the room?” Doña Carlota gasped in scandalized amazement. “Do you believe, Don Abraham, that my niece would conceal a man in her house? Jesus save——”

“Where, then?” Roberto demanded.

“I do not know, Don Roberto; but somewhere

on the ranch. The Yankee mayordomo can tell you that."

"A tree would tell as much!" Don Abrahan said. "Call Helena."

"She has heard; she is coming. There is her candle in the hall!" Doña Carlota pressed her elbows to her sides, drew her shoulders as if trying to shrink upon herself.

Helena appeared, lifting her candle high to peer beneath it at the intruders upon her midnight peace. The flaring bottom of the candlestick threw a shadow on her face, only her hair coming into the light. She was draped in a long, dark, voluminous cloak, her arms bare in its wide sleeves, the white frill of her nightdress peeping at her throat out of its austere envelopment.

"It is a late hour for a visit, Don Abrahan, Roberto," she said, looking from one to the other in questioning surprise. "I heard horsemen in my patio. What does it mean?"

"We have come to you for a man who has run away from a debt, like a thief," Don Abrahan replied. "Your mayordomo is hiding him on your ranch, I have been told. It is to your authority I appeal, as a magistrate of the law, Helena, to compel the delivery of this fugitive alien into our hands."

"My mayordomo is only obeying my orders," Helena replied.

She placed her candle on the deep window-sill, gathering her cloak closer about her neck, standing

so, clasping the mantle delicately, its loose sleeve slipping down to the bend of her arm.

“You are humane, but mistaken,” Don Abrahan chided her gently. “This man is a ruffianly sailor who ran away from his ship; he has committed a murderous assault on my son. He is entirely unworthy of your protection and tender sympathy.”

“I am sorry that it was necessary for Roberto to suffer at his hands,” she said, yet withholding from Roberto even the sympathy of her glance. “I have talked with the young sailor, Mr. Henderson. He is a gentleman; he does not deserve the hard usage you have given him, any more than he does the hard name, Don Abrahan. I intended to go down and see you about his case tomorrow.”

“Then I rejoice that I have spared you so much fatigue,” Don Abrahan said, inclining his thin body in graceful obeisance, sombrero in his hand.

“I am sure Mr. Henderson has repaid you, many times over, all that he ever owed you legally,” Helena said. “He has told me that he came into your service in February; it is now July. You cannot rate the services of an American with those of an ignorant peon, Don Abrahan. Be generous; call it paid.”

“What he owes me is another matter,” Roberto said.

He had found the grace to remove his hat on Helena's appearance; in his fierce show of hungry vengeance now he let it fall, the hand that had held it clenched, the other on his pistol.

Helena surveyed him in this dramatic pose with cool curiosity, running her eyes over him as if searching the cause of his animosity against a man whom he had degraded to a servile station and now pursued in vindictive hate.

“Although I might forgive his debt as you propose, under such kindly argument by his lovely advocate, that would not free him of his assault upon my son. But you are mistaken in the matter of his debt to me; the man has lied.”

“He cannot escape,” Roberto said fiercely, bending toward her as he spoke, his face flushed, his eyes drawn small.

“It is impossible for him to reach the north and join the Americans who plot against our country there,” Don Abrahan declared. “The road is guarded well; he cannot pass.”

“I doubt if he thinks of escaping—to the north, or anywhere, at present, Don Abrahan. A man who has done no wrong has nothing to fear.”

“There is no reason in the heart of youth—only fire and sympathy,” Don Abrahan said. “Yankee men of this common type are brutes. This one I saw strike his captain down with a broken oar, like a savage. What weapon he held when he assaulted my son we do not know, but the bruise of it is still to be seen on his face. No, the man cannot be permitted to go free and unpunished. The safety of the community demands his correction.”

“He told me he struck Roberto with his hand, and no weapon,” Helena said, indignant over the

charge, unwise in her revelation, as she realized almost immediately.

“So you have been alone with him again, cheek by cheek!” Roberto accused, with insolence malevolent and threatening.

“Silence!” Don Abrahan commanded, turning a stern face upon his son.

“I was not alone with him; John Toberman was present.”

“What cruelty to say she was alone with a man!” said Doña Carlota. “The four angels who guard her chamber are not more innocent, Don Roberto.”

“Then if you will call Toberman and order him to lead us to the sailor’s hiding-place,” Don Abrahan suggested, yet with the imperative inflection of a command.

“I heard him among your men; he is not one to sleep when an invasion like this is going on. Call at the door, or send Simon around to the patio.”

John Toberman, mayordomo of the ranch, appeared at the front door presently with Simon, who had bounded away at Don Abrahan’s nod to find him. He came into the light of Doña Carlota’s candle, which she still held in her hand, its flame on a level with her stubby nose. He was bareheaded, his pistols were belted around him, his shirt was open on his grizzled neck. He came into the house without ceremony, no show of deference, and little of respect, in his bearing toward Don Abrahan and his son.

Toberman was a broad-shouldered, lean Yankee, once mate of the ship that Captain Sprague had commanded. He was sixty years of age or more, his heavy, bushy hair of a pepper-and-salt gray, his bearded face, dark as a Mexican's, keen and alert. He stood in the door, severe, questioning, a cloud of displeasure on his face.

"What does this clatter around here at this time of the night mean, Garvanza?" he demanded, fixing the magistrate with searching eyes.

"In the name of the law, to demand a fugitive who is to be judged for his crimes," Don Abraham replied.

"You want that young man Henderson, do you? Well, if you think you're goin' to drag him back to work for you till the United States army marches in here and sets the peones free, you're mistaken. If you want to try him for slappin' your son's jaw, set the date and I'll guarantee he'll be on hand."

"There is more than you understand," Don Abraham said coldly. "You are a Mexican citizen; it is treason for you to talk of an American army taking possession of this country. Bear that in mind when you open your mouth hastily in the future, Toberman."

Toberman seemed to grow two inches as he drew himself up, his chest swelling with no knowing what defiance. Helena lifted her hand, slightly, seeming to speak to him with her eyes. The blast of words that might have knocked Don Abraham off his feet, and haled Toberman into court for trial

on a serious charge, was checked. Toberman contented himself with adjusting his hands on his hips, in a pose that was at once expressive of defiance and disdain, and standing so in silence.

“Where is the fugitive hiding?” Don Abrahan demanded.

“You’re free to go and find out,” said Toberman.

“The time has come to teach these Yankees who are masters of this country,” Roberto said, turning to his father in fury. “Why will you temporize with them — permit them to throw insult and defiance in your face? Give me permission and I will find a way to make this man answer, and answer with respect.”

“Peace!” Don Abrahan commanded, yet with more admiration than severity. “There is a way; in due time it will be seen. Toberman, the iron hand of the law is over you; it must not, it shall not be defied. I will give you until midday tomorrow to produce this fugitive. Go about the business immediately.”

“Don Abrahan, you have no right to come into my house with such commands!” Helena protested.

“Garvanza, ever since the new governor has been established in the pueblo, with the thieves and off-scourings of the Mexican prisons in his military force, you’ve swelled up like a toad,” Toberman said. He moved forward a step as he spoke, his hand lifted, pointed finger driving his words into

the magistrate's face. "I'm not taking orders from the governor, I'm not taking orders from you. I get my orders from this little lady right here, and from nobody else."

Toberman glared around as he pronounced this defiance of the constituted authorities, hands back again on his hips in convenient reach of his pistols, a fearless man who had passed through many conflicts, to whom the imminence of another was nothing but an incident in his day.

"Don Abraham, I will pay you what this fugitive owes you, according to your own reckoning of it," Helena offered, drawing a little closer to the magistrate, closing the little group in the wide, low-walled hall. It seemed as if defiance and appeal pressed upon Don Abraham in the same breath.

"It cannot be permitted," Don Abraham replied.

He retreated a step from her advance, from her white arms outstretched in supplication for permission to do this humane service.

"He is a stranger, far from home, without money, without friends," she pleaded. "I will pay it in his name—seven times the amount, Don Abraham, if you demand it."

"It cannot be adjusted in this manner," Don Abraham refused. "Prepare quarters in this house for me and my son," he directed, turning gruffly to Doña Carlota.

Doña Carlota started, her growing nervousness reaching its climax in the order, given with such affront to the hospitality of that house. She shifted

the position of her candle to look past it at Helena, plainly asking instructions from one whose authority she held in greater fear than Don Abraham's wrath.

"You will know where to accommodate them," Helena said coldly. "There will be nothing more tonight, John," to Toberman, in kindness that had no taint of patronage.

Toberman left the house the way he had entered, Don Abraham's order in little prospect of being carried out, that was plain. Doña Carlota had hastened down the hall to open the guest rooms; Don Abraham turned to the door, where he leaned out peering into the dark, as if watching Toberman. He summoned Simon in low voice, and stood there for some time talking with his teamster in hurried manner, Simon answering with a short word here and there, interspersed in hasty eagerness.

"So you would buy a lover!" Roberto said, his breath audible in his nostrils as he leaned to whisper the insult in Helena's ear.

Helena drew away from him, her cloak gathered close, afraid of him for the fierce cruelty of his eyes. Roberto reached quickly, roughly grasping her wrist where her hand held the mantle at her throat.

"There is a dagger for a heart so false!" he said.

Don Abraham turned from the door as Roberto flung her hand away with such gesture of contempt,

such complete abandonment, that the magistrate stood stiffly, his limbs checked in their function by his great amazement.

“This is not well,” he said sternly.

“False!” Helena repeated in scorn. “Who is it that has mooned and sighed under windows, and caught flowers thrown by coquettes—and worse? What have I heard from the capital of the doings of Don Roberto that would turn my heart to him or make him dear? Roberto, if there ever was any obligation to you on my part, I have been absolved from it long ago.”

“You were betrothed to me—it was a holy compact,” Roberto said.

His voice shook with sickness of the shame he believed had been put upon him; he stood clenching his hands and scowling, ready, it seemed, to begin the chastisement that he had threatened.

“This is folly,” Don Abraham said, attempting to soothe their young passion with the unction of his steady word. “All the world knows there was a betrothal between you two, years ago.”

“It wasn’t of my making,” Helena reminded him, bitterly accusing in the recollection of that bargain and conveyance, after the country’s custom. “What you and my father arranged between you when I was a child cannot bind me now, Don Abraham. I repudiate it; I throw it in your face!”

“It cannot be done so lightly,” Don Abraham said, thinking of the lands and herds, and the gold that the Yankee captain had plucked out of the air

like a magician, all now in the hands of this girl, all now about to take wings and fly out of his family's reach forever. "It cannot be done so easily, Helena. There is much to consider before pulling down shame upon my house, disgrace upon your own."

"Disgrace! And she would buy a lover for a price!" Roberto groaned, burning already in the fire of humiliation.

"It is only the—the—disgraceful sort you know so well, Roberto, who have love to sell for a price," she said. "Don Abrahan, I leave you to your repose."

"Youth is too quick," said Don Abrahan regretfully, as Helena disappeared down the dark hall, leaving her candle on the window-sill to light them to such repose as the night's upheaval had left them. "Tomorrow you will repair the damage with soft words."

"Tomorrow," said Roberto portentously, "it will be another thing. I am no longer a boy. I have grown the teeth of a man this night; I can bite."

CHAPTER IX

DON ROBERTO BITES

ROBERTO found the air of his room stifling, the confinement of its walls oppressive. It seemed that the teeth of a man, which he had become cognizant of possessing only that hour, ached for something to fasten upon and try their strength, urging him out into the open with savage restlessness.

His door opened into the wide patio between the wings of the house, where an immense pepper tree rose high above the roof, its softly draped foliage blue-tinted in the moonlight like a vast, still smoke. There was no light in the house as Roberto stood a little while in the patio, drowned in the gloom of the great tree's shadow. If Helena's conscience troubled her on account of this night's rebellion, she hid the shame of it in the dark.

That was as it should be, Roberto thought. It would have been satisfying to him to know that she was bowed in remorseful shame at her prayers; he suspected, with resentful anger, that she was asleep in her bed.

All was as quiet outside the house as within. The men who had ridden from the ranch, but few in number, mean-spirited fellows all, excepting Simon alone, had found places to stretch them-

selves and sleep. It was nothing to them whether Gabriel Henderson went free or was taken; nothing to them whether the power and dignity of Don Abraham's house rose or fell. Vengeful, bitter, contemptuous of them all, Roberto went to the front of the house and into the broad road that passed before it, the fire of his passion burning the desire for sleep.

Along this road a little way toward the north he walked, striding rapidly, his spurs clicking at his heels. The land in this valley was sandy, soft, almost white as snow in the bright moonlight, far different from the black, tenuous adobe of his father's homestead. Between the little groves of live-oaks which grew in this rich valley the erratic highway ran, the royal road, the king's highway, of the old mission days. The Indians made it first between their villages, long before the zeal of the Franciscan fathers brought them to that shore; the traffic of the missionaries broadened it, and gave it the dignity of its name.

Roberto felt that his heart was nested in this valley, toward which he had yearned sometimes among the dissipations of the capital. He had intended, all the years of his betrothal to Helena, to establish the dignity of his house here on the land that the Yankee captain, who had been accepted as an equal of the best in that country, had acquired by grant for some service to the Mexican government, real or contrived, which was forgotten now. But the land remained, no matter for

the evanescent memory of those who gave it or him who received. It yielded as no other rancho in that part of the country under the wise management of John Toberman, who had given up herding ships on the sea for the herding of cattle on the land.

It was a wrench to give up that plantation, with its green vegas, its stream of living water that came down from the mountains to refresh the great herds, its groves of oak and sycamore trees, its barley and wheat fields, its mansion by the roadside. Yet honor was dearer to a man than lands and herds. At least custom made it so, Roberto said, beginning to feel his anger against Helena diminish in weighing it against what it would cost him. Custom was wrong in many things, as the constant abandonment of old usages proved. Custom was cruel when it separated a man from his dreams and desires in such manner as this.

Roberto's feet found a slower pace, the boiling turmoil of his anger cooled, as these considerations assailed him. Helena was not guilty of any indecorum that smirched her; of that he was well satisfied. She was modern, she was disdainful of the old limitations upon her sex; the Yankee blood of that old captain had drowned the Castilian in her veins. It was wrong to judge her by the standards of that country, as it would be wrong for him to throw away a fortune on no sounder proof than this.

Soft words would repair this breach between

them, he was confident, knowing the weakness of women well. A man could bend to soft words, even dissimulation, to save a fortune. That would be a trifling price. But consider Helena. If, by some strength of her alien strain that made her different in many ways from the women he knew best, she held to the repudiation of their betrothal, what was he to do? Helena might refuse to accept his apology tomorrow; she might scorn him, and turn her cold white face away. It was a thing to pace slowly up and down here in the shadow of the roadside oaks and consider, hands behind the back like a thinking man.

A man must leave home, hunger for it, sigh for it, to return and perceive its beauties hitherto unknown, to feel its friendliness as he felt it here tonight. His heart rose in him, a tenderness of poetic feeling blended out the last shred of his anger, as he stood in the moonlight at the margin of the oak trees' shade, viewing the beauty of that place.

In the south stood the low chain of hills separating this broad valley from that in which the pueblo of Los Angeles lay; close at hand on the north, higher mountains rose, the crumbling granite ledges on their rough sides and summits glistening like snow.

Dark, repellent, the canyons of these mountains appeared, rough and unfriendly their steeps and mangy slopes. No trees graced them, little verdure. They seemed the great cinder-heap of a

burning world that the sea had rushed upon and extinguished in some long-distant age. Even with their austerity chastened in the moonlight, there was no invitation to man in the face they presented.

Yet Roberto knew that their sides were covered with low-growing shrubs, with sweet-scented plants, with sage and holly and honey-bearing flowers, which left a man's clothing perfumed by their touch when he threaded the tangle of their barring limbs. Green things grew there which sheep and cattle fattened on; the sage-bloom called the bees to gather such honey as never gladdened man's tongue in any other land. There was a great beneficence, a gentle kindness, even in the forbidding hills.

To the east Roberto could not see far, the vision hemmed by trees, but there he knew the valley came down to a point, like a river flowing between the hills. To the west it broadened for miles, closing again before coming quite to the sea. In that direction the road turned from San Fernando Mission, threading to Santa Barbara and, in its weary course, to Monterey.

It was clear in the valley this night, not a curl of mist drifted along the hills, a sweet languor in its placidity that embraced a man and made him glad. He could dissemble, he could put pride aside, stoop to soft words to beguile a foolish girl's ear, for the blessings of that place. This knowledge that he had teeth to bite made a man wiser, fortified his courage like a pistol in the belt.

With these reflections over him, the thought of his vengeance against Gabriel Henderson put aside for that hour, Roberto walked on up the road, thinking nothing of the time, sleep a stranger to his eyes. There grew mesquite and screw-bean by the roadside, cactus and chaparral, and grass in bunches that put up tall plumes. Soon Roberto was far beyond sight of the ranchhouse, his eyes on the white road, the weight of his new manhood upon him making him grave.

Roberto was startled out of his meditations by the beat of a horse's feet in the road to the north. Before the rider came in sight around one of the goat-path windings of the highway, Roberto knew that the horse had been ridden hard, and far. He stood in the middle of the road, curious to know who had come from a distance in such pressure, whither he was bound, and the mission that urged him to ride in haste through the night.

The rider halted suddenly when he rounded the turn of the road, seeing his way blocked by a man. He seemed to hesitate for a moment between advance and flight. Roberto, prickling with a keen suspicion that all was not honest with the rider, hailed him.

"Advance!" he said, in commanding voice.

The rider lifted his right hand in signal that he understood, and came forward slowly.

"Can you direct me to the Sprague ranch?" he inquired, in the speech of a common man. Roberto saw that he wore the dress of a vaquero,

or cattleherder. His carriage in the saddle fixed him as one of that calling.

"It is close by," Roberto replied, laying hold of the bridle rein as a man might do a friend's. Yet there was nothing of friendliness in the young man's bearing; much of suspicious severity, and question of the other's right to pass. "Who is it you have business with there at this late hour?"

"It is a man's own business, whatever it may be," the horseman replied, undisturbed by Roberto's hostility. "Would you deny a man the road, like a bandit?"

"I am a kinsman of Miss Sprague, I have the right to stop any stranger who comes looking for her at this hour of the night. If your business is honest, you will not hesitate to tell me what it is."

"You might be her brother?"

"No, not her brother. I am a distant relative, but my authority is not to be questioned."

"Only a distant relative!" said the rider, with a short laugh. "But you stop a man in the road with a pistol under your fingers. If you were a near relative, a brother or a cousin, maybe you would shoot a man if he even looked in the lady's direction? You are too quick for me, young gentleman. Let go my bridle—I must be on my way."

He seemed to hold Roberto in little seriousness, in trifling account. His teeth flashed in a quick smile; he sat in a posture of graceful indulgence,

one hand on his hip, his bridle reins held high in the other.

“Who sent you?” Roberto demanded with all the sternness of his privileged class.

“A man with fingers on his hands, and money in them to pay for what he wanted. That’s enough for me to know; it will have to be enough for you.”

“Where do you come from? impertinent scoundrel!”

“Have you heard of Monterey, little man?” the vaquero asked, patronizingly insolent, as a free man who knows his strength and despises that of another. “Well then, I come from Monterey. I bring letters for the young lady. Whether they are from a lover, that is another thing. Now let go my bridle — permit me.”

The vaquero leaned as he spoke, laying hold of Roberto’s wrist to remove his hand from the rein. His cool insolence, his impertinent disregard of any force that his challenger might use to prevent his going, seemed to Roberto a mighty insult to his new manhood, as it doubtless was intended to be.

“Get down!” Roberto commanded, presenting his pistol at the rider’s ribs.

“Presently — at the lady’s door,” the messenger replied, his teeth white in the moonlight as he laughed.

With the words he set spur to his horse, waking in the agony of the cruel thrust the spirit that

seemed beaten out of the weary animal. It bounded forward, the dust of its high-flung hoofs in Roberto's face.

The chaparral echoed with a sound strange and discordant in the placidity of that night. Don Roberto had snapped his teeth.

CHAPTER X

THE MAGISTRATE SPEAKS

I ONLY know that Don Roberto has killed a man, that they have brought his body wrapped in tentcloth and laid it near the olive press, under the trees. That is all I know."

Doña Carlota was not greatly moved by the event. Dead men had come in her way before, and men who had fallen by violence. She was less agitated in the relation of this news than over the prospect last night that her betrayal of the American's presence on the ranch might be discovered by her niece. She was keen enough to see that the agitation had passed to the other side of the hearth, so to speak. It was Helena's face that grew white, and set in little lines of pain, when this news of Don Roberto's exploit was related.

"You didn't hear them say who it was? when, where, it happened?" Helena inquired.

She sat as she had started from sleep at her aunt's summons to hear this news, the bedclothes flung aside, her hair showering on her shoulders, dread and anxiety staring from her eyes.

"It may be the one they came to find. It was of about that length—I saw it as they carried it by the window. I'll send Rosa with coffee——"

“No. But, Auntie Carlota, ask them—find out who it was, why it was that Roberto——”

“There! there is Don Abrahan calling me, roaring again like a bear. These men! what a trouble!”

Doña Carlota left hurriedly, the sound of Don Abrahan’s voice swelling as she opened Helena’s chamber door.

“Doña Carlota, Doña Carlota!” the summons sounded. And fainter, as the door closed, as if he had turned his back: “Doña Carlota!” with impatient clapping of the hands.

Doña Carlota made no haste to appear before her kinsman and learn his pleasure. She stood a moment at Helena’s door, a look of supreme satisfaction in her face, crossed the hall to the door opening into the patio and stood a little while looking at the tender morning sun in the leaves of the pepper tree.

“I was right, I was justified; my conscience is clear,” she said. “Yes, Don Abrahan. I am here, I am here. I am coming as fast as my feet can carry me.”

Helena hastened her toilet, oppressed by a dread that made her morning dark. Sleep had been long coming to her last night; she had lain planning and devising, her mind flooded by this breaking down of traditional submission. When sleep came, it had locked her fast, she had heard nothing of the coming and going when the body of the slain man was brought and laid beneath the olive trees. Had

she slept while they hunted this trusting stranger and killed him at her very door?

The thought wrung her heart with poignant regret. It seemed equal to betrayal to offer a man sanctuary that she could not insure, a refuge that had become a trap. She had not looked deep enough into Doña Carlota's crafty eyes when she related this tragic intelligence; not deep enough to see that her purpose was only one of leading her young ward on to the betrayal of what hid in her heart. Now Doña Carlota knew; she knew better than Helena herself, or more than Helena would have owned, at least, if confronted with the demand by her own conscience.

Doña Carlota was back at Helena's door while she was still braiding her hair. This time with a summons from Don Abraham that amounted to a command. As quickly as she could dress she was to attend the pleasure of Don Abraham in the parlor. It must be something terrible, Doña Carlota said, now unmistakably alarmed. There was a look in Don Abraham's face to make a woman's heart sink low.

Don Abraham sat at a small table near the window, papers spread before him; Roberto waited at the door like a butler, closing it behind Helena sharply when she entered, shutting Doña Carlota out with summary rudeness. Don Abraham rose, tall, gaunt, his roomy clothing loose upon his limbs. Helena stood in questioning hesitation, looking from Don Abraham to his son. She seemed a

stranger in her own house, these two had taken such authoritative control.

Don Abraham turned his hand in slow, graceful motion to a chair, remaining standing in his punctilious way of deferential grace until she was seated. Roberto stood with his back to the door, his pistol at his side.

This house was not so pretentious as Don Abraham's, there being nothing grand in its proportions at all, compared with the bright and beautiful homes which stand in that same valley today. It was a squat, flat building of gray adobe, severely simple, conforming in all particulars with the traditional plan of houses of the gentry in California of that period, following the older traditions of an older land. All rooms faced upon the patio, with doors admitting to it. In the front of the house there was the hall in the center, a room on either hand; in the wings the kitchen and sleeping rooms. The parlor in which this small party gathered this morning was not a large room. The morning sun did not brighten it, the house facing the west. Cedar beams across the ceiling, its dark draperies and somber furnishings, gave it a solemnity fitting to a solemn hour.

And this seemed to Helena a most solemn and portentous hour, indeed. Don Abraham's face was grave, his demeanor judicially severe. Roberto, standing with arms folded on his breast, appeared like one waiting to enforce the judgment of some stern and pitiless court. They might have

been officers of the Holy Inquisition, Helena thought, judged by the unsympathetic harshness of their faces, their fixed determination upon the business that lay in their hands.

Don Abrahan sat silent a little spell, drawing the written sheets of paper together before him, arranging them in a way that seemed to tell of his thoughts being detached from the action of his hands. Helena's heart was laboring as if it lay under a stone; her limbs trembled, her hands were cold. She did not know that Don Abrahan was a master of suspense; that every movement of his hand was calculated, every moment of silence gauged against the perturbation of her breast.

"There is a matter of gravity on our hands, Helena, my desired," Don Abrahan began, his measured words, his slowly lifted head, his deliberate, searching eyes, all adding to the weight of that cold stone which seemed pressing upon the warmth of her redundant heart. "If I have your permission, I will speak."

"Assuredly, Don Abrahan."

"We spoke last night, Helena, of your betrothal to my son."

Don Abrahan paused; his eyes sought the papers on the table, the first of which he lifted, seeming to read beneath.

"That is ended, Don Abrahan," Helena said, the tremor of her heart in her words.

"It is a heavy thing to speak of lightly, and in haste, as I said last night, my dear. Let us go

back a little way, let us reconsider. Do you realize the affront, the humiliation, the insult, you are laying on my son, my house, by this hasty, capricious act?"

"There is neither insult nor humiliation intended, sir. I realize that I could not be happy with your son. That is the first consideration. I could not honor him, love him, or even respect him, as a woman should the man she marries."

Helena's spirit began to lift, the dread to ease its compression on her bosom. She looked Don Abraham in the eyes, a flush enlivening her pale cheeks.

"In what way has my son forfeited his claim upon your respect, my love?"

"I told you last night."

"Rumors may easily grow into slanders between here and the capital," Don Abraham said, in stern reproof. "If we are to credit all our suspicions, believe all we hear, accept every small circumstance as damning evidence, we will soon drive happiness and tranquillity out of our lives. Who of us is pure in all things? Who has not transgressed?"

"The source of my information cannot be impeached," Helena replied. "If you have called this solemn court to try me, Don Abraham, you have exceeded any and all authority that I grant to your position and your years. I am free, I am in my right mind. I will not marry Roberto. You cannot force me to it, even with your valiant son guarding the door!"

“The small frivolities, the mild indiscretions — all this the world grants a man in his youth, Helena. It is different with a man.”

“Let it pass; there will be many ready to accept the defense. As for me, I cannot, Don Abraham.”

“It is strange that you should come to this conclusion at this late hour, Helena. There was no word of it before the last day of the fiesta, no word——”

“Two days after I left your house, Don Abraham, letters came from my friends in the capital. But I doubt, even without the things revealed to me——”

“Lies, slanders,” said Don Abraham, disdain in the swelling of his nostrils, the rocking of his head. “Have I not been young? It is the fashion to slander such.”

“Your son has an able advocate, Don Abraham,” she said, smiling a bit scornfully. “Do we have to go on with the discussion, only to come to nothing in the end?”

“It is soon done,” Don Abraham declared with sudden sternness, rising to his feet. “My son stands ready to forget the past, out of his great and honorable love for you, to accept you with all the taint of suspicion——”

“Don Abraham! Don Abraham!”

Helena sprang up, shocked, outraged. It seemed as if forbearance had broken with his words, that she would fly at him and tear out his tongue.

“He is generous enough, in the light of his great affection,” Don Abraham continued, hard in his tone, inflexible of purpose, “to close his eyes upon what would appear sufficient evidence to another, a less sophisticated man, and take you to his arms as his wife.”

“The rake, the libertine!” she denounced Roberto, turning on him furiously. “Oh, you have no words of your own, you coward!”

“Silence!” Don Abraham commanded. “He is under my interdiction, I speak for both. He is too generous to believe your intrigue with an inferior amounts to absolute guilt——”

“Intrigue! you viper!”

“More as an escapade of adventurous youth, a thing to be censured, but forgiven.”

“Generous gentleman!” she mocked. “And if I refuse to marry him, the penalty will be publicity, disgrace.”

“No. A gentleman learns early in life when to keep silent,” Don Abraham returned. “You will reconsider your hasty words?”

“No!”

“You will think slowly, and speak slower. My son forgives the escapade of the oak tree, he forgives——”

“Forgives! What absolution can he show for his own crimes?”

“He will forget what has passed, he will accept this restored compact as if you never had broken it by word or deed.”

“How magnificent!”

“Do you yield?”

“No, Don Abrahan, I do not yield. There is no act of purgation, there is no fire of penance, that can cleanse him in my sight. To add to his crimes against women, it is said he killed a man last night. Who was it? Why was it done, here at my very door?”

“We are coming to that,” Don Abrahan said.

He motioned her to her chair again, an invitation that passed unheeded. Seeing that she did not sit, he remained standing, lifting the papers from the table.

“It becomes necessary to tell you now what I have known these three days,” Don Abrahan said. “The insolent aggressions of the Americans have driven our patient nation to resent them at last. War has been declared; battles have been fought on the Rio Grande. The triumphant Mexican army is sweeping forward to Washington. The man whom my son challenged in the road last night was a spy, carrying intelligence to spies. This correspondence before me was taken from him. Part of it was addressed to you.”

Don Abrahan held up the written sheets, half a dozen or so in number. Helena put out her hand quickly, more in appeal than demand. Don Abrahan pressed the correspondence against his breast, denying her, lifting a checking hand. His face was forbidding, his accusing voice was cold.

“I have suspected Toberman a long time of

plotting with the Americans and traitors in the north, but I lacked absolute proof until this day. It was beyond the limit of reason to include you, Helena."

Helena was not thinking of herself that moment; she was not crushed and confounded as her silence might be misunderstood. Her heart was beating fast, the warm blood was surging into her brain, quickening it to all the alert resourcefulness that was her heritage. Toberman had escaped, Toberman was safe, thank God! That was her thought, that was her exultation. Toberman was riding free. For herself and her peril, she had no thought.

"Perilous as your situation is, Helena," Don Abrahan said, "there is a door open to your salvation. You are young, you are under the influence of this man who has had your affairs in his hands since your father's death. He has misled you, he has brought you to this unwittingly, he ——"

"No, Don Abrahan," she denied, lifting her head proudly.

There was something in her voice, the ring of it, the proud defiance, that started Roberto out of his pose before the door. His folded arms fell to his sides, his fingers shaped as if to snatch a weapon. He moved a step toward her, his eyes distended in astonishment of the spirit revealed.

"I offer you this door," Don Abrahan said, unheeding her defiance. "I trust in my heart you

will accept the exit from this most grave situation. Let this compact between you and my son continue, let us proceed at once to the priest and celebrate the marriage. My son has begged me to offer you this out of the manly love he bears you, Helena, and from no other consideration. Accept, and you will be relieved of this taint of treason. It will be an easy matter in such case to place the burden of guilt where it belongs, on the head of the traitor who involved you in this, innocently, we——”

“Roberto, forgive me!” Helena begged, turning to the young man impulsively, a light in her eyes that he never had seen before. “I have misjudged you. You must have a true, an honorable affection for me to offer me this.”

“May God judge between us!” said Roberto, with such feeling that his words trembled on his lips.

“There is something in you better than I knew,” she confessed, the honesty of her nature not permitting the covering of one little spark of gratitude. “I thought all the time you were anxious only to have my money and my lands, but this——but this——”

“The lands? curse them! The gold? sink it in hell!” Roberto said, flinging his arms wide, his head thrown back in his dramatic fervor.

“Forgive me if I have wronged you by word or thought, Roberto. There is much in you that is manly, much, I am sure, that is good. I owe

you the confession of that much. But the compact cannot be renewed. We stand parted, never to unite. I would not buy my life with the betrayal of a friend."

"Think——" Roberto began to plead.

"What a cowardly thing it would be," she seemed to conclude for him, but with a far different thought.

"If you refuse, it means the loss of your estate, degradation, imprisonment, perhaps death," Don Abrahan warned.

"Let it be so, then. I do refuse."

"What is this man, this alien who plays citizen for the purpose of introducing the enemy into this country, to you?" Roberto asked, perplexed, baffled, not able to understand. "Let him bear the blame, as he deserves to bear it. Nobody will believe you guilty."

"But I am guilty," she said, proud in the confession. "I have prayed for this war, I have prayed for the day when the United States army would march into this land——"

"Silence!" Don Abrahan commanded, in stern, loud voice.

"The cruelties and injustices, the oppression of the strong, the misery of the poor—all this would come to an end, all of it will come to an end, when the United States army marches here!"

"Helena Sprague, as a magistrate of the republic I arrest you on the charge of treason," Don Abrahan solemnly declared. "I seize your lands

and properties, in the name of the republic; I lay hold upon your cattle, your goods, your money, your effects, in the name of the republic. Such as spurn mercy when it is offered, must burn in the fire of justice.”

“Take them, then, and my life, if the republic wants it!” she said. She turned to Roberto, who stood by torn between loyalty to his country and love for its betrayer. “Toberman—is he gone, is he safe?” she asked.

“Toberman is under arrest, safely kept,” Don Abraham answered her. “I have sent to the pueblo for the military. Tomorrow Toberman will be shot as a spy.”

CHAPTER XI

THE VALOR OF SIMON

HENDERSON had waited all that day in the appointed place for Toberman, who was to bring him news of what he had learned regarding the feasibility of escaping out of that country by the northern road. It was within half an hour of sunset now, and no sign of Toberman.

Although he was well equipped with horse, pistol and clothing which Toberman had supplied him, out of his own resources, the overseer had given him to understand, placing the fugitive under no obligation on that score to the owner of the ranch, Henderson hesitated over making a start toward Monterey. Since coming to the Sprague ranch he had learned more of Abraham Garvanza's power and influence in that part of California. A feudal baron never lived who could stretch a longer arm.

The governor of California, now stationed at Los Angeles, that pueblo having been made the capital lately, was a man under Don Abraham's control. The forty soldiers who garrisoned the capital, given the choice between service in this distant land and completing their sentences for various felonies in the prisons at home, were at the beck and call of Don Abraham, the general in

command being a relative of the Garvanza family, owing his station to its wide influence.

Toberman had told Henderson, and Helena Sprague had confirmed it, that the news of his escape from Don Abraham's enforced service would have been carried to Monterey by the third day, incredible as it appeared to him. News spread with great rapidity among the Indians and lawless Mexicans who worked as vaqueros on the cattle ranches, and Don Abraham had posted a reward of twenty dollars, gold, for the fugitive's capture and return.

Twenty dollars gold on the California coast in those pastoral days was equal to four head of cattle. A laborer would toil many months to earn that much. A vaquero did not gain a sum like it in half a year's riding after the herds. It would not be a matter of enmity toward him, Henderson understood, but the plain business one of making a handsome sum of money quickly, that would set the hand of every man, high and low, between Los Angeles and Monterey against his passage.

But there was an obscure way through the mountains, Toberman had told him, long and rough, that might lead to freedom if a trustworthy guide could be found. There seemed to be none in his employ whom he would trust in that capacity. It was on this business that Toberman had engaged to return this day and report.

Henderson watched the valley for his coming from the peak of a hill which seemed a mountain

that had sunk into the earth, a feature common to those rugged foothills. There was spread in the broad valley, running up into the inlets of the canyons, a haze of such density that it seemed as if the sea must have swept in to reclaim its ancient domain. This was as blue as the smoke of wood-fires, the Indian summer haze of other lands intensified until it seemed almost palpable; blue as the upper ether of the clearest October skies.

This strange inflooding of what seemed smoke from mysterious and hidden fires obscured the view of the valley, where it stood at a level against the walls of the hills as definitely marked as water. Above this level the little mountains rose clear and sharp. Henderson gazed out over this transformation, moved by a strange feeling of friendliness and desire for this land.

An hour ago the sun had fallen brightly upon garish shoulder of scrub-patched hill, upon yellow break of sand in the valley among the green. It had revealed harshly the forbidding features of the country, as daylight strips an aged beauty of her sad pretense. Now a veil had been drawn; the sublimity of the change was such as hurt the heart with longing for the sympathetic vibration that could quiver with it and make it wholly understood.

Henderson gave up his vigil on the hill-top at dusk, returning to his camp. This was a little hut built of boulders from a mountain stream, laid together with mud, a sheep-herder's shelter against

the winter rains. The place was a sequestered canyon, many miles from the homestead of the ranch, unfrequented by herdsmen at this season. Toberman had assured the fugitive that he might rest in security there until his affairs took a better turn.

This feeling, doubtful at first, had gradually laid its spell over Henderson as the days passed without sight of any human invasion. Toberman had conducted him to the place secretly, at night, by cunning ways which he believed left no track. Henderson's surprise was the greater, as a consequence of all this caution, to find Simon sitting placidly in the cabin door when he came down from watching the valley for Toberman.

Simon sat with his long knees updrawn, hands idly hooked in front of them, in the patient, immobile fashion such as becomes a habit in people only who have served long in subjugation and waited without hope. The tragedy of his race was in his pose, the watcher who had been set over other men's treasures, none of which he ever was destined to touch or share. But in Simon's case, at least, it was only a racial trait. There was nothing of humility in him, even in the presence of Don Abraham, although of patience for long and unrewarded vigils he must have owned his share.

He rose at Henderson's approach, unfolding his thin length with considerable spryness, advancing with hand extended in demonstration of keen friendship.

“Is it you, my little friend Gabriel?” he hailed, great token of pleasure in his voice. “I thought you were dead, I thought the wolves had made a dinner on you. Come on, my boy—how are you, how have you passed?”

Henderson’s horse was picketed some distance down the canyon; Simon was directly in the way between them. Henderson distrusted the friendly show, although Simon appeared to be unarmed and quite genuine in his expression of pleasure. There seemed little warrant for drawing a weapon on him, although the thick growth of shrubs and small trees around the cabin might hide twenty of Don Abraham’s men.

Henderson replied to the flood of affectionate inquiry that all was well with him; asked of Simon’s family, according to the custom, shook hands with him, accepted a cigarette. He wondered whether Toberman had betrayed him, dismissing the suspicion at once as unworthy.

He could not know, certainly, of the little talk between Don Abraham and Simon the night before, or of the small pieces of gold that had passed from the patron’s hand in the dark. He could not have known, indeed, that the old men who sit in the sun, wrapped in introspection, see more than passes by them in the road.

“So, then, all is forgiven, my little Gabriel,” Simon hastened to explain, with evidence of great joy in his news. “Don Abraham has sent me, on the directions for finding you that the good John

Toberman gave us. I have come with Don Abraham's forgiveness in my hand for the wrong you did the good patron in running away from him. As for the little blow you gave Roberto, there is nobody in thirty miles that does not say bravo to that deed."

Simon found English too slow for his tidings. He trusted to his late pupil in his native idiom to understand.

"Toberman told you where to come, did he?"

Henderson questioned that declaration; it set a new current of suspicion and distrust running. Yet, on the other hand, Toberman might have sent Simon, saving himself the time from his activities that the journey would take. It seemed only the natural thing for a man of Toberman's consequence to do. He could not be expected to ride messenger in a matter that had lost its bottom like a barrel in the sun.

It must be that Don Abraham had seen a new light. Perhaps the long-expected news had come from the north that the United States had seized California and added it to its domain. In such case, Don Abraham's forgiveness would find a ready explanation.

"He says to tell you," Simon replied, "that there is no longer any need for you to think of going away to the north, and Don Abraham speaks in the same voice. Don Abraham says he will get you a ticket home in a ship that is in the harbor now, loading hides. It is a Boston ship, with such

trees sticking out of it that it made my head swim to look at the tops of them. Yes. I, myself, saw this ship three days ago at the harbor. So you will return?"

"Are you here alone, Simon? there's no treachery in this?"

"As I hope to have two teeth when I am ninety, I am here alone, Gabriel."

"Where is your horse?"

"Down there in the canyon with yours, like a man that has come to dinner with his friend."

"And Don Abrahan said he'd let it all pass, the little trouble with Roberto, and everything?"

"Don Abrahan said, 'Tell my little son Gabriel that all is forgiven.' He said the ship would sail in three days. We must hurry, Gabriel."

"First, we can't do better than imitate our horses," Henderson said, his confidence growing, suspicion all but dispelled. "Let's get some supper before we start, Simon. I'm hungry; your news is good for the appetite."

Simon was heartily in favor of the refreshment. He bestirred himself to assist, with much talk and many English oaths. The firelight revealed the same lively satisfaction in his face as quickened his words, as if Henderson's absolution warmed him like a fire built to cheer another man.

Although largely assured by Simon's manner of open honesty, Henderson watched him closely. He had heard the mule-driver air his peculiar morals often enough to ground a deep and abiding

distrust of his ability to do anything exactly straightforward. Simon was apparently unarmed, but Henderson suspected that a pistol was concealed somewhere in his loose clothing, ready to his hand.

“Don Abrahan has come to Helena Sprague’s ranch, where he is waiting to welcome you and take you to his breast,” Simon said, sitting in the light of the little fire after the hastily-prepared supper had been eaten. “We think he has found out something about you, that you are the son of a family, or something grand.”

“And Roberto? is he there?”

“Roberto went on to Monterey today, I heard it said. Seven doctors! what a dark night it is here in the hills!”

“It will be darker before it’s lighter. We’d better go.”

“Yes, the ship will not wait, Don Abrahan will wonder at our delay. What was that?”

Simon started, listening, hand lifted to impose silence.

“Coyotes, very likely,” Henderson replied, unconcerned. “They come around here at night.”

“It sounded like a horse.” Simon rose, leaning into the dark, listening hard. “If mine has got loose!”

He walked away a little distance, going softly, almost immediately disappearing in the dark, which was deeper for the wooded side of the canyon forming the background of the camp. Henderson

heard him swearing presently around the corner of the hut, disturbing the bushes softly as if he sought a passage through.

"A bird in the bushes, I think," Simon said, turning back. "Do you leave your fire uncovered these dry days?"

"I drown it," Henderson said.

"Go ahead, then; we must get down out of this dark place. Don Abraham will think I'm slower than seven doctors."

Henderson took up the pail to pour what water it contained over the dying fire. He was standing with it poised, held in both hands, when something came toward him with the swishing sound of a bird's wing from Simon's direction. Quick as the leaping of his intuitive warning that treachery was afoot behind him, Henderson stooped and sprang aside.

But Simon, with all the vaquero's cunning in casting the lariat, had planned his part too carefully, and risked too much, to fail. The rope fell true to calculation, tightening with Simon's vicious jerk, binding Henderson's arms to his body, one impotent hand within a few inches of his pistol. Simon threw all his sinewy strength into the struggle that followed, cutting Henderson's resistance short by dragging him to the ground. In a moment additional coils of rope webbed the over-trustful sailor, binding him hopelessly.

Nothing was said between the men while this treacherous capture and desperate resistance was

going forward. Now, when Simon had his prize securely tied and thrown on the ground, he stirred up the fire, added branches of dry cedar, and blew it to a blaze.

“So I, without a pistol on my body, take this smart Yankee and tie him like a hog,” Simon boasted, great and arrogant satisfaction in his voice. He lifted his arms to display his body free of a belted pistol, and sat down near the fire, his back against a small tree.

“I’ll remember this treachery, Simon, in the day that will come,” Henderson said.

“The day that is coming for you is one when Roberto will cut you to pieces with his whip,” Simon sneered. “Well, there is no hurry now. We will wait till daylight comes, then ride down the canyon. It would be foolish to arrive at midnight, for Don Abraham would be asleep.”

Simon smoked a while, legs stretched toward the fire, blowing smoke luxuriously, chin lifted high.

“What did I say to them when I left my pistol behind, all the foolish ones looking at me like men whose jaws were out of joint? I said, ‘I need no pistol for this work. I am going to catch a Yankee, and that is not the same as a man.’ When they see me come back with you, tied like a pig for sale in the plaza! Seven doctors, what a laugh!”

CHAPTER XII

THE BENEFICENCE OF DON ABRAHAN

SIMON timed his arrival at the ranch for the theatrical effect that the simplest peon appreciates and introduces in the common transactions of life. It is this appreciation of the dramatic that makes political upheavals and armed revolutions so popular among the Mexican people, and from this very reason that so many of them turn out small and farcical affairs. The gravity of serious business seldom lies behind them; the passing sensation is sought, rather than the lasting effect.

It seemed that a fiesta must be going forward at Helena Sprague's place that morning. Although the sun was not yet up, and the morning was cool almost to chilliness, vestiges of the night fog still trailing across the hills, the working people of the ranch appeared to be all astir, together with the men who had come with Don Abrahan, all dressed in white shirts and holiday gear.

Some notable must have arrived, grander than Don Abrahan, Simon concluded, seeing a few green uniforms of soldiers mingled with the little crowd of household people. It was a fine setting for a man of valor to make his dramatic entrance, his prisoner bound to the back of the horse that he drove ahead of him.

Simon was puzzled, as he drew near the house, to account for the silence that lay upon the scene. There was none of the quick talk and merry laughter of a holiday. The children were quiet as they clustered around their mothers, their black heads sleek from the comb. Simon had leisure to note all this before so much as a dog discovered his approach.

The people of the ranch were so much taken up with this big thing that had happened, and given them a holiday, or was about to happen with the same profit to themselves, that they had neither eyes nor ears for the coming of one who, let other men in that house be as famous as they might, would take his place among the notables of that hour. So Simon told himself, secure in the belief of his own importance.

Henderson was greatly depressed as he rode in bonds ahead of his captor, his feet tied under the horse's belly, inglorious figure as man might well present. He had marked more than Simon, keen as the mule-driver's eyes, and that nothing less than military guards posted in the patio, and that the soldiers who mingled with the people carried guns.

It was due to the presence of these soldiers, Henderson believed, that all was so silent about the place. He wondered, above the discomfort of the rope that bound his hands, whether such an armed demonstration could have been made on his account. He dismissed the thought at once,

in the light of his present situation and the means to which he owed it.

“Soldiers!” said Simon, riding abreast of his prisoner, scorn in his expression. “They will do to scare women and children, but for a man’s work it takes a man.”

Simon lifted himself in the saddle, distended his chest, trained his mustaches back with crooked fingers. The people gathered in the open space behind the ranch house, upon one side of which the dwellings of the laborers faced, the barns and corrals the other, now began to show interest in the riders who came from the direction of the hills. They began to point, some ran excitedly from group to group, leaving the soldiers to themselves. By the time Simon and Henderson reached the gate in the fenced enclosure, willing hands were there to open to them, sparing the dignity of Simon.

Soldiers stopped them as they rode forward toward the patio. Henderson’s concern for the safety of his friends grew so great that his own danger was all but forgotten. He did not know to what extent they were involved in the plotting to overthrow the Mexican government in California. Toberman had told him little of the matter, Helena scarcely more. They had seemed to be feeling him out without trusting him completely. He recalled Helena’s disappointment when he convinced her that he was nothing more than he appeared, not what she had thought him to be — an

agent of the northern plotters working under this disguise.

Henderson had little time to pursue these disturbing thoughts. The sentry halted them within a few rods of the patio; through the windows Henderson could see people passing back and forth hurriedly.

“Call Don Abrahan,” Simon commanded the soldier loftily.

The sentry turned to walk the length of his little beat, jerking hips and shoulders in the pride and contempt of his calling for a fellow who had nothing better to distinguish him than a pair of long mustaches and a captive foreigner tied about with a rope. His military ardor was so great that he kicked up a dust in his turning, marching away as if to dare Simon’s courage with the unguarded line behind his back.

There was a movement of activity among the sentries in the patio — four of them Henderson counted, each apparently guarding a door — when an officer appeared issuing a rather lengthy order, no words of which Henderson could hear. Don Abrahan came to a door, his brown velvet garb somber in contrast with the green and gold of the officer’s uniform. For a moment Henderson saw Roberto’s face at a window.

Two soldiers entered the room where Don Abrahan stood inside the door, their companions lined up on either side of the entrance. In a moment the two who had entered returned to the

patio, bringing John Toberman with them, a prisoner, hands bound at his back.

Roberto followed, with another officer whose rank must have been considerable, appraised by the grandeur of his uniform. The two soldiers who conducted Toberman fell in behind the least consequential of the officers, the prisoner between them, their comrades following. After the soldiers came Don Abraham and the most important military officer of them all, in gold braid, the black plume of his hussar cap standing high.

"Seven doctors! They've got a general for every man!" said Simon.

Henderson was at once astonished and alarmed by this portentous procession. It must be that Toberman was under military arrest, on his way to the pueblo for trial. But in such case why all this solemn parade? Henderson felt his throat constrict, his lips grow dry as if a parching wind blew in his face. This proceeding had all the formality of a set and studied program, one often rehearsed by the military men who were conducting it. There was something irrevocably final about it, as of a concluded and determined case. John Toberman already had been judged and condemned. They were taking him out to die.

Henderson quivered with resentment of this brutal proceeding, unjustified as he believed it must be. That this view was held by the Mexicans and Indians who had been under Toberman's authority on the ranch was evident in the precaution

taken to awe them into submission. They were as powerless in the face of that small force of soldiers as himself, bound in humiliation with his pistol still strapped about him.

The small procession approached the line where the sentries held back the silent, submissive, sorrowful people from approaching the house. Toberman's head was bare, his thick, dark hair was in disorder. He evidently had not seen Henderson, absorbed as he was in this great affair which made the thought of other men and their troubles draw away and vanish, but now as he passed, only a few yards between them, he lifted his head.

Henderson marked, to remember all his years after, the baffled, perplexed, almost incredible expression of Toberman's face. It was like that of a man who walked in a distracting dream, which he knew to be a dream, and blamed himself for the weakness that would not let him wake. It seemed that he did not credit the fact of his peril; that he did not believe these people whom it was his daily habit to override and despise, had come to their strength over him and were about to take away his life.

Henderson's amazing thought was that he must startle Toberman to a sense of his situation. If he could wake him out of that stunned dullness he might make a heroic effort, fling them down, bound as he was and escape.

"Toberman!" Henderson called, in the voice of one who rouses a sleeper; "Toberman!"

Toberman interpreted that wild hail as perfectly as the man who gave it. He swept a quick glance around the place, over the faces of the men who had come and gone all those years at his bidding, who, in the awe of this greater authority, would not lift a hand to save him now; looked down the far-spreading valley where the sun was rising redly out of the thinning fog, shook his head sadly, as if saying he knew that it was all a dream, but one out of which he would wake no more.

“Don Abrahan!” Henderson appealed, startling his horse into sudden bound by clamping its sides with his tied heels, “stop this thing, Don Abrahan! That man is an American, you can’t——”

A sentry sprang forward, menace in his uplifted piece; another caught the bridle, hurled the horse back, while Simon, roused out of his interest in the tragic pageant, drew hard on the rope that ran from his saddle-horn to the bit of Henderson’s horse. Don Abrahan, not turning his eyes, not averting his fixed countenance, passed on as if he had not heard. In the dust that rose around him from his trampling horse, Henderson saw Simon leering at him dark threats.

“You are an American, also, and see where you are!” Simon said. “In a second I’ll make a hole in you that the bees can fly through, you Yankee peddler out of a ship!”

They were placing Toberman with his back against the adobe wall of the sheep corral, afraid

of him to the end, denying him the grace of dying with hands unbound. The officer of the squad advanced, a handkerchief in his hand, offering to cover the condemned man's eyes, not knowing that one who had sailed the seas so long, and looked familiarly on death so many times, would scorn to have its approach hidden from him now. Henderson could not hear his words, but he saw him draw himself up valiantly, and the officer stand back. The sun was yellow on the adobe wall above Toberman's head when he fell.

An overpowering rage swept Henderson, hot as a flame. He strained to lift his bound body in the saddle, to raise his bound arms in his denunciation.

"You damned cowards!" he shouted, voice vibrant with passion. "You damned, infernal cowards!"

There must have been something in the timbre of Henderson's voice that carried the realization to the very hearts of the men who had encompassed that deed that a delegate from a stronger race was among them; that they had heard the voice of vengeance from a source of authority. Even if they did not understand the words, the soldiers who had fired into Toberman's body felt the thought that they conveyed. They turned, their smoking weapons clutched, as if the tramp of cavalry had struck upon their ears.

Don Abraham wheeled, shocked out of his studied dignity. The gilded and braided general in the plumed cap turned to look at this man who

had sounded denunciation in the voice of judgment.

The smoke of the guns stood heavy between Henderson and the adobe wall. He could see Toberman's white shirt, his body stretched full-length where he had fallen on his face. The general spoke to Don Abraham, looking again toward Henderson. They conferred together, as if considering some stroke of punishment fitting to the affront.

The officer in command of the firing squad gave a harsh command to the shrinking ranch laborers, who had been compelled to assemble and witness the degradation and death of the man whom they had respected and obeyed, some of them all their lives. A few went forward with reluctant feet, lifted Toberman's body and bore it away.

Henderson was careless of all consequences to himself, superior to the helplessness of his present state. The weariness of lying all night in ropes under Simon's unfeeling eyes was forgotten, the pain and stiffness dissolved out of his muscles and was gone. When Don Abraham and the military commander approached, he leaned in the saddle, straining on his bonds.

"Don Abraham Garvanza, you have done a cowardly and atrocious thing!" he charged.

Don Abraham stopped, looking Henderson sternly in the eyes, gazing long, as if sounding him for the courage and manhood that lay within.

"So a traitor has died, so traitors must die," Don Abraham said.

“The curs that have murdered him shall answer to the United States government,” Henderson declared, as positively as if the power lay in his own hands.

“The United States government will be on its knees before Santana in a few weeks, my good Gabriel. Haven’t the traitors with whom you have associated since you left the shelter of my house told you this? There is war, Gabriel; the United States forces have been defeated on every hand; they fly, Santana’s victorious troops pursue them to the shadow of Washington itself. Who, then, is there left to bring this terrible retribution you threaten, my little son?”

“There is one, at least, if no more,” Henderson replied.

“That might be yourself, then, my fine Gabriel?”

“Even myself, Don Abrahan.”

Henderson’s voice was steady when he took upon himself that obligation of retribution for the deed he had witnessed in the pain of his helplessness but a few moments past. It was so firm, and so deep in its gravity, that the braided general—and he was of no less rank, though his forces numbered but forty men—at Don Abrahan’s side looked at the speaker, his eyes drawn as if to pierce him to the marrow. Perhaps he sounded deeper than Don Abrahan, and found the man.

Not so Roberto, who had come up from his conversation with the other officer to stand beside his

father. He jerked his shoulder, his nostrils twitched in a sneer, a smile parted his heavy, petulant lips.

“A man must be valiant and vigorous for such an undertaking, Gabriel,” Don Abraham said with sinister gentleness, that light of laughter that was not yet a laugh lying deep in his eyes. “There is a process for hardening a man for a task like that, of testing the sufficiency of his fortitude and valor. We shall come to this. Simon, you have done well; you shall have your reward. Take the ropes from this pig that you have brought me.”

Simon, who had disdained to set foot on the ground until this moment, flung himself from the saddle and set about undoing the rope that bound Henderson’s feet.

“Soldiers!” Simon scoffed, bending at his task; “five of them to kill one old Yankee! And I, myself, have caught a better one, with not even the shadow of a pistol at my side.”

“You have done well,” Don Abraham assured him. “Santana’s army has no braver man.”

Henderson’s legs were stiff; he staggered when he came to the ground. Don Abraham looked at him critically, that reflection of inner laughter deepening in his eyes.

“General, permit me the services of two soldiers with strong arms,” he requested. “There is too much insolent blood in this young man; some of it must be let out through the skin of his back.”

“With great pleasure, Don Abraham,” the gen-

eral granted, in unmistakable endorsement of the program.

“There was a compact,” said Roberto, stepping forward, addressing his father. “You will recall that certain matters in the business of this runaway peon were to be left in my hands.”

“Your pardon, my son. That is so. Gabriel, you will see that I am a beneficent man. I forego your deserved chastisement and deliver you to the merciful hands of Don Roberto, your master from this moment. Let us go to breakfast, General Verdugo. I trust your appetite is keen.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRICE OF MERCY

DON ABRAHAN'S father had built that house as the houses of men of consequence in his native country, who had daughters and dignities to guard and cherish, had built theirs since time of old. Daughters and the dignity of houses too often fall together, especially in a country where men are not to be trusted alone with women, except where bars divide them. Don Abraham's father had set strong bars into the oak sills of the windows opening upon the patio, perhaps not so much in the belief that the women of his household were weak, as in his knowledge that the men of his nation were vile.

Don Abraham's sisters had watched the moon through these bars; his daughters had sent their longings winging away to lovers' hearts between them. Helena Sprague, prisoner in the republic's name, under charge of a heavy crime, occupied an apartment looking upon this patio, into which many ladies had sighed.

In her room there were two windows in a little projecting balcony, a sort of stage box for witnessing the drama of adoration, somewhat higher from the ground than a tall cavalier's head. A lady might reach down her hand to be kissed by one on

the outside, but her lips must remain unkissed behind the bars.

Doña Carlota occupied the adjoining room, a connecting door between, the key to which she was careful to keep close, fearful of Don Abraham's wrath if Helena should chance to lock her out and pass an hour free from her espionage. Helena had spared her the fire and anger of her scorn for the betrayal of Henderson, which had resulted in the visitation of Don Abraham and the attendant tragedies. Yet Helena's cold, white silence was more terrible to Doña Carlota's fleshy bosom than any torrent of words. In words one had it over, soon to forget; in silence such as this girl's there was a constant threat.

Almost immediately after the military execution of John Toberman, which Helena's pleadings had been unavailing to stay for an hour, Don Abraham had given orders for Helena's removal to his own house. The journey had been made by carriage, under guard of soldiers, pushed rapidly, without regard for Doña Carlota's bulk, or her protestations that her bones would be broken before the descent of the pass was so much as begun.

They had arrived at Don Abraham's house in the middle of the afternoon. Now the sun was gone from the patio, the canyons were filling with the blue haze of evening. Since her arrival Helena had not moved from the place where she sat before the window, gazing at the stern, gray hills.

She seemed a prisoner without hope, Doña Car-

lota thought, smiling comfortably and knowingly to herself. Youth did not understand that discipline, to be effective, to result in healthful regeneration, must inflict its pain. And this was only discipline, applied for the purpose of setting Helena's feet in the way of their duty again. Don Abraham had told her that.

Through the connecting doorway Doña Carlota looked at the girl, her smile fat as a Benedictine friar's, a certain softness of affection in her eyes. Doña Carlota caressed the tidy slenderness of Helena's body with her affectionate glance, as if she had a half-formed notion of going over and caressing the long braid of hair that swung like a lissom vine down her back, swaying when she moved restlessly from time to time, her hand on the window-sill. That was a strong hand for a girl, Doña Carlota thought, one with the power of the Yankee captain in it, one that might well open the casement and tear out the restraining bars.

Helena was paler than youth should be, thought Doña Carlota. A little color out of a box spread artfully on the cheeks, a little darkening under the eyes in the cunning way the girls of her own youth knew so well to enhance the wistfulness of those bright gems. Yet, without the color Helena was pleasant to the eye, warm-feeling to look upon, a sense of satisfaction in the complete fineness of her face and form.

Helena was *linda*. There is no English word exactly for *linda*, which is more than pretty, not yet

to say beautiful; wholesome, clean, perhaps we might say, or even fresh, or fair, but all inadequate in approach to the fine shading of that little word. A girl that did not set men mad, Doña Carlota said, but one that drew their respect and held them at the distance that men belong. From a slip, as one sees a vine grow, Doña Carlota had seen this girl struggle out of childhood and mount strong upon the trellis of life. Much like a vine, indeed, thought Doña Carlota, that one sets in love beside the door.

Now the vine had come to blossom in the fresh, fragrant beauty of its young strength. And everybody knew, Doña Carlota said, that a vine standing alone did not come to bear the best fruit. No; there must be at least two vines, close side by side in the blossom-time to make the fruit perfect, full and sweet. Why it was so, Doña Carlota did not know, being neither a botanist nor a biologist. But that it was an eternal truth, she knew as well as the wisest.

Don Abraham was calling outside her door. She put down her pleasant speculations, turning to answer. What a man Don^o Abraham was! what impatience with a woman in his way of calling at her door! Here he must come with his business to break in and disturb her just when she was regaining her tranquillity and getting back her breath from that terrific journey through the pass.

“Don Abraham waits your attendance,” Doña Carlota announced, returning to Helena’s door.

“I am weary of Don Abraham’s importunities,” Helena said. “Tell him that.”

“I will carry no such word to Don Abraham!” Doña Carlota returned.

“Let him wait, then.”

Doña Carlota came back with all the haste she could impose on her fat legs, with all the severity she could summon out of her colorless soul.

“As a magistrate, Don Abraham commands your attendance,” she said. “He trusts, for the dignity of this house, that it will not be necessary to say more. Will you see me humbled, called like a servant——”

Helena seemed to push the words back into her aunt’s mouth with the impatient sweep of her hand as she rose to obey the magistrate’s summons. She stood a moment to look again out of the window as if to take farewell of a familiar and well-loved scene. When she passed slowly out of the room, head bent as if she walked under a heavy penance, Doña Carlota hastened to the window to see for herself what there might be in that fascinating landscape to hold a girl’s eyes and make them reluctant to turn away.

There was the yellow road at the head of the lane of olive trees, where it curved eastward to strike the pass into the valley which they had left but a few hours since. There was bitterness, and there was scorn in Doña Carlota’s voice as she spoke, beating her finger-ends against the small thick window-pane.

“It is the baseness that is in her blood that turns her eyes to watch for him, the Yankee sailor out of a dirty ship! Would to God Don Abrahan had stood him against the wall this morning along with the other one!”

Don Abrahan was alone in his office; he rose, bowing in his slow-bending, gravely courteous way, seeming to offer Helena the house and all it contained by the grand sweep of his hand when presenting her a chair. She stood, hand on the chair, as if she questioned his purpose in commanding her, and had but a moment to remain for his reply. She was pale and harried by the anguishing recollection of that morning's cruel deed, strained by an oppressive anxiety for the future, but not her own.

“If you will be seated, my child,” Don Abrahan seemed to implore, so great his deference. “There may be much to say.”

Don Abrahan took up certain papers from many on the table, holding them in his hand like a master about to hear his pupil recite. He sat so a little while, a cloud coming over his face, playing, as he knew well from his heritage of a thousand years of cruel men how to play, upon her suspense and fear.

“There is a matter that I would approach without giving you pain,” he said. “Yet I am afraid you will misinterpret my motive, and my tongue halts.”

“Does it concern the young stranger, Mr. Hen-

der person?" Helena inquired, lifting her eyes suddenly. "Have you murdered him, too?"

"I did not intend to speak of the sailor—a trifle, a thing of no consequence."

"Since you have spoken, Don Abrahan, tell me where he is, what you are going to do with him. He was under my poor protection. I have a right to know how far my hospitality has been shamed by the armed tyrants who invaded my home."

"He is not dead; no man holds him in such account as to want his life, as far as I know. It is not the custom to honor peones who desert their masters by so much as hanging them. You understand the country's customs—you are no alien here."

"What have you done with him? I have a right to know."

"He will be brought here today, to take up his labors again," Don Abrahan answered shortly. "Now, for this matter that I called you here to confer upon."

Don Abrahan lapsed away again into that suspended introspective pause. So the master of the torture paused in the melancholy chamber of the inquisition, calculating the utmost strain the tendons of his stretched victim could bear without snapping. The same greedy glint must have shone in his eyes as enlivened Don Abrahan's that moment, watching the young woman at the end of his great oak table over the paper's edge.

Helena sat with hands loosely clasped in her lap.

Strong hands, large for a woman, Don Abrahan made note; hands that might drive a dagger into a man's heart. Her head was bent slightly. If her heart went faster for any threat in Don Abrahan's manner, her face did not reveal it. Don Abrahan watched the thin nostrils for a betraying tremor, the calm forehead for the drawing of the brows. She remained as placid outwardly as unshaken water.

"The fact of your disloyal conduct to your country has not been published yet, Helena," Don Abrahan resumed. "Fortunately, it was not necessary to reveal to the military authorities anything that implicated or involved you in order to secure the conviction of Toberman, renegade traitor, thing of the vilest!"

"He was not a traitor," Helena denied, flashing under the charge against her dead friend, surprising Don Abrahan mightily. He had looked to see her subdued to a woman's place by this. "All he worked for, all I helped him in, was for peaceful annexation to the United States."

"It is treason, even in time of peace," Don Abrahan corrected her, magisterial, severe. "Put a guard on your tongue, Helena. Such speech in the hearing of others would lead to something that I might not be able to stop."

"It was a savage deed of personal vengeance, Don Abrahan, against a man you would not have dared to face," she said.

"We will not open again what we have discussed

and closed," Don Abrahan returned, harsh, final, almost savage.

"How will you answer when the strong friends of that murdered man demand an accounting of you?"

"It is folly to speak of such things, Helena. The Americans never can overcome Mexico, they are of inferior breed, their valor is in their heels. If you look forward to such a day for your own deliverance your heart will die. Your deliverer is before you; I call you here to offer you a door to liberty, to life. Do not provoke me to close it in your face."

"I believe it is a custom with you, Don Abrahan, to sell your beneficence at a price. What am I expected to pay?"

"Nothing is wanted from you, Helena, nothing is asked — but justice. There is no price, but there is such a thing as recompense."

"If you can name a wrong," she said, in the conviction of innocence.

"We shall come to that. As I have said, the fact of your treason, even of your arrest, has not been officially proclaimed. No notice of seizure has been posted on your house and lands; your effects are guarded by men whom I trust. This written evidence, sufficient, I am afraid, to bring you long imprisonment, if not death, is known only to me and my son. With it removed, with no witness to come forward to disclose what it contained, the case against you will fall."

Don Abraham paused, eyes fixed on the warehouse across the dusty courtyard. A little while so; then he shook the paper in his hand as if to rouse himself from wandering after unprofitable things — perhaps justice and mercy were among them — tossed it from him, took up another.

“And I am certain you are coming to the price I am to pay to bring this happy end around,” Helena said.

Don Abraham was a keen man; the scorn of her voice was not lost on him. Likewise he was a hard man, upon whom sarcasm could not make a scar.

“There is such a thing as recompense for a loss,” he said, with the tentative suggestion of a bribe-seeker. “My son was to marry you. Through your refusal to carry out the contract, he loses your lands and property. I have drawn a deed, antedating this crisis in your affairs. It is one little paper balancing another, Helena. For the deed I give you this. My memory is erased; the foul crime of treason will not stand against your name.”

Don Abraham had come to it, and come to it boldly. Now that he had no further need of playing with words to lead up to his purpose in his way of ancient diplomacy, he could be as blunt as any Yankee captain that ever sailed the seas. He looked Helena straight in the eyes, his hard, thin face unsympathetic as bone.

“So the case stands,” he said.

“I have heard it,” she replied.

“It will be a sale for a consideration, and what consideration, indeed, is more precious to youth than life?”

“Life with honor is a precious thing, Don Abraham. But what of General Verdugo, a greedy, unscrupulous man? What of the soldiers who rode here guarding me? Who is going to hush them and keep them still?”

“There will be no evidence—rumors are not evidence. Besides, I will send you safely out of the country. There is a British warship in the harbor now; you can pass for an American woman fleeing the dangers of the country with which your own is at war.”

“I could, without much pretense,” she agreed, with peculiar stress. “But I am not going to sign over my property to you, Don Abraham. You would not dare bring a charge of treason against me, a not so very far distant relation. Do you suppose the attainder could dishonor me, my name, and leave your own unclouded? No. I will not sign the deed, Don Abraham; I will not give up my home, and all that I hold dear, to you.”

“There is no other way to escape the penalty; all other doors are locked. You have the memory of Toberman fresh. The same fate threatens you; it is so near its breath moves your hair.”

“I will not sign the deed, Don Abraham.”

“As God judges between us, Helena, there is no other way. General Verdugo knows enough that I must silence him at a heavy price. I would not tell

you this, but your obstinate blindness wrings it from my heart."

"Let the thieves fall out, then. Maybe the innocent will profit by it."

"Innocent!" he repeated, bitterly discounting the word. "You plot to sell your country for a price——"

"Of liberty to all men," she said.

"Liberty! These sweat-sour peones would get drunk on liberty; they would cut all our throats in a week."

"They would pay as they have been paid. It is the nature of man."

"And if you do not sign, Miss," Don Abrahan struck the table with the folded deed to solemnize his words, "by the sacred blood, you will be shot, as Toberman was shot!"

"I'll never sign it, Don Abrahan."

"Consider it in the night, when the terror of death comes to a man in its blackest form," he counseled. "I will give you until morning. Beyond that I cannot protect you; the matter will have passed out of my hands. Verdugo is threatening. He is a wolf; there is no mercy in his breast. He has smelled your gold, and it is like blood to a lion."

"You are all base, all cowards," she said, rising with her denunciation. "Don Abrahan Garvanza, when the United States soldiers step ashore from their ships you will meet men, such men as you heard this morning denounce you, challenge and

defy you, in his bonds. You will feel this country tip toward the sea beneath their weight. Shoot me if your greed demands the sacrifice, but consider how you will answer the United States soldiers when they come marching to your door."

Helena left him. Don Abrahan, his hands cold in something that was not all rage, stood gaunt and hollow, his brown clothing loose upon his limbs, looking hard at the door through which she passed.

CHAPTER XIV

A DAGGER AGAINST THE BARS

HELENA, watching at her window as day grew faint on the hills, saw a small cavalcade arrive at the turn of the road beyond the olive lane, bringing Gabriel Henderson a prisoner to the ranch. One rider came before him, one on either hand, and Roberto himself, with pistols in his belt, closed the road behind. Henderson's hands were bound at his back.

Helena had only a brief sight of the prisoner as the dusty riders came sweeping at a lively trot down the road and turned into the lane. She knew the torture of the long ride with hands bound behind him must have been a great trial on the sailor's endurance, but he seemed fresh and strong, and sat as erect in his saddle as Roberto himself. She knew well that his unbroken spirit still looked bravely out of his laughing eyes.

"The servant will bring our supper to these rooms; that is the direction of Don Abrahan," Doña Carlota opened the door to announce.

"You may have my share of Don Abrahan's bounty, Aunt Carlota," Helena said, her white face close to the window bars, the sash open to admit the cool, scented evening wind.

"You must eat, my child. How long? Why,

it has been since yesterday that you have not eaten! You will die famished — it is a mortal sin to starve one's self to death."

"I have no heart for food, Aunt Carlota," Helena sighed.

"Three days is as long as any Christian being can live without eating, and it is now more than one. You must eat, my little dove."

"I have a banquet of bitter herbs tonight. I shall not die of hunger."

"You should not be bitter in your heart toward Don Abraham, my sweet pigeon. What Don Abraham proposes is only a subterfuge to save your property; in the end he will give it back to you again. Don Abraham has told me this with his own mouth."

"Don Abraham has been more generous to you than he has been to me."

"He is a good man, Helena; a kind and gentle man. 'Pray for me, Doña Carlota,' he requested me not an hour ago."

"Eat your supper first, then, Auntie Carlota. You will need great strength and endurance for that task."

"You must not scoff at prayers," Doña Carlota rebuked her.

"Not I."

Helena was standing before the window, the long leaves of which opened into the room. Her hands were white on the bars where she grasped them as if to draw herself to the window-ledge.

Doña Carlota leaned forward to study her sharply in the fast-falling gloom.

“You will not eat?” she asked.

“No. Please close the door when you begin. I only want to be alone.”

“You would not run away?”

“Yes, if I could. If I had an ax I’d break down these bars. Yes. Perhaps you’d better tell that to Don Abraham.”

“I tell Don Abraham? Don Abraham hears nothing from me!”

“While you are praying, Aunt Carlota, say several for yourself.”

“He hears only what is for your good,” Doña Carlota amended for the benefit of her own conscience, mumbling it as she closed the door. She closed it noisily, to show her displeasure, then opened it softly wide enough to admit a feather or a sound.

Doña Carlota fell asleep after her heavy supper, a tall, fresh candle on the table at her side, her feet short of the floor as she lay back in the great arm-chair which Don Abraham had provided for her comfort. But she had locked the door leading into the patio, and was sitting on the key. Helena knew her habit in the way of keys. As well try to beat down the door of two-inch oak with her bare hands as to remove Doña Carlota from the key without waking her, sluggish as her slumber was, raucous as her snore.

Helena returned to her own dark room from a

hopeless little hope that Doña Carlota might have forgotten the key, to close her window against the chill of night. Her own name came to her, pronounced in questioning accent of appeal, little louder than a sigh.

“Who calls?” she asked, her face close to the bars.

“It is I, Roberto.”

“Oh, Roberto,” she said, the strong leap of her heart falling low, the quick fire of a great new hope sinking again in despair. Roberto! Who but Roberto would be free to come, indeed!

“Come close, Helena; my words are for your ear alone.”

“I am near, Roberto.”

But she had drawn away at the sound of his name, unconsciously, perhaps, with the recession of her hope. Who was there but Roberto to come, indeed?

“Doña Carlota must not hear, Helena.”

“She is asleep; the door is closed between us. Why do you come in this secret manner, Roberto? What do you want to tell me?”

She heard his breath near, and the soft exploration of his hands upon the bars. The great pepper tree was dark behind him, the moon was not yet up. She could see him dimly, head and shoulders above the window-sill.

“There, I am up,” Roberto panted. “I am standing on Don Felipe’s stool out of his office.”

“And whose ambassador are you now?” she

asked, prepared for some new piece of subtlety and deceit.

“My own. I have heard of your refusal to sign away your estate, Helena. I applaud your resolution. But you cannot stand before the forces that will be brought against you tomorrow, Helena. You must either yield to my father’s desire in the matter, or suffer a thing that my dread will not let me name.”

“And you have come to counsel me to sign away all that is mine to save you from the thought of this terrible word, Roberto?”

“I have come to offer you freedom,” Roberto whispered, his words hot in their eagerness, it seemed, his face pressed close to the bars. She felt his breath on her hand.

“What is your price, then, Roberto?”

There was not even sarcasm in her tone; only the low note of one who had spent her illusions, and had no more interest in man’s devices of lure and deceit.

“Price? It is I who will pay the price, it is I who will fling everything away for you! Do you not know the voice of love, Helena?”

“I have heard it so seldom, Roberto,” she replied softly, in sorrow. She touched his hand, seen dimly white on the window-bar. “Forgive me, Roberto. I did not know.”

“They will have your property whether you go or stay, Helena, my father and General Verdugo, between them. There is only a little time — quick!

The bars are not so strong, the wood can be broken, the adobe can be torn out beneath the sill on this side."

"But what, Roberto, what then?" she asked, bewildered by his impetuosity, his apparent sincerity in whatever it was he devised.

"To the priest and be married, and then — what God wills!"

"There have been so many deceits," she said, turning many considerations in her thoughts, but not among them that of paying Roberto's price for the doubtful liberty that he offered.

"There is no deceit, Helena. I will fling everything away, I will——"

"What is there for you to throw away, Roberto?" she asked, impatient of what seemed a hollow protestation.

"My father's friendship, my inheritance — all!"

"No; that is too much, Roberto."

"It is nothing."

"You might be sorry tomorrow, getting so little for so much."

"I have loved you long," he said, with such simple sincerity that touched her heart. "I have come to you now to redeem all that is past. I ask you to believe me — only that."

"But tomorrow, and the days after? Roberto, you know that I am called a traitor. I am under the shadow of death."

"My love absolves you."

“But you could not save me if they determined to have my life.”

“We will go to the north, Helena, among your friends. In Sonoma the Americans have already raised a flag—do you know of this?”

“A flag? the American——”

“Of the Republic of California.”

“That will not do,” she said, disappointed in the news. “California cannot stand as a republic.”

“But the Americans will come; I am not deceived as my father is, Helena. I know they will come.”

“Yes, they will come, Roberto.”

“And all men may look for justice with good reason then. Your lands will be returned to you; mine, perhaps. Who knows?”

“Who knows?” she echoed.

“Doña Carlota wakes?” he whispered, straining against the bars, something in her tone that startled him.

“She sleeps on.”

“We must hasten. You will come?”

“If I knew, if I knew, Roberto!”

“If you knew, my desired?”

“That you loved me—oh, Roberto! so much better than enough!”

“I’ll prove to you by the devotion of my life——”

“But now,” she insisted, “but now. How am I to know this moment if you love me even well enough?”

“I would kill a man to prove how well I love you!”

“Roberto, but would you give one life?”

“A thousand lives if they were in my power.”

“Just one, and I will do all that you desire. Roberto”—her hand found his again, she nestled on the deep window-sill close to him—“if you will let Gabriel Henderson go free, if you will see that he reaches Monterey in safety, that is all I ask.”

“You ask this of me?” Roberto spoke quickly, eagerly, she thought.

“I ask it of you, Roberto. He will find a way from Monterey to go back to his people, his home.”

“And if this is granted?”

“The moment he sends me word that he is safe among friends in Monterey, I swear I will do all that you desire.”

“So—yes—your hand, your hand!”

Roberto spoke quickly, in the incoherence of a strong and sudden resolution, the excitement of it thrilling in his tone. She felt his hand groping between the bars, caught his wrist, laid her own hand in the grasp of his ardent fingers.

“You love him too much!” said Roberto, drawing her suddenly against the bars. “By the sacred blood, you die!”

Helena struggled hard against him, knowing his purpose was to draw her down within his dagger’s reach.

“Roberto! I will alarm the house!”

“By the sacred blood!”

Helena's free hand grasped a bar as Roberto's dagger clashed on the iron. She threw herself back, breaking free from his vengeful embrace. His weapon struck the floor with a sharp clatter as he clutched to save himself a fall.

“Who is it?” Doña Carlota demanded, her voice thick with sleep, shaken in terrific fright.

“I am closing the window, Aunt Carlota,” Helena answered, in calm, assuring tone.

CHAPTER XV

CONCERNING A PATRIOT

GABRIEL HENDERSON often had speculated on the purpose of that barred embrasure high in the side of the warehouse wall. It was little more than a slit in the blank face of the ugly brown adobe, perhaps eight or nine inches deep and twice as wide. Heavy oak sills held the strong bars securely; a strong oak plank inside them closed the slight vent, or whatever it was designed to be.

The place must be the repository of something of extraordinary value, he had supposed. In all his duties about the warehouse, none of them ever had brought him into the room of this barred window. He often thought of inquiring of Don Felipe the purpose of it. Now he had been enlightened without inquiry.

It was the cell of Don Abrahan's private prison, the penitential place where the wills of strong men who rose at times in defiance of the patron's authority were broken. And if not their spirits, then their bodies. Don Abrahan's father had built it, and employed it in his day. Many a man's life had gone out in the torture of starvation and thirst within those thick, brown walls, the heavy plank locked at the barred slit to sequester even his dying groan.

Don Felipe had come with the key to open this prison at his young master's command, and there they had left Henderson, hands bound as they had taken him from the horse. Felipe had the consideration to command Simon, whose reach was long, to unlock the slab that closed the slit of window and admit a breath of new air. In the little light left of that sad day, Henderson was able presently to see the space that contained him.

The cell was about eight feet long and half as wide, the ceiling at least twice the height of Henderson's body above his head. The floor was earth; there was not even a straw in the place to contribute to the comfort of one whose misfortunes brought him within the embrace of its high, blank walls.

Henderson's arms pained him cruelly, for Roberto had ordered his ropes drawn hard that morning after they had freed his hands for a little while to let him eat and drink. Since then he had not been refreshed. He was suffering from thirst, which asserted itself above the turmoil of his thoughts, although hunger had no place in the anxiety of his situation. John Toberman's fate stood before him as a forecast of his own.

Long after nightfall Simon came, bringing a candle and food. He released Henderson's hands, laughing over his numbed efforts to lift the pitcher of water to his lips, offering no assistance. Compassion was not in him, nor his kind. Simon stood with his back to the door while Henderson chafed

his hands, much diverted to see that the congested blood had distended and burst the sailor's sea-hardened skin.

"Eat," Simon directed. "Don't sit here all night rubbing your hands like an old woman over a charcoal pot. A man has to get to his bed. I wouldn't have brought you so much as a bean if Don Roberto hadn't given sharp orders to feed you well. He wants you to have strength for tomorrow. A man suffers more if he is strong. Eat, curse you in the seven places!"

Simon opened the door to kick through a heap of straw when he saw the prisoner engage himself with the earthen pot of beans.

"Here, Don Gabriel," he said in mockery, "here comes your bed. It is more than many a poor peon has this night to lay his bones on—sweet straw that has not been even picked over by the mules. Well, Don Roberto is kinder to you than I would be—kinder than Santana is to the Yankees he catches along the Rio Grande. They say he burns them, fat scoundrels that they are, to light his camp at night."

Henderson did not grant Simon the satisfaction of so much as a word, although he contrasted the fellow's present ferocity with the friendliness of the past, thinking how quickly tyranny will grow into a rank, foul thing from a so insignificant seed. Simon closed the door after shutting an inner grated barrier that swung back against the wall, then opened it again, candle in hand, as if to re-

fresh himself by the sight of the chequered shadows on the prison floor.

“Don Roberto has made me your keeper, in due reward for my bravery in catching you alone, with only my naked arm,” he said. “Sleep, then, Don Gabriel, Don Marinero, Don Yankee, happy to know that you are watched over by a man who is as strong and as vigilant as an angel. An ant could not pass me where I lie outside your door. And tomorrow, tomorrow!”

Simon made his appearance early next morning, bringing a plentiful breakfast. He did not stay to gossip, or to take away the few dishes. He was bristling with excitement as he pushed the board upon which he had carried the breakfast from the kitchen beneath the inner barred door.

“There is the devil to pay around this place today,” he said. He locked the thick oak door and hurried off. Henderson heard him running through the empty room beyond.

Henderson had noted an unusual commotion around the patron's dwelling for that early hour. Horses had been ridden into the courtyard, where they stood stamping off the flies which clustered on their legs. After a time they had been ridden out again, rapidly. There had been much passing to and from between the patron's mansion and the direction of Don Felipe's office, the stables, the houses of the laborers on the estate; much talking when men met and paused, voices pitched in the undertone of guarded excitement.

Henderson had not been able to clamber up the crumbling adobe to lift his eyes to the little window. But buried as he was behind four feet of adobe wall, the pulsation of the excitement without came to him. Something of importance had happened, or was threatening, at Don Abraham's house that day.

Shortly after Simon's brief visit things began to assume an extraordinary quietude in the courtyard. Henderson heard the servants come and go, their feet sounding faster than their common pace. Sometimes they stopped under his window, voices lowered as men hush them when they speak of the dying or the dead.

Henderson believed only one thing could account for such an atmosphere of flurry and fear. News must have come of the arrival of the United States warships at Monterey. Toberman had expected them; the outbreak of war between the two nations would simplify their course, set aside and make unnecessary whatever pretext the friends of annexation had evolved for their action. If the ships had come, Don Abraham would be thinking some serious things about John Toberman that morning.

Simon returned to take away the breakfast dishes after the sun had found the little slit in the wall and mounted on, withdrawing its strong illumination, which served only to reveal the hopelessness and misery of that cramped place with more distressing distinctness. It was better without the sun.

“So you have eaten everything, like a dog,” said Simon, viewing the cleaned dishes. “It is a good thing for me that you have found heart to eat, Mr. Gabriel, for Roberto would blame me with having licked your dishes myself if you happened to faint at the whipping-post when he puts the sharp raw-hide to your back this afternoon. There will be no dinner; that is Don Roberto’s order. Maybe just a little pinch of hunger helps a man suffer, as long as he is strong in the legs to stand. Will you smoke, Mr. Gabriel?”

“I would smoke, Simon, if I had some tobacco,” Gabriel replied, no more feeling apparent in his tone against this overbearing, vain, bragging creature than if their former relations had not been changed.

“Your pipe, your watch and your money I put back in your pockets at Don Roberto’s order,” Simon regretfully confessed. “If you have lost them on the way it is not my fault, although I told Roberto you would do it. But we were not robbing you, he said; it must never be charged against him that he stooped to rob a runaway low Yankee who carried hides on his head to a ship.”

“I didn’t lose them, Simon. Have you some tobacco there?”

“Yes. If you will promise me not to set fire to the straw and strangle yourself on smoke to cheat Roberto out of his revenge for the blow you gave him, I’ll let you have it, with fire to set it going in your pipe.”

“I promise you, Simon.”

Simon passed tobacco through the bars of the door. As for fire, he never was without it on the tip of his cigarette. This he supplied when Henderson had filled his pipe.

“The olla, Gabriel,” he requested, pointing to the jar of heavy earthenware that stood out of his reach.

“Permit me to keep it, Simon. If I am not to have anything more to eat, permit me to drink, at least.”

“Oh, very well.”

Simon was in no hurry now. The flurry of excitement that had moved his languid limbs in such unexampled haste a few hours past had calmed. He stood leaning against the thick wall between the outer and inner doors of the cell, his eyes half closed in the comfortable contemplation of his own importance and of the things he knew.

“But what use is a watch to a dead man?” he inquired.

He turned, blowing a long trail of smoke from his nostrils, his eyes drawn a bit closer, as if to ponder his own question in judicial astuteness.

“Very little, Simon.”

“And money — can a dead man spend money?”

“I never heard of one doing it.”

“Nor I,” Simon agreed.

There seemed to be no personal allusion in these philosophical speculations. Simon appeared to be far from the desire of a watch or money for him-

self. He stood with shoulders against the wall, lounging easily, chin lifted, cigarette drooping in his mouth. It seemed, rather, as if he had seen watch and money take flight like a covey of quail, and followed their course to see where they would light.

“Don Roberto has had old Vincente nail a crosspiece to the whipping-post, to stretch you out like they spread the thief on the cross beside Our Señor,” Simon told him. “He is going to flog you there this afternoon. He will never stop, when he sees the blood spring, till you hang dead in the ropes. Jesus! it will be a sight to see!”

Henderson was standing by, smoking calmly. Simon glanced at him slyly, turning his eyeballs between the thin slits of his lids, his head held as before. Smoke was trickling out of his nostrils and mouth, as if he bled in fiery compassion over the cruelty he had pictured.

“Don Roberto is a man of fine humor,” Simon continued, turning now to look at Henderson squarely, smiling as a man smiles when he approaches a pleasant thing.

“You know him better than I do,” Henderson said, feeling that Simon’s generosity in picturing the experience in store for him merited some encouragement.

“Yes. When he was a boy his great pleasure was to tie little frogs, and even little cats, by strings and hold them in the blaze until they slowly died. It was the great enjoyment of his tender years.

Many times I have sat by and laughed to see the sweet pleasure of his little face as the foolish creatures squirmed. You should see a little frog tied by the leg and held in the blaze, Gabriel. It is amazing the life there is in such a contemptible thing."

Henderson was considering himself through all this talk by Simon. He did not doubt that the fellow was telling the truth about Roberto's vicious plans for revenge. He determined that Roberto never should lay lash to his back while he lived to lift a hand to fight. They might kill him in the struggle to drag him to Roberto's cross, but Roberto never should humiliate and degrade his living body. It might be there in the cell when they came to take him out to his chastisement, it might be in the open under the sky, but there would be a fight that they would remember and respect him for all their days. That he vowed.

"Yes, the devil has been to pay around this place today," Simon said, jumping off the subject of Roberto's fine humor as abruptly as he had begun it. "The governor has been here, demanding this wild Yankee girl, Helena Sprague, to be locked in jail at the pueblo and tried for treason against her country. Seven doctors! how Don Abraham defied him to his face."

"If she is a Yankee she can't be a traitor to Mexico," Henderson said, ready now to talk to any length and draw from Simon everything he knew. It was the first word he had heard of the

accusation of treason against Helena. It startled him with a greater concern for her safety than for his own.

“Yankee in blood and heart only, Gabriel. Her father was a citizen, like that old lizard Toberman, and Toberman was a traitor. They say this Helena plotted with Toberman to deliver the country to the Yankees — as if there were Yankees enough in the world to take it out of our hands!”

“Have they arrested her? Is she here?”

“She is here, with that little fat hen Doña Carlota. There, if you could lift yourself up to the window, you could see the one that this red-headed traitor looks through upon the sun that they say will soon stop shining for her eyes.”

“Don Abraham’s prisoner, not the State’s? That seems a strange situation.”

Henderson turned this thought aloud, hardly considering the presence of Simon. But Simon, sharp in more ways than one, had made observations of his own.

“Don Abraham wishes her to sign a certain little paper,” he said. “My Josefa listened yesterday outside the door and heard. I tell you this, for it is all right to tell a dead man anything, and you are the same as a dead man, Gabriel.”

“Certainly, Simon. A little paper, you said?”

“Don Abraham promised her if she would sign this trifling deed to her lands and all that she owns, he would give her another certain little paper that speaks the proof of her plotting with the Yankees,

and she would go free. Simple; yes. My little Josefa heard it all."

"Very simple," said Henderson. "And because the governor has no proof against her, Don Abraham defies him."

"That is the great joke of the whole thing," said Simon, with keen relish in telling it, although to one who was the same as dead. "Last night somebody entered the patron's office and stole this evidence. The governor declares a patriot delivered it to him. I'd like to have been that patriot! I'll bet he got a hatful of gold."

"But Don Abraham defied him, in spite of the paper?" Henderson was grateful to Don Abraham for once, and genuine in his admiration of his courage, though self-interest had moved the patron to this defense.

"You could hear him roar as loud as a jackass. The heart of every man on the ranch stood still to hear Don Abraham roar, and the pale governor threatened to send soldiers and burn down the mansion. And so the governor went back to the pueblo to get his soldiers, and Don Abraham went after him to stop them. It is known that Don Abraham holds his hand over General Verdugo like a little chick. No, Gabriel, the soldiers will not come."

"Who was the patriot that stole the paper? Who would know about it?" Henderson wondered.

There was something in Simon's face when he

spoke of that trick which seemed more than the hint of knowledge unrevealed. Henderson believed if he could get this out of Simon, grown friendly and loquacious in the hope of coming into his prisoner's watch and money, it might be a lever to lift him out of his own desperate condition. He seemed abstractedly to draw the three gold coins that he possessed out of his pocket, to shuffle them aimlessly in his fingers in the way of one whose thoughts overshadow his actions.

"It is a mystery as thick as a fog," Simon declared. His eyes shifted to follow the quick-shuffled gold pieces; he turned in his deep interest and stood holding the bars of the door.

"It was somebody in Don Abraham's own house," said Henderson, speaking with more certainty than guess. "Here, Simon. What good is money to a dead man? You were right."

Henderson dropped a ten-dollar piece into Simon's hand. Simon's face was close to the bars, his nose almost between them.

"And what good is knowing things that must soon pass out of him like water out of a broken olla?" Simon asked.

"What harm, then? Who was it that robbed Don Abraham last night, Simon?"

Henderson dropped the two remaining gold-pieces from one hand to the other, and back again, as if he cooled them to put them in his pocket.

"There was a talk last night under a window," said Simon, pressing his face to the bars. "I was

behind the pepper tree, where no man was thought to be. I heard."

Henderson reached out his hand, the two gold-pieces between his fingers like a man about to plant a seed. Simon's hand came through the bars, palm upward, as thirsty for what hung over it as autumn vegas for rain. Henderson seemed wrapped in an obscuring cloud of thought. He did not plant the seed of man's undoing in this yearning, fecund soil.

"I heard a man offer liberty for a fool girl's heart," Simon said. His hand came through a little farther; still the planting of gold was withheld. "And I heard a fool girl refuse to accept it unless your prison door was opened and you were permitted to go to your people. Then I heard a dagger strike on a bar of iron at a window, and there were curses in a man's throat. 'You love him too much!' he said. And that was all I heard. What will jealousy drive a man to do, Don Gabriel? You are wise in the books. Have I said enough?"

"You have said enough, Simon."

Henderson dropped the gold coins, but, due to his abstraction, as it seemed, they missed Simon's hand and fell softly among the straw that had been the prisoner's bed. Henderson made apology, stooping to recover the money, stirring the straw with vexed exclamations, scattering it impatiently about.

"The devil take them!" he said. "Strange how completely they have disappeared."

“Wait, I’ll help you. If you stir it up too much they will never be found till the straw is burned.”

Simon unlocked the door, caution and prudence alike as nothing to him in the scent of money that had so contrarily eluded his hand. He thrust head and shoulders into the cell, bending low to rake the straw with his long fingers. Henderson, stooping near, not a foot between their shoulders, snatched the heavy water pitcher and struck Simon senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER XVI

DON ROBERTO'S ENTERTAINMENT

SIMON must wake disappointed to find the gold piece gone out of his pocket, Henderson believed; he doubted whether his humiliation over his downfall would be greater than that. As Simon lay with the light knocked out of him, his jaw pried wide, his own clasp-knife tied between his teeth like a bit, Henderson stood considering him a little while before leaving him to his bitter awakening.

He was a long man, stretched out so, and would be longer one day when he stretched with nothing for his feet to stand upon. Henderson was convinced that day was in reserve for him, and so spared the life that was in him to bring him to a more fitting end. But Simon's feet he had bound, and his hands, these with the rope that the sardonic braggart had drawn with unsparing cruelty about his own wrists only twenty-four hours since. So fate turns the fortunes of men around, Henderson thought, with a great deal of satisfaction in the reversal of Simon.

Henderson buckled Simon's notable pistol around himself, disappointed in his search for ammunition. Simon evidently had believed the six charges in the chambers sufficient for one scorned Yankee, and carried no more. Henderson was

thankful for so much. He locked the doors on his late warden, put the keys in his pocket and left him to come out of his stunned condition as nature might repair him.

There appeared to be plenty of life in Simon, although it was pretty well driven back into its secret places. The water jar was heavy, of six quarts or more capacity; the broken pieces of it were half an inch thick. But not much thicker than Simon's head, Henderson thought. He had struck the rascal on his most vulnerable spot, over what in a well-balanced man would have been his small brain, but in Simon his principal seat of intelligence. He was only an animal.

Henderson passed out through the guard chamber where Simon's straw pallet lay heaped behind the door, proof that he had been cautious last night, whatever cupidity had done for him today. Beyond this room the warehouse was familiar. It was a part not much frequented, only wood and lumber being stored there, piled in tiers high against the ceiling. Here Henderson paused to listen for what movement was about the place, and to form his plans upon the necessity of the moment.

Ordinarily an armed man could have taken all before him at Don Abraham's place, few there being permitted to own or carry any farther-reaching weapon than a knife. But since the turmoil of the morning there was no knowing what guards Don Abraham had set around his house, especially

since there was a prisoner within it whom the magistrate was determined no other hand but his own should rob.

The quietude that had settled over the hacienda after the noise of the governor's arrival and departure continued unbroken. It was like a holy day when the peones were permitted to troop off to the pueblo and attend church, although Henderson knew that such was not the case. Outside the warehouse there was the frequent sound of passing feet, and low words spoken when two met and paused.

Henderson's watch had run down while his arms were tied, he had not seen the sun to gauge the height of day, but he reckoned that it must be well past noon. If Simon had told the truth about Roberto's intentions, they would be coming soon to take him from prison cell to whipping-post.

In the extreme end of the warehouse from Don Felipe's office was a room in which Don Abraham stored wool and the hides of sheep. As these common commodities were of little value, and presented few attractions to thieves, the room never was locked. Henderson passed softly out of the first chamber, across the intervening passage and into this room, where great wooolsacks lay buttressed against the walls.

There was a small window in this place, crossed by horizontal bars, reminiscent of a time when something more valuable than wool had been in its keeping. This opening gave an unobstructed

view of the mansion, so called, and a great part of the courtyard through which the business of the place came and went as through the plaza of a town.

Simon had spoken truly of the improvement Roberto had ordered made in the whipping-post. A cross-piece of new wood had been nailed to the thick cedar post, at about the height of a man's outstretched arms. Two women with baskets of washed clothing were going by; they paused beside the station of degradation, talking earnestly. One of them touched the new wood, her hand reluctant and slow, as if she feared it as a thing that already had the blood of a man stained in its rough grain.

The whipping-post never had been used during Henderson's time on the ranch, Don Abraham having other more subtle, more cruel means of breaking the soul of an insubordinate man. But the terrors of the thing were fresh in the recollection of all the people; some of them had shown Henderson how the wretched person brought there for chastisement was forced to embrace the thick timber, from which the bark had been removed or worn long ago, the gray lint of the years softening it in melancholy harmony with its unhappy use. Two heavy iron rings were set into the wood where the subject's hands reached as he stood clasping the post with his arms. There his wrists were bound, the skin of his back drawn so tight that the bite of the rawhide parted it with every blow.

The courtyard into which Henderson now stood looking from the warehouse window lay directly behind Don Abraham's mansion. The windows opening on the patio gave a view into this courtyard, as the windows of a street running out from a square. Henderson wondered which of the barred windows Helena Sprague looked through upon the cross that stretched its arms to receive him; and whether she had been told of Roberto's vengeful planning to inflict this cowardly punishment before her eyes.

There were three of these barred oriel windows in the face of each wing of the house, and one at each end. As Henderson watched for a movement within, the glimpse of a face that might tell him which window was Helena's, a thing that he desired with a grave and urgent reason for knowing, Roberto came riding into the courtyard.

Roberto was riding a beautiful black gelding that Henderson recognized at once as Helena Sprague's property. She had shown him this animal in her stable, John Toberman comparing it on that occasion to a Yankee clipper for its fine proportions and speed. Roberto also had appreciated the animal's fine points, and had been somewhat more successful in coming into possession of it than he had been with its owner.

The young man presented a handsome figure, riding as securely and lightly as any vaquero, although the beast was restive and rebellious under his strange hand. Henderson thought it appeared

resentful, spiteful, in its reluctance to obey rein and spur. It reared vainly in what appeared to be a determined effort to unseat the rider, and shied at the whipping-post as if some strange thing had sprung suddenly from the ground.

Roberto curbed the horse with unsparing hand, parading it back and forth across the courtyard with eye turned always to the patio, his purpose as plain as if a herald had proclaimed it.

Roberto was dressed in the subdued lavishness which was a peculiar art with him, an art distinguishing him generally in gatherings since his return home, where the inclination of youth was for barbaric color without harmony or restraint. He wore a green jacket ornamented with silver braid, a sash of silver gray, its tasseled ends streaming a foot behind him when he rode. Henderson noted that he wore thrust into this belt the two Yankee pistols of the latest Massachusetts make which he had brought home from the capital.

When Roberto rode toward Don Felipe's end of the warehouse, he passed out of Henderson's sight; when he returned, he crossed the courtyard sometimes within a rod of where the half-free prisoner stood. While this parade was going on the people of the ranch, who appeared to have been given liberty to witness Don Roberto's valor that afternoon, began to gather along the face of the warehouse wall.

Some of these men and women had come to know Henderson well during the latter weeks of his

servitude, and to put down their first suspicions and racial antipathy. There were sympathetic hearts among them, homely and ignorant as they were, timid and shuddering in their beliefs of witchcraft and curse and evil eye. Henderson doubted if any of them would interpose to stop him in his dash for liberty, though the patron himself should appear and command them. In this confidence he had little concern for their numbers, as they came in silence that was anything but festival to range along the wall and wait the young master's pleasure in the entertainment he had promised.

Now Don Felipe appeared, and stood in the courtyard near the whipping-post as if waiting Roberto's orders. He had come, Henderson well knew, to summon Simon with the prisoner.

Roberto appeared to be in no hurry to come to this, parading back and forth in such high and insolent state upon his borrowed, or confiscated, horse. He was waiting for the appearance of a face at one of the barred windows. No matter who attended and stood waiting, Roberto had set this entertainment for Helena alone.

The horse had either a short memory or a stubborn will; he would not accustom himself to the whipping-post, the outreaching cross of which seemed so menacing and prominent, the new wood against the old. Each time he came opposite the cross he pitched and shied in fright, shaking his defiant head until the trappings of the bridle clashed.

Roberto appeared to lose patience with the animal at last, determined that he was to break it to his will. He faced the horse toward the post, and, gathering his reins with strong hand, rasped his long-spiked spurs across its sides with sudden and vicious sweep.

Henderson heard the horse grunt in terrified pain as it crouched a moment under the barbarous inflection of this torture strange to it. When it sprang to escape, Roberto checked it harshly, bringing it up short, throwing it to its haunches in a cloud of dust. The animal seemed to throw off its terror with this hard usage, and to gather itself in an angry effort to rid its back of the tormentor. It reared, flung its head in wild defiance, arched its back, stopped with stiffened legs braced hard.

Roberto had given it only a gentle foretaste of the agony that lay in the two-inch rowels of his silver-gilt spurs. Now he clamped them to the beast's belly and pressed with slow and growing force, sinking the spikes through the glossy skin. Again the terrified, mad plunge to escape; again the hard, restraining hand. Henderson sweated in the resentment of this cruelty practiced on a creature that could neither strike in defense nor flee out of its tormentor's reach.

Still the horse defied its rider to urge it up to the terrifying cross. The torture of rasping spur, of grinding bit, could not overcome its magnificent spirit of defiance. Roberto drove it forward again and again, with all the mastery of his practiced

hand. A certain distance from the cross it stopped, abruptly as if it met a palpable barrier there which it could not pass, legs set stiffly against all urging to compel it on. No amount of punishment that Roberto had in his heels could drive it a yard nearer.

Roberto had gained his desire in one thing, at least, if not over the horse. Helena Sprague had appeared at a window in the east wing of the mansion, where she stood grasping the bars, the agony of her white face plain to Henderson across the fifty yards or more that separated them.

Henderson had not seen her come to the window. Between caution to guard himself from discovery, and his furious resentment of Roberto's cruelty to the horse, he had not watched the house closely. Now he saw someone behind Helena, whom he concluded to be Doña Carlota, attempting to draw her away from the window. Helena turned on this person with the sudden bursting of anger, and drove her back into the room.

Now that he had won the spectator for whom he had been playing this prelude to his principal entertainment, Roberto's spirits plainly rose high. The anger that had distorted his features but a moment before cleared away; a smile broadened on his heavy lips, a flush darkened his face. Satisfaction was lined there, the triumph of vengeance realized. His teeth gleamed in his spreading smile, proof that his pleasure in Helena's evident suffering was both keen and sincere. It was such

a satisfaction to show these new teeth of a man.

With Helena's appearance Roberto elaborated his tactics to compel the stubborn horse and break it to his will. He abandoned his attempt to force it directly to approach the whipping-post and smell away its fear of that object. Now he galloped to the opposite end of the courtyard, out of Henderson's sight, to come at headlong speed in a moment, thinking to win in this subterfuge what he had failed to gain before.

But with all this headway to impel him forward, the horse refused to be ridden to the post, where the fresh wood of the cross-arm shone yellow in the sun. It turned sharply, sliding, trampling, its maneuver carrying it over against the warehouse, making a scatterment among the people gathered along the wall.

The horse stopped within a few feet of the window at which Henderson crouched. Blood and sweat dripped from the frantic creature's sides, its breath was hoarse in its nostrils. Roberto gave the harried thing its way for a moment, permitting it to stand where it had stopped. He raised himself until he stood in his stirrups on his toes, his superb body in tense grace of stretched muscle and tendon, swept his hand in slow, expressive salute to Helena, something of mockery in the gesture, in his very pose. Thus far, he seemed to say, this has been a colorless affair. Now the show is about to begin.

Roberto rode slowly to the center of the court-

yard, where he began again his heart-sickening atrocities upon the horse. He rode a circle around the whipping post, increasing the speed until the animal strained to its last pound of strength, Roberto leaning on the narrowing ring, an admirable figure, even in his despicable design.

Cunningly he drew the circle closer; nearer and nearer he approached the post. There was a murmuring near Henderson's window; caution made him draw back into the dark room. When he looked again presently, Roberto was throwing himself out of the saddle to save being crushed as the horse reared to fling itself backward with hoofs beating the air. Roberto had gained his poor desire. He had ridden the horse up to the post.

But it was a triumph marred, a victory only half won. The humiliation of being unseated before the owner of this unruly beast, who must be applauding its successful maneuver as Roberto scrambled to his feet out of the dust, was an abasement that no *caballero* could suffer to pass. Roberto had the reins in his hand while the horse was heaving itself up from the dusty turmoil of its hazardous fall.

Roberto drew the reins around the upright post, shortening them with adroit hand, dragging the unwilling beast up until its nose was within a foot of the thing it had fought so bitterly to avoid. A moment Roberto stood confronting the animal, as if to charge it with a greater terror of him by meeting it eye to eye. Then he seized its forelock,

snatching out the dagger that he always wore in a leather sheath at his belt.

Helena Sprague, knowing his scoundrelly intention before it even dawned to Henderson, screamed as if the dagger threatened her own throat.

“No, no! you thief!” she cried.

She stood grasping a bar of the window with both hands, trying hopelessly to tear it out of its heavy bracket and go to the help of her horse, menaced by a danger that Henderson did not yet understand. Roberto lifted his dagger, sweeping it as if to salute her, to dedicate to her the sacrifice, the sun flashing on its bright blade.

“What a pity to blind such a horse!” a man near Henderson’s window said.

There was a passage between the place where lumber was stored and this chamber of woolsacks, into which a wagon could be driven. The people who had gathered to see Don Roberto’s entertainment stood across this passage as Henderson dashed from his concealment, Simon’s big pistol in his hand. They parted like smoke before him; the murmur of their astonishment sounded in his ears as he bounded into the open and ran with the spring of his sea strength in his limbs, across the court.

Roberto turned at the sound of Henderson’s feet, his dagger held high, as he had poised it to sink it in the eye of the unconquered horse.

Roberto had reason to fear the wrath of this

man, burst from his prison as if he had grown strong in the purpose he had vowed to Don Abraham only yesterday. Not only the blood of John Toberman, but the wrong of his own oppression, stood in this man's memory to be avenged. It seemed a miracle that had delivered him and sent him there as Roberto stood in the posture of a man who lifts his hands in supplication for his life, one grasping the forelock of the horse, the other lifting the dagger to blind its defiant eyes.

"Keep your hands where they are!" Henderson commanded him.

Roberto, seeming to obey, dropped the dagger, his calculative eye measuring his chance of drawing a pistol. Henderson was advancing, closing on him rapidly. Roberto was not a coward, neither a fool. He realized that Henderson's situation would not admit temporizing or empty bluster. When a man in that desperate pass stepped out with a pistol in his hand, he came in the determination to kill if necessary. Roberto's fingers twitched as he set them to reach for a weapon, but reason held them as they were.

"Permit me," said Henderson, his pistol against Roberto's breast as he took from his sash the modern Yankee pistol nearest to hand. He took the mate of it also, keeping it in his hand, kicked the dagger far out of Roberto's reach, while Don Felipe and all of them stood by with hearts fairly bursting to see the valor of this Yankee sailor with the laughter and soul of youth and friendship in

his glad blue eyes. In the window of the patio there was the sound of applauding hands.

There were ropes at the foot of the whipping-post, ready for binding his own limbs, Henderson knew. And there lay coiled the rawhide whip with lash soaked in water to give it weight, that Roberto had intended to swing upon his victim's naked back.

"Pick up that rope," Henderson directed. Roberto, watching him with fear staring in his eyes as he stooped and blindly laid hold of the rope, appeared to believe that his moment to die had come.

Henderson put the Yankee pistol in his belt, leaving his left hand free, cast off the bridle reins from the post. The horse started back a step in retreat, only to stop according to its training when the reins fell to the ground, seeing that no more violence was aimed at its head. Henderson faced Roberto to the whipping-post, fashioned a noose in his deft sailor quickness, his pistol pressing Roberto's back, holding him close against the wood.

A turn, and the noose was around Roberto's neck; a pull, and he was bound to the post, shamed and humiliated in the eyes of his meanest servants, none of whom loved him well enough to come forward and lift a hand in his defense.

With quick turns of the rope around the cross-piece, Henderson tied Roberto's outstretched arms. While he was doing this Don Felipe came

forward, trepidation in his manner, fear in his face.

“But, Don Gabriel, you are not going to whip him?” he asked, standing off a little way.

“No, Don Felipe. It is not the way of a gentleman of my country to strike a helpless man. I degrade him in your eyes, and leave him to consider what might have happened to him if I had been a Mexican.”

Henderson turned to the people, who had come out a little way from the wall when they saw that the Yankee sailor did not shoot Don Felipe down at the first movement of his foot.

“The man that releases him will be the first man to die,” he said.

CHAPTER XVII

LISETA SOUNDS ALARM

ROBERTO had yielded like a lamb in a leash, spreading his arms to the cross as if to embrace his bride. The fear of death was over him, the folly of resistance plain to his eyes. It was better to yield to a few minutes of humiliation than to lie stiff in the grave forever. Humiliation could be requited by brave deeds of reprisal and revenge, but not so death. The Yankee might lay defiling hands on the body of a Mexican gentleman for the little moment of his power, but he was only one Yankee in a country of Mexican gentlemen. Roberto swore by the sacred blood that he would feed this Yankee's heart to the fire.

Henderson stood a few moments as if waiting for somebody to step forward and test the sincerity of his edict, the bridle rein of Roberto's late mount in his hand. There was more fear of the Yankee sailor with three pistols in his belt than love of the patron's son among the men who served, free and bond, on Don Abraham's estate. None came forward to cut the young master's shameful ropes and set him free.

They had big eyes for the man from the ship, as they spoke of him, who had sprung up into the estate of hero from his obscurity well in accord

with their own romantic ideals. Heroic fire in the humble burst out of their own sad ranks of oppression in just that manner now and then, when a man would arm and mount, and ride and rob, a scourge to the rich, a benefactor to the poor. There was not one among them but wished Don Gabriel well of his adventure.

Henderson was a strange figure in their eyes, accustomed as they were to seeing him come and go among them in quite different garments. He was dressed in the manner of an American plainsman, in the clothing John Toberman had supplied him from his personal wardrobe. He wore a heavy gray wool shirt without coat, dark corduroy trousers folded into tall, broad-topped boots. His hat was an old one, brown and weather-beaten as an old eagle, the broad brim of it pliant and hard to keep back from falling like a blinder over the eyes. To prevent this, Henderson had pinned one side of it up with a thorn.

There was a suggestion of romance, of headlong intrepidity, in the turned-up hat brim that the peones appreciated. They talked of Don Gabriel's competent, heroic appearance, gathering in little groups, passing back and forth in suppressed excitement. Henderson turned to the mansion, where Helena Sprague waited at her barred window, the horse following in quiet confidence.

"Felipe! Felipe!" Roberto called, imperiously, impatiently. He knew that the mayordomo stood near, although he could not turn his head to see.

“Don Roberto, I am here.”

“Cut these cursed ropes, send for guns!” Roberto commanded.

“You heard Don Gabriel’s command——”

“Don Yankee, Don Sailor! Here—quick! Bring a gun, I will show who is don!”

“It would be instant death to touch the rope, Don Roberto.”

“It will be instant death when my hands are free if you refuse again, coward! Vincente! Carlos! Are you all dogs? is there no man here?”

Nobody answered. Henderson had reached the patio, where he stood beneath Helena’s window, facing them with three pistols in his belt.

“Fernando! Jaime! Benito! Juan!” Roberto called, command in the inflection of each name. Silence.

“Man fears death, Don Roberto, because it is the end,” Don Felipe said, standing back a little farther from the cross.

“Infidel! You shall stand here before the sun goes down on this day! Is one Yankee to rule the world?”

It was well for his own peace, such as the future might bring it, that Roberto could not see the cloud that darkened over Felipe’s face when the threat of this punishment was uttered. The little mayordomo drew himself up, head held high, a flush of insult in his pale face. He stood a moment, hands clenched as if he strangled hot words in them; turned and went toward his office, walking so fast

that a murmur went through the crowd like a little wind through a field of maize as he passed.

It was that they were to see a tragedy, they said. Don Felipe was going for his knife.

“You are a brave and gallant gentleman, Don Gabriel,” said Helena Sprague, her hand reaching toward him vainly, her face pressed to the bars.

Gabriel lifted his hand to his hat, eyes fixed on the crowd.

“Come away!” said Doña Carlota, scandalized, and shaken with fright. “It is wrong for you to talk to a brigand.”

“I thank God you have burst your prison door, Don Gabriel,” Helena said, pushing Doña Carlota back with impatient hand.

“Here is your horse, Miss Sprague. He has been abused, but not much hurt.”

“He is yours, I give him to you.”

“I have brought him for you to ride away, Helena. Felipe shall get me a crowbar, I’ll tear down these bars or break in the door.”

“You are generous and brave, but I have no place to flee to, Don — no place to hide from them, Gabriel.”

“This is sinful, this will disgrace you forever!” Doña Carlota panted, tugging to draw her from the window.

“I have been told they have laid a charge of treason against you, Helena, and that Roberto, in the treachery of his mean soul——”

“His jealous heart, Gabriel.”

“Stole the evidence, a certain paper——”

“That is why the governor came! The governor knows!”

“The evidence was delivered to the governor, I have been told. He has gone after soldiers to take you from Don Abraham’s house by force. You must leave here at once, go to the north—somewhere—out of their reach. Here is your horse—here, catch the rein—I will break in the door.”

She caught the rein as he tossed it, her arm thrust between the bars.

“And you—and you, Gabriel?”

“I’ll take a horse from the stable and go with you.”

“No,” she denied him softly, shaking her head. “We couldn’t get away, I would only encumber you. Alone you can beat them, for you are resourceful and bold. I’d only hold you back, they’d murder you like they did John Toberman.”

“They will murder you here, Helena.”

“No, they’ll only rob me, Gabriel. I can put that off—go away, Aunt Carlota! Leave me—go to your room and close the door!”

“The disgrace of this! a bandit!” Doña Carlota said.

Helena turned on her furiously, disappearing from the window, the bridle rein dropped to the ground. Henderson heard her, speaking in Spanish now, driving her tormentor from the room.

“I can delay the seizure of my property,”

Helena said, coming to the window again, her face flushed by the anger that had blasted Doña Carlota's courage like a wrinkled pea. "I can put them off a week, a month, by seeming about to yield to this one, a promise to that one. I can make them fight among themselves, as they are already started, over my estate. They will not dare to bring me to trial on this foolish charge of treason."

"I am afraid there are few things they will not dare against the helpless," said Gabriel, sorrowfully remembering John Toberman's last look.

"Don Abraham will protect me if the governor presses the matter," she declared. "He is my distant relative, my condemnation would be his disgrace. He never will permit it, don't you see, Gabriel?"

"Have you any further news from Monterey?"

"No. I wasn't allowed to read the message they took from the man Roberto killed."

"I wish we knew whether the United States cruisers Toberman was expecting have arrived."

"It is plain you must go to Monterey, Gabriel, and find out. I will be safe, setting the wolves fighting over my property. Then, if the cruisers are there, or when they come, you will sail in one of them to San Pedro and march here with the marines and set me free."

"That's a long speculation, too great a gamble, Helena. You must go with me."

"I would be a stone around your neck, Gabriel. It is a long way, a woman's endurance is not equal

to a man's. I would drag, my courage might fail. They would overtake us and bring us back, and you would suffer for us both. For that reason, and that reason only, I will not go."

"But here——"

"I shall be safe, as I have told you, Gabriel. Get on your horse, let him know his new master's hand. So—how well he behaves! he knows his friend. There—come close to the window, Gabriel. In Monterey see these men, whose names are here. If the ships haven't come these men will know how to help you."

"And who will help you, Helena? No, it would be cowardly for me to go."

"You are outlawed here, they'll hunt you down. You must ride fast to Monterey."

"A little prying with a crowbar and these things would fall—see, they shake, they are loose in the sill. Helena, come with me."

"You know it is not because I do not trust you, Gabriel. I couldn't go unprepared, as a man can go. Before we could be ready, Don Abraham might return, or Roberto——"

"I'll stay here, then. I'll hide in the hills, I'll come down on them and take my toll for John Toberman's life. If they harm you, every man that conspires against you shall die!"

"There would be many friends on your side, but they would be the weak and the poor, Gabriel. It would be better for you to go."

But there was a plea in her eyes, a reluctant

hope in her very words, that he would stay. She pressed her face between the bars, reaching out her hand.

“No, I’ll not go to Monterey,” he said decisively.

“Gabriel, Don Felipe went into his office a little while ago.”

“I was watching him.”

“He will be coming to set Roberto free in a minute. Go, Gabriel!—but a moment for my benediction.”

She reached her hand to him, fluttering it like a frantic bird. Gabriel reined nearer, caught it, pressed it to his breast.

There was the sound of bare feet running. Liseta, who herded goats on the hills, stood panting at the corner of the patio.

“The soldiers, Don Gabriel!” she said, pointing toward the pueblo.

Helena started, looked across the vega where the barley fields were yellow.

“Gabriel! they are coming! You will be lost!”

“I will go to the hills,” he whispered, leaning near.

“Nearer, Gabriel—for my benediction!”

Her face was pressed hard between the bars, her convulsive hand was now within his own. A little way to her lips, and that way so swiftly passed.

“Ah! what angel!” said Liseta.

Gabriel rode into the olive lane, thinking of a

sanctuary in the gray hills, pausing a moment where the yellow road made its turn to the eastward to sweep through the pass. There he looked back to estimate the number of soldiers, noting that there were eight, led by an officer who rode a little way in advance. Don Abraham was not with them. Henderson went on his way.

At that moment Don Felipe rode out from Don Abraham's gate and came galloping after Henderson. When he reached the head of the olive lane he lifted his right hand in witness of his pacific intention. Gabriel stopped, waiting for him to come.

"Don Gabriel, I have come to ride with you wherever your road may go, if you will permit me," Felipe said.

Henderson made a quick survey of the mayordomo, suspicious of this amazing declaration. Felipe was armed with two pistols and a rifle; he carried a knife in his belt, provisions and cooking utensils at the cantle of his saddle. His preparations for a campaign in the wilds appeared to be complete, too complete, Gabriel thought, for such hasty decision.

"Don Felipe, I have been betrayed lately by one who came to me with the face and the words of a friend," he said.

"I have suffered insults and degradations here that my soul revolts to recall," Felipe declared, flinging out his hand. "When I refused to cut the rope, that unripe tyrant threatened me with

the post and the lash. Threats are not idle on the tongue of that young oppressor. If I cannot go with you, then I must go alone."

Don Felipe's face was as earnest as the face of man could be. He spoke in the grave and resolute tone of one whose burden had grown too great, whose endurance was at an end. He rode on, saluting with outflung hand.

"Don Felipe, we will go together," Gabriel said, riding hard to overtake him. "But the risk is greater with me than it would be without me. The soldiers are coming——"

"I saw them," said Felipe calmly.

"They will soon be on my trail."

"I know a way, Don Gabriel, that no soldier can follow," Felipe said in quiet confidence. "If I betray you, save a ball for me between the eyes."

"There will not be a doubt of it, Don Felipe," Henderson assured him, as he galloped at his side.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHERE NO SOLDIER CAN FOLLOW

DON FELIPE'S way that no soldier could follow did not lead into the hills. Henderson was doubtful of the honesty of his intention, alert for betrayal, when Felipe turned from the royal highway, as this road was still called, into the great plain where Don Abraham's vaqueros grazed his herds.

"Men commonly go into the hills, the world over, Don Gabriel, when they desire to hide from vengeance, oppression and the law," Felipe said. "By varying this general custom we secure our safety in the first step. Well, I have friends where we are going. That is something to a man."

"Yes, that is much, Felipe. Every friend is an extra pair of eyes and ears."

"And feet to run, and hands to strike, Don Gabriel, when they are friends such as mine. True, they are all of the common, the poor; some of them are old, with eyes pinched to little cracks. But you shall see."

They rode boldly, making no attempt to hide either their tracks or the fact of their passing. Sometimes they sighted cowboys in the distance, once they passed near one, whom they saluted with uplifted hand, after the manner of the open places

and the long road the world over, also, as Felipe in his philosophy observed. It must have been half an hour that they held their way southward, skirting Don Abraham's fields at times, again hidden in groves of oaks. Then they turned westward, toward the sea.

"This is the estate that liberty and equality cost me," Felipe said, when they had traveled in that direction several miles. "You have seen the equality among men in this country, Don Gabriel; you have tasted its liberty. I am to blame, along with other patriots who overthrew the ancient regime. But the oppression of the mission priests was better than this liberty. That I will say to any man."

"So, this was your estate, Felipe?"

Henderson paused. It was open country, bearing no trace of improvement, its grassy glades set here and there with clumps of dark-green oaks.

"Beginning at the arroyo, the dry creek, behind us, extending westward to the sea. From the hills on the north, beyond the first hills you see on the south, five leagues square. That was my grandfather's grant from the king. Not much, but my grandfather was a moderate man. What does it matter? There is still room in the world for a man to breathe."

"It's a beautiful stretch of country, the finest I've seen in California. Who owns it now, Felipe?"

"It was divided among several of liberty's aris-

ocrats, none of whom live in California. They are all in the capital, their land lies here free of taxes, rented by small drovers and poor farmers. Where we are going there is a small settlement of people to whom my father gave land when he saw the republic would take it away from him. The new government respected the titles of these small beneficiaries, faithful servants of my father's house. They will conceal us, there will be willing feet to carry us the news."

"There's no need for you to hide, they can't molest you for leaving your position of mayor-domo on Don Abrahan's estate."

"I brought away a little more of Don Abrahan's gold than he may compute to be my due," Felipe confessed, very openly, with entire ease of conscience. "But no amount of gold, Don Gabriel, would repay me for the humiliation of spirit I have suffered there since young Roberto came back home."

"And you paid yourself from Don Abrahan's treasury?" Gabriel said, seeing the humor of that convenient plan. "While you were about it, I wish you'd made a settlement for me."

"What is mine is my friend's," Felipe said, with such simple sincerity that Gabriel's last cloud of suspicion dissolved and blew away.

"Do you know anything about Don Abrahan's dispute with the governor over the custody of Helena Sprague? Simon told me, as a confidence given a dead man, as he considered me, that the

governor went to the pueblo to send troops to take her away, and that Don Abraham went after him to stop them."

"I think that was the state of the affair, Don Gabriel."

Gabriel turned to Felipe, brows drawn in a frown of annoyance. Felipe looked at him with startled eyes, for to him, even hero of the late revolution that he was, this sailor who had grown so great on the bitter nourishment of his vengeance that he had filled and burst Don Abraham's prison in a day, was no less romantic, magnificent, invincible, than he had appeared to poor Liseta when she stood panting out her warning in the patio.

"Felipe, let's drop all this don formality when we speak to each other," Gabriel said. "Call me Gabriel, or Gabe, or anything you like, but leave off the don."

"Very well, Gabriel," Felipe agreed, but with reluctance that seemed a protest against giving up a dignity for his new friend that it was men's duty to respect.

"You noticed that the old man wasn't with the soldiers?"

"No, I only looked to see how near they were as I rode out of the gate. So, Don Abraham was not there?"

"He must have failed to influence that Verdugo scoundrel. Maybe the governor offered him a bigger share."

"The highest bidder would get him, for he is a

scoundrel with no more principle than a squirrel," Felipe said. "But let them take all of her land and cattle, they can't make her poor," he added, so completely satisfied with the declaration that he smiled.

"That would be impossible," Gabriel agreed. "Nature has endowed her with treasures of mind and heart that villains such as Verdugo can't steal."

"And her gold has been sent to Boston year by year. John Toberman attended to that, distrustful always of these descendants of the hidalgos. He had many friends on the Boston ships, it was an easy matter for him to send the gold to be put in the bank in Boston. Let them take all she has here, and she will still come to your arms a rich bride, Gabriel."

"You can plan faster than I, Felipe," Henderson said, shaking his head.

"I have seen it since the night you snatched her shoe from Roberto under the tree. I have seen it in her eyes."

"You're a better hand at reading the ladies' eyes than I am, then, Felipe," Henderson laughed. But his heart leaped when he remembered her benediction, and he knew that Felipe had learned his book very well.

"I have had my romance, even I," Felipe sighed; although he did not appear a likely subject for romance in relation to the ladies, especially, as he rode by Henderson's side. His black beard, its stubbles as thick as if plumbago smeared his jaws,

gave him an aspect of fierceness that would not appear to admit a gentle thought.

Henderson pulled his horse up, drawing rein as if he intended to turn back.

“Felipe, do you suppose the governor sent those men to take her away from Don Abraham’s house?”

“Who knows?” Felipe replied, shifting the responsibility of a direct reply in the manner of his blood.

“I must find out. Felipe, I’m going back.”

“That would be a perilous thing to do, Gabriel.”

“Her peril is greater than mine. She was relying on Don Abraham to protect her, she convinced me he would be able to do it, even against the governor. But Don Abraham has lost his power. Felipe, they’ll murder her.”

“I doubt if they would go that far. They can confiscate her property without that.”

“They hate her for her Yankee blood, because she speaks English. And I suppose she is guilty of treason, since the two countries are at war. Felipe, I was a fool not to bring her with me.”

“That would have been better, if there had been time. But the soldiers would have come before you could have broken down the door.”

“I’m going back!”

“It would be too rash,” Felipe protested, laying his hand on Gabriel’s rein to check his hazardous intention. “There is a better plan.”

“They’ll murder her while we stand talking!”

“I know them, their ways are open to me. Wait till evening, when our horses are fresh for a hard run, then we’ll go back. There is old Cecilia, Liseta’s mother. She will know everything.”

Henderson would not yield at once. It required a good deal of Felipe’s sensible reasoning to convince him that he would only throw his life away by returning to Don Abraham’s before night. Don Abraham would have summoned his friends, would have gathered then in the pueblo, to stand with him against the governor.

It would be a little revolution, Felipe said, such as were common to that country when the powerful landowners felt imported authority running counter to their interests and desires. More than one governor had been packed out of California in past years. It was very likely, Felipe said, that Don Abraham would win, even if the military had succeeded in removing Helena from his house.

At length this argument prevailed. Henderson agreed to wait till sunset, and then proceed under Felipe’s guidance to Don Abraham’s ranch.

A few minutes’ ride from the place where they halted for this colloquy brought them to a well-traveled road, which they pursued several miles toward the sea. It was then something past mid-afternoon; the wind that always sets in from the sea in summer at that period of the day, was beginning then to dispel the heat of the hazy, drowsy

valley. It came fresh and inspiring, with the scent of breaching seas, appealing to the sailor as he rode like a call from home.

“Where you see that sycamore,” said Felipe, pointing, “there we stop.”

The sycamore was a tree of great girth, its bole knotted, its branches distorted in grotesque twistings, angular elbows, as if it had grown in slow torture through its two hundred years and more. It was the largest tree of any species whatever that Henderson had seen in California, its branches covering not less than a hundred feet.

Close by in a little ravine a strong spring issued from the bank; a little way from this precious vein of water a small adobe house seemed to shrink and hide among fig and almond trees. An adobe wall could be seen through the intervening growth of cacti and chaparral, behind which maize was growing tall.

An old man was sitting in the sun near the spring, apparently indifferent to the passing of the two riders, no more concerned when they left the road at the sycamore as if to seek the refreshment of his spring. He was the framework only of what had been a magnificent man, bony now and dry, his tattered shirt of some once gay material loose on his gaunt shoulders, his thin, short beard as white as the ash of seasoned oak.

He sat with hands clasped around his updrawn knees, a man without a thought, it seemed, one who had lived his apportioned years and had crept

to the roadside to save death the trouble of reaching within doors for him when it passed. A dark and wrinkled man, his sombrero, shaggy and mangy as the coat of an old burro, pulled down to shade his eyes.

The old man rose with surprising agility as the two riders came near. It must not be that he had an appointment with death for that day, or many days to come, Henderson thought, regarding him with surprise. He seemed as supple as a man carrying half his years; his step was quick when he advanced, evidence of pleasure was in his kindly, wrinkled face.

“Don Felipe! I thought my eyes were deceiving me, it has been so long since they had the good luck to see your face.”

“Pablo, my friend.”

Felipe leaned with outstretched hand to meet the old man's. It was plain by the fervor of that handclasp that equality between men was not altogether a poetic fancy with this Don Felipe, whom liberty had stripped of his lands.

“How have you passed, Felipe?” the old man asked.

“Oh, but so-so, Pablo. And you?”

“Like a tortoise. Well, I have had my day.”

“I pray God to give you many more, old friend. I have the honor to present my comrade and friend, Gabriel Henderson. Gabriel, this is Pablo Gonzales, my second father.”

The old man looked up with quick interest, the

sleepy lids of his eyes lifting, showing them keen and bright.

“You are the man from the ship who lived with Don Abrahan; I have heard of you,” he said. He offered his hand, in the ease of perfect equality, with all the dignity of his years. “And you are the one who gave the young bear a green eye, and left him whining for the lady of his desire. It is a pleasure to grasp your hand, Don Gabriel.”

Gabriel's embarrassment was little less than his surprise at hearing his exploits so widely known and so romantically embellished, but he gave old Pablo a warm return of his greeting, seeing that he was sincere.

“It is said the Americans are coming soon to take this country and add it to their own,” Pablo said. “But I do not know. Have you heard of this, Don Gabriel?”

“They will come, Mr. Gonzales. How soon, I do not know.”

“If they will leave me my house, and not break down the wall around my garden. I shall need them only a little while longer now, if they will leave them to me, Don Gabriel.”

“No honest man will be poorer for their coming, your house and your garden will be secure, Mr. Gonzales. It is only the rascals and oppressors of the poor who will feel the difference.”

“Some say they will set the peones free from the hands of such men as Don Abrahan, the magistrate. If so, I pray God to hasten the day.”

“It will be done, Mr. Gonzales.”

“I have been a free man all my life,” the old man proudly declared, stretching his long arms wide, like an old eagle exulting in the freedom that still was his. “No man lives until he is free. Do you go to meet the Americans, Felipe, you and your friend?”

Felipe explained in as few words as could cover the situation, what had set the two of them upon the road that day.

“We have come seeking refuge, and the counsel of your wisdom in the dangerous hours that are before us,” Felipe said, throwing the whole matter before his ancient friend for his judgment.

“This is a place where no enemy of my friends can find his way,” said the old man, with such quiet, simple declaration of loyalty that made Henderson’s heart quicken to hear.

“I told my friend I would lead him to such a place,” Felipe said.

“Do they follow you?”

“Not yet, Pablo. We must go back tonight and break the hornets’ nest.”

Felipe told the old man of Helena’s situation, arranging for her to hide there under his protection, also, if it should become necessary.

“Gabriel is going back tonight to take her away from them, let it be Don Abrahan, the soldiers or the devil who is shutting her up behind barred windows, and I am going with him, to load his pistols, if nothing more.”

“You will show your friend the retreat,” Pablo directed. “If there is nobody after you yet, there is nothing to fear, but the rabbit must know where to find its hole when the coyote comes.”

Felipe led the way through a grove of live-oak and sycamore trees that bordered on Pablo's garden, into a cleared space a little distance behind the old man's house, where the crumbling walls of what must have been at one time an extensive homestead encumbered the ground. These ruins appeared to be of a day long past, their walls tumbled down, the frames gone from gaping windows and doors. Blackened ends of beams still held here and there in the walls, stood as evidence of the tragedy that had leveled this once consequential seat. Henderson was astonished when Felipe extended welcome with sweeping movement of his outstretched hand, saying:

“Gabriel, behold my ancestral walls.”

“This was your home, Felipe?”

“Home, Gabriel. Here I was born, here my father and mother came from Spain, bride and groom, to join my grandfather, who had prepared this house to receive them. The soldiers of the revolution burned it after my father fled to Spain.”

“It looks like an older ruin,” said Gabriel, looking around with sad interest in the fallen strength of this once grand place. “But I see now it couldn't have been long ago, the trees that have come up between the walls are still small.”

“Adobe walls without a roof over them soon look ancient, Gabriel. There is Pablo’s fence, it seems a century old. He built it not twenty years ago.”

“But what is there here, Felipe, to prevent soldiers or anybody else, following and finding us?” Gabriel inquired, puzzled to find himself in a place of such doubtful security.

“First, there is Pablo,” Felipe replied. “He does not wake and become alert for everybody that approaches him. The soldiers, Don Abrahan, would find him only a sleepy, dull, deaf and dim-eyed old man. But you will understand what he means, what I mean, when you know him better. He could send the keenest soldier or officer of the law off on a chase that would take him a long time to find out was empty, as he has done many a time. The Franciscans outlawed by the revolution used to hide here, Pablo sitting beside the road as you saw him when we arrived.”

“That is all very good, Felipe, but it seems to me not quite enough for security.”

“There is more,” Felipe said, discovering this with triumph, as if he had held it covered to remove his friend’s last doubt. “Over there, behind that adobe wall, is a retreat built by my grandfather, designed as a refuge in time of the uprising of the abused Indian peones which he always expected would come in his day, but which never came. It once had an entrance from the mansion,

which is closed now by the fallen walls. The exit remains, with shelter for us, as you shall see."

The ancient Guterrez, grandfather of Felipe, had used this underground vault to store his wine casks, pending the day when he might need it to escape with his family from the just and long-sleeping vengeance of the oppressed Indians, who labored in virtual slavery on the vast mission estates, and the lands of the hidalgos who lived in harmony with them in the tyranny they jointly exercised over the land. It was an elaborate work for his day, no doubt, but in Gabriel Henderson's eyes it appeared crude and useless as either a place of concealment or defense against an intelligent and determined foe. But, like Don Abraham's house, its chief commendable feature was the many means of escaping from it. There had been four of these long passages originally, two of which remained.

The existence of this old underground refuge was not known to many now, Felipe said. There were tales of it, romantic and tragic, but only three or four old men, Pablo included, could lead the way to it. And these were loyal men, who would die before they would betray him.

Within the underground recess there was room for several horses as well as people. At the word of alarm, one could mount and go before those who looked for him even gained suspicion from the cunning old Pablo that he was within miles of that spot.

Felipe's last and greatest revelation was the little bell that hung in the arch of the vault, to be connected by a string with Pablo's house. The string would be available to the old man's hand from many places, Felipe said. The cord that had moved the bell and warned the Franciscans was rotted away now; Pablo would run another one without delay.

It seemed a rather childish arrangement to Henderson, but, as Felipe had such evident pride and confidence in it, he tried to make it appear that he believed it a most masterly contrivance.

"Here we can lie," said Felipe, "until they believe we have gone from the country in some mysterious way and relax their vigilance. Then we can slip out, and make our way to Monterey. This is better than making a dash with them hot at our heels. It is the crafty, Franciscan way."

"There is good argument in it," Henderson admitted, feeling that it was so.

"And if some traitor betrays us, or some spy creeps like a snake and luck leads him to us, then the bell will warn us, we can ride away before they can arrive, and be miles ahead of them."

"That is excellent, Felipe," Henderson declared. He went to the door of the retreat, doubly hidden inside a high adobe wall and the young trees and shrubs which had sprung thickly there. It was concealed so well that one might pass within a yard of it and be no wiser.

"Asleep or awake the bell will warn us, for they

must pass the house first to come here. Don't you think it is admirable, Gabriel?"

"Admirable!" said Gabriel warmly. "I wonder, Felipe, if those damned scoundrels took that girl to the pueblo and locked her in their dirty jail?"

CHAPTER XIX

THE HOUSE BY THE GOAT PENS

“**Y**ES, the governor himself came in a carriage behind the soldiers, and took the poor angel away. That was not more than an hour after you left with Don Gabriel. It was a thing to make the heart rage, and not even Doña Carlota permitted to go with her.”

Cecilia spoke in low tones, distrustful of every shadow that moved. She had taken her visitors into her cabin, which was the farthest removed of all the laborers' dwellings from Don Abrahan's mansion on account of the corral for the goats which ran out from its corners. As they talked with her in the dark, the sound of the goats champ-ing the cuds they had gathered during the day, the shuffling of the feet of such restless ones as had not yet lain down to their night's repose, came into the little cabin. Liseta could be heard breathing in her throbbing excitement where she sat on her cowhide cot against the wall, her head dimly seen against the open window.

“What is Don Abrahan doing about it?” Gabriel inquired, speaking softly, impressed by Cecilia's caution.

“Nothing, Don Gabriel. There seems to be some new arrangement. General Verdugo, as you

know, has been put out of his place by the governor."

"Verdugo out?" Felipe exclaimed in incredulous surprise. "Who told you this, Cecilia?"

"One of the soldiers, Don Felipe. There is nothing a soldier will not tell me if I can speak a little while with him. My husband was a soldier in his day."

"Then Colonel Ybarra is in command. He is worse, Gabriel, far worse, than the other."

"Is it possible you have heard nothing of this big news?" Cecilia asked, in vast surprise. "I thought they must know at Monterey by now that Roberto has been made general by the governor."

"Roberto! What general, even of forty men!"

Henderson was almost amused, in spite of Helena Sprague's uncertain situation in the hands of this vengeful youth.

"He is a military man; he held the rank of colonel," Felipe explained, no amusement in the matter of Roberto's elevation apparent to him.

"There is a cannon," said Cecilia gravely. "I have heard it will shoot through the wall of a church."

"It is an admirable arrangement they have made of it," Felipe said. "Don Abraham must have given up all his share in the division of Helena's estate to the governor. He could afford it, having the civil and military power now in his hands."

"There is justice to be thankful for in one quar-

ter," Cecilia said. "Simon is still in the prison where you locked him, Don Gabriel. No key can be found to let him out. I pray God it is lost forever!"

"What does it mean when they wouldn't permit her aunt to go with her, Felipe? What do you suppose they've done, or design to do?"

Gabriel's concern was great. In his agitation he went to the door, closed in Cecilia's caution, opened it and stood gazing toward the pueblo as if for his answer out of the dark.

Cecilia came softly, pushed him back into the room, and closed the door.

"There will be somebody passing," she said.

As for the window, that did not seem to trouble her. It opened upon the goat corral; the strong scent of the animals came in with the slow breeze.

"It has a bad color, that," Felipe said, trouble in his tone.

"I'm going to the pueblo to find out," Gabriel declared.

"Don Gabriel, Don Gabriel! It would be death to go!"

Liseta sprang from her cot as she made this protest, the first word she had spoken since the visitors entered the door.

"She speaks the truth," Cecilia whispered.

"I heard Don Roberto swear he would burn you, tied to the very cross where you tied him today," Liseta said.

"Thanks for your warning, Liseta; you always

were a good friend to me," Gabriel said. "But I must go; I am burning up my time."

"Soldiers were sent to hunt for you and Don Felipe. I saw them from the hill when I gathered in the goats this evening."

"Which way were they going, Liseta?"

"Toward the pass, Don Gabriel. I heard Don Abraham say you would try to escape to the north."

"That is very good," Gabriel said, touching Felipe's arm in the dark. "Every one of them that's away will be one less for us to face in the pueblo. Are you ready, Felipe?"

"There will be a matter of an extra horse for Helena," Felipe said. "Who watches the stable, since Simon is in prison, Cecilia?"

"Old Vincente, the carpenter, has been around this evening. I doubt if anybody watches."

"There will be no difficulty," Felipe said.

Felipe left something in Cecilia's hand as they parted from her at the door, that was more than unemphasized thanks to the poor widow living out her hopeless peonage under the beneficent Don Abraham's shadow.

"Don Felipe," she said earnestly, "tell me, is it true the Americans are coming to set free all the poor ones who are enslaved by unjust debts?"

"It is true, Cecilia."

"I pray the sun may not set three times before they come!" she said.

There seemed the very breath of romance in the night as Henderson and Felipe rode away toward

the pueblo, Felipe leading the horse taken from Don Abraham's corral. To Henderson it seemed as if the dark were charged with the suspense of mystery. There was the scent of lemon blossoms from Don Abraham's orchard, and of jasmine from some humble door.

"It will be a late moon," said Felipe.

"So much the better for us."

"Yes, people will be awake until midnight these times, talking over this great news of war. I have a friend who will know all that has happened today. His home is behind the church; we can leave our horses a little way off to keep any suspicion of complicity from his door."

The pueblo of Los Angeles, called by the Franciscans who founded the place *La Ciudad de Nuestra Señora La Reina de Los Angeles*, or *The City of Our Lady Queen of the Angels*, was a village of a few score houses at that time, most of them the mean dwellings of the poor. These were clustered around the church, which stood on one side of the plaza, the governor's mansion, so called, and the military barracks facing it. This plaza was the gulf between consequence and obscurity, most of the influential and wealthy people living on the governor's side.

All about the little city were the pastures and fields, orange orchards and vineyards of the great estates of the *hidalgos* who had received their grants from the king. Many of these estates had passed from the grantees' hands into the possession

of others, generally less worthy, in the rebellion against the authority of Spain, yet the face of things had not changed, the new owners being no more progressive than the old.

It was not yet midnight when Henderson and Felipe rode into the town. Contrary to Felipe's prediction, there was no waking over the news. The houses were dark and silent, even the house of Felipe's friend.

"This is a strange business," said Felipe, his voice made low as if he stood among sleepers.

They had come to a halt a little distance from his friend's house, a white-plastered adobe of considerable size, which stood in a grove of orange and fig trees. The wasted moon was then rising redly above the valley of San Gabriel; its faint light discovered the dark masses of the orange trees, the white arms of the fig trees. It also was strong enough to make their present situation one of insecurity from the eyes of any person who might pass, or come to the window of the neighboring house a little way along the thinly-built street.

"If you will take the horses back among the oak trees," Felipe suggested, pointing to an unfenced common that seemed to stretch away into the wilds, "I will sound on his door and see if he will come."

Henderson withdrew to the shadow of the oaks, where he dismounted, holding the reins of the three horses to be ready for any emergency. If he distrusted Felipe a little, surely he was not to be blamed, having had his lesson in treachery and

betrayal so lately. The house to which Felipe was supposed to have gone displayed no light; there was not so much as the bark of a dog to break the straining pitch of Henderson's expectation as he subdued his breath to listen.

Felipe had not gone to betray him to the authorities. Henderson abased himself in his own conscience for harboring such a suspicion when he heard his little friend returning with cautious tread. It seemed that he had been gone long enough to gather not only the history of one day, but of all the years since the founding of the pueblo.

"Here is an unexpected thing!"

These were Felipe's words as he came up in high excitement. He touched Henderson's arm, as if to calm him for the revelation he was about to make.

"What have you found out, Felipe?" Henderson inquired, far steadier in voice and pulse than his friend.

"There has been a disagreement already between the governor and his new general, and the general, determined to have his way, has suspended the civil law."

"You mean the town is under martial law, Felipe?"

"That is it. Here is a difficulty, a great difficulty, unforeseen."

"What have they done with Helena Sprague?"

Henderson's voice was not so steady when he asked this, the first and greatest thing in the hearts

of both of them, try as Felipe might to hold it back for whatever kind purpose that he would.

“The coward has tried and condemned her. She will be shot at the first light of dawn.”

“Roberto? Would he dare defy his father to this length?”

“It is true, Gabriel. My friend is in confidence of a captain of the military; he has heard all. It was over this trial and condemnation that Roberto and the governor quarreled. The governor would not have gone so far.”

“Where do they—where will it be done?”

Henderson’s voice was dry, harsh. It seemed that the blasting fire of Roberto’s vengeance had leaped and reached him, as Roberto had designed that it should do; it seemed that it had withered the youth in him, leaving only the ashes of a man.

“In the plaza, in the face of all the town. God’s pity! we have come too late!”

“No, we are still in time.”

“Time? Then for what, my poor Gabriel, but to see her die? Two of us against twenty-five soldiers! My heart breaks, but it is hopeless.”

“Twenty-five? Are there only twenty-five soldiers here?” Henderson inquired eagerly.

“Maybe not more than twenty, still ten to one. They have sent several out to hunt for us. They are hurrying like bats through the night, guarding the pass and road.”

“Your friend told you this?”

“Yes, he is a man who sees. Fifteen soldiers

were sent to overtake us on the road to Monterey, as Liseta told us; others were thrown around here and there."

"There may not be more than ten or fifteen in the garrison tonight."

"Too many, I am afraid, Gabriel. My hope was in the governor; I have friends that I might use as levers to move him, but since he has no power, that hope is gone."

"Your courage is not gone, Felipe," Henderson said, his own strength quick in his sinews again. The first withering shock that dried his heart and left his words weak on his lips was gone. The fire of determination leaped in him. Twenty men? He had the resourcefulness, inspired of Helena's peril, of a regiment.

"I did not know what we'd discover when we arrived here, Gabriel, but I did not expect this," said Felipe sadly. "I knew Helena would be a prisoner, but in the governor's house, I believed, where they would try to frighten her into surrendering her property, or to cajole her with promises of safety for you. But I am ready to stand with you, Gabriel, in anything, to storm the garrison if you say the word. What is your plan?"

"That must rise out of the circumstances, Felipe. Just now I have no plan. How long is it to dawn, do you think?"

"Not more than three hours."

"I'm going to see if I can find out anything. Will you wait for me here, Felipe?"

“But where? To find out what?”

“To the plaza, the garrison. Maybe some soldier drinking——”

“Everything is closed—cantinas, all. At eight o'clock the doors were locked; everybody was driven from the streets. But they are not asleep in this pueblo tonight. In every house they sit waiting for the dawn.”

“They are eager to see her die!”

“No, they pray that pity will move Roberto. They do not want her shot. It was the plea of the people that moved the governor until he would have pardoned her and set her free. Her youth excused her; she was misled by the Yankee who already had paid the price. And so Roberto, in his rage, becomes the tyrant. Would to God we had the cannon, Gabriel!”

“Will you lend me your knife, Felipe?”

“My rifle, too, if you need it.”

“Only the knife. If I fail to come back before daylight, ride away and save yourself, my good friend. All will be at an end.”

“Why should I stay here, like a groom, keeping company with horses, when there is the work of a man to be done?” Felipe demanded, the hurt of being left behind in his voice.

“You have risked too much for me, a stranger, already. I can't ask you to risk more.”

“If you do not come back, Gabriel, I will hate my life. The horses will be as safe here alone as if I stood at their heads. We will leave them

farther back, behind my friend's corral. I know the plaza, I know the streets. Where you would be blind, I can see."

"I couldn't have asked you to take this hazard with me, Felipe. But I'd rather have you than the cannon."

Henderson felt the sincerity of Felipe's fiber, this strange little man whose hidalgo traditions outweighed by far his new republicanism. He recalled the many small acts of kindness Felipe had done him when their situations were quite different, when the mayordomo had nothing to gain by making the lot of Don Abraham's alien peon any lighter by word or deed.

They led the horses farther back among the trees, tying them directly behind the mud wall of the corral. They would have the benefit of the wall, said Felipe, without compromising his friend, for even a thief might tie his horse behind an honest man's house. The only thing that he deplored was the distance from the plaza.

"If we are obliged to make a run, Gabriel, it will be a long one," he said. "As we go along, make note of the turnings and the landmarks, so you may find your way back if misfortune conspires to keep me behind."

"We must find where she is," said Henderson, desperately eager. "After that—whatever comes. But we must stick together if we can."

They kept to the shadows as they went toward the plaza, passing so quietly that the dogs did not

raise the alarm. The wind that had blown softly from the hills, moving the palm leaves in gentle chafing, with whisperings and sighs as from a people burdened with oppression, was still. A pause had come upon the night; the strident insects in dark acacia bowers were silent. Night murmured no more; its lispings were hushed, its plaints and its dreams dispersed. It was the slack tide in life that falls upon all nature before the miracle of dawn.

“If anybody in this pueblo is asleep, it is the sleep of fever,” Felipe said. “Such a great cruelty as this disturbs the repose. Many eyes will be at windows watching for the day. It will be fortunate if we are not discovered.”

“I think even the dogs are asleep,” Henderson muttered, his faith in the sympathy of that people very shallow.

“There is a garden beside the church, with peaches and apricots,” Felipe said. “I believe the padres have no dogs, either asleep or awake. We can enter there and view the plaza and the barracks.”

“Very good.”

“Just here, then, we climb the wall. The padres do not trust their fruit to unlocked gates.”

If anybody watched in pitiful anxiety for the tragedy of the dawn, the padres were not among them. Everything was hushed around the church and the priests' house that stood near it, white among the orchard trees. Through the barred and

locked gates of heavy timbers the two friends looked into the plaza.

The plaza was an empty square of hard-beaten earth, the parade ground for the garrison, the gathering place of the people at evenings and on days of fiesta. There were no trees in it, no growing thing, no seats, fountains nor ornamentations of any description. It was as barren as a desert, excepting only the posts set in the ground before certain shops and cantinas for hitching the horses of customers.

Starlight alone would have revealed this blank spot in all its bleakness; the added illumination of the bright strip of waning moon made it distinct in detail to the men who surveyed it through the padres' garden gate.

Henderson was as empty of any plan as the plaza itself, as he stood straining against the timbers of the gate. The necessity of quick and masterly decision pressed on him with hot frenzy; his thoughts were in a desperate surge. Every moment of the speeding time urged him to action, only to mock the desperate impotency of his hand.

What could two men do against twenty? as Felipe had asked. There the dark garrison lay, a long, low, dun building of adobe bricks, roofed over with red tiles. It had its secret places, its dungeons, Felipe had said. He was as helpless against its mysteries and thick, guarded walls as an ant.

“Every street emptying into the plaza has a

soldier at its mouth," Felipe whispered. "It's a good thing for us we came this way."

Somewhere within those walls the condemned prisoner waited with sad eyes for the dawn. Perhaps she had believed for an hour of mocking hope, that he whom she had given the benediction of her lips only a broken day past, would come in all the bravery of her faith, the strength of her belief, and take her from the peril that was drawing upon her to engulf her young life.

Whoever slept under that roof of dull-red tiles, it would not be Helena Sprague. In the morning — only a little while now till the break of day — they would bring her out, wan and steady, her eyes open wide in the hunger of life, in the straining to gather and store against the cold bleakness of the grave some little more of the allotment so brutally denied. Perhaps they might look, lighted for a moment with hope, for the face of a friend.

There would be no pity in Roberto now. What his dagger had failed of in the night, the soldiers' bullets would accomplish that coming dawn. No doubt the mean-hearted victor in this pitiful contest of honor, jealousy and cupidity lay sleeping now, refreshing himself to rise soon to the full enjoyment of his triumph.

There was a dim light in what Henderson knew must be the quarters of the officer of the guard, it being a window without bars. Close by was a door, set deep in the thick wall, a broad, high and ponderous thing like a gate in a city wall, before which a

sentry walked a short beat. That was the door they would open to bring her out to die.

With the thought, a door in Henderson's baffled mind sprung wide, revealing the thing that had eluded him.

"Back to the horses!" he whispered, clutching Felipe's arm. "Quick! let us go!"

Felipe felt the shock of a purpose in the quick words, the eagerness of the voice. His own despondent, sad heart jumped with the sound, with the thrilling grasp upon his arm.

"Have you seen something, Gabriel?" he asked, coming down eagerly from the gate.

"I have seen the way," Henderson replied. "To the horses—it is nearly day!"

CHAPTER XX

IN THE PLAZA AT DAWN

PEOPLE began to collect in the plaza before the flare of dawn lifted. As the day grew, dimming the stars at the eastern horizon edge, and spread onward, engulfing the heavens, the arrivals increased. They came now in haste, with searching turnings of the head as if to question whether they had arrived too late, many women with rosaries in their hands, some men with the darkness of threat in their troubled faces.

All comers were directed by the sentinels, who still guarded each street where it opened into the square, to that side of the plaza where the church fronted. Here they stood in the chill of morning, shocked and afraid of this awful thing, yet lacking the courage either to interfere or deny the spectacle their presence.

At the first showing of the *madrugada*, the dawning of day, the general's proclamation had said, this traitress would be stood against the adobe wall and shot. Now it was broadening into day; the drum had not beaten, the door of the military jail had not opened.

"Perhaps General Garvanza has relented, perhaps he will spare her," a woman said. She was old; her hair was dusty-gray as trodden ashes;

her mantilla had slipped from her head to her shoulders unnoticed.

“I saw her when they brought her,” a younger woman said, and she was one whose hand seemed to have laid her child down to its pillow to slip away and stand with aching heart to wait the opening of the carcel door. “She is young and pretty; her hair is the color of wine-grapes. What a pity that bullets must tear her soft bosom and burst into her heart!”

“It is not a time of pity, doña; it is a time of war.”

The speaker was a harsh, gray man, straight in the shoulders like one whose business had been arms. He turned with disfavor in his drawn brows, fixing the young woman with stern eyes.

“But there can be mercy, even in war,” the woman insisted, undaunted by his glare.

“Yes, doña, but when the Yankees come, yelling like devils, what will you have to say about pity then? Who will pity you when they cut your throat and trample your children under their horses’ feet? Ah, that will be another thing!”

“There must be an example,” said another, and he also was old. “If this plotting with the enemy is permitted, every Yankee in this pueblo will turn on us and eat our hearts. This will be an example to them — this will keep them in their places.”

“A pitiful example, then, Don Felix,” one at his side declared, asperity in his voice. “It may be next to treason to say it, but to me this thing is

cowardly and unpardonable. If this tyrant Garvanza ——”

“Silence!” the old soldier rebuked him savagely. “I will not stand by and hear treason spoken in my ear!”

“Then, if the Americans would come, I would help them set that poor young lady free,” the young man declared, defiance in his reckless mouth.

“If the general hears of this ——”

“Curse the general! No man fights a woman — only a coward does that.”

All around there was the murmur of voices, pitched in the note of pity, of helpless, hopeless pity which, dear as it might be to one who must walk forth soon to die, could not stay for one moment the general’s vindictive decree.

“This is the liberty we have under the republic!” one who appeared to be a laborer said, speaking sneeringly, his broken hat pushed back from his flushed brow. “We had no tyranny like this under the crown; no woman ever was led out to die before soldiers in those times.”

“When the Americans come ——”

“Hasten the day!” said the workman fervently.

“It is said they are humane people.”

“Humane! Have you heard of the black men bound in slavery, bought and sold like pigs? Tell me, then!”

“Don Ambrosio, I have heard. But they do not stand the black women, or even the black men, against the wall and shoot them.”

“Yes, and you are a traitor in the core of your heart! I would report you to the general for half——”

“No? Haven’t you heard? Impossible that you haven’t heard!”

The speaker raised his voice above the subdued murmuring, in his surprise, what seemed his avidity, to spread a piece of news. He was of the common class, a thin, acidulous man. The low babbling of voices fell silent as this man drew himself up and looked around on his neighbors, two hundred or more of them now, gathered before the church.

“What is it, innkeeper?” the one called Don Ambrosio demanded, out of his position of authority, it seemed.

“I thought everybody knew; I thought it must have spread like oil on water,” the innkeeper said. “He came last night to my hotel, the messenger who brought the news to the governor. It is of so great——”

“What foolishness!” said Don Ambrosio. “Speak!”

“The Americans, Don Ambrosio,” said the innkeeper.

“What of them, animal?”

“They have taken Monterey!” said the innkeeper with triumphant malevolence, it seemed, stretching himself to his greatest height, straining to tiptoes to fairly throw the news in Don Ambrosio’s face.

“It is a lie!” Don Ambrosio denied.

“Ask the governor, then. Or better—ask Don Michael. Here he comes.”

“It is the shameful truth, Don Ambrosio,” Don Michael, a portly man with sagging jaws, admitted. “The news reached me at midnight. There is one called General Fremont marching on this pueblo now.”

“God save us!” said a woman.

“Your bank—our money in your bank, Don Michael!” another clamored.

“God knows!” said Don Michael, spreading wide his arms as if to show his own breast free of guile.

“Where are they? How near do they approach?” a small, sharp-faced man came elbowing forward to inquire.

“Close at hand, it is thought. They ride like the wind, the messenger said, Missouri men, hard scoundrels who do not even aim when they shoot, and never miss.”

“What?” asked a soldier, pressing near, gun on shoulder, face eager for the right of it. “The Yankees, did you say?”

“Yes, soldier, a thousand of them, coming in a dust like the end of the world!”

It was the defiant young man who volunteered this, giving it to the soldier with excited breath. The soldier gulped it as if he had swallowed an oyster, turned and hurried away to spread the intelligence among his comrades, who were dusty,

red-eyed and weary from their long vigil of the night.

“By God!” the young man muttered; “I hope that will help little Felipe.”

“The general has heard this; he is afraid,” said one, expressing the hope that rose in the hearts of many.

The broad gate in the adobe wall surrounding the compound where the horses were kept, opened as this person spoke. Four horses appeared, drawing out a cannon. One of the lead team was saddled, ridden by a soldier; another soldier rode on the limber of the small piece which they came wheeling into the plaza.

“That is for the Americans,” said the soldierly old man. “Let them have a taste of that and we’ll see how far they come. Good for General Garvanza — he is not asleep!”

“Over there is the place,” said a woman, speaking almost in a whisper to another as they stood with heads drawn together, “there against the wall. They say the priest is still with her——”

“I saw him go in long ago,” an old woman volunteered. “They say it is his long prayers that delay——”

“What a pity, and so young!”

The long roll of a drum sounded in the barracks. There was a noise of assembling men, of trampling feet. The soldiers in the plaza, eight of them there were, ten with the two who manned the cannon, stiffened to their duty, pushing the people

sternly back into a close-packed front opposite the compound wall where the tragedy was to be set.

Two soldiers came and stood at the carcel door, one on either side; others were issuing from the barracks where the drum clamored. The waiting people caught their breath with a sound like a sob when the door opened. There were two soldiers in front, two in the rear; between them Helena, a dark-robed priest beside her.

“She does not die for treason to her country, but for fidelity to one she loves,” said the young man who had expressed his willingness to help set her free.

“It is well known that the general’s jealousy has burned the heart out of him, leaving him as hollow as a barrel,” the innkeeper said.

An officer came forward and assumed command of the party conducting the prisoner. There was a pause before the prison door, while the priest seemed taking his farewell of Helena, who lifted her face, so white it seemed radiant, and smiled.

“I thank God I am not in that squad!” said a soldier at the edge of the crowd. He wiped sweat from his forehead. Women gave him their blessing with their eyes.

Helena was dressed as she was when the soldiers tore her from Don Abraham’s house, in the simple white gown she had worn when she came to the window to talk with Henderson. Her head was bare, her abundant hair gathered with care into a girlish braid which hung across her shoulder and

down her bosom, as her hands had let it fall on the summons of the guard at her door. It gave her the appearance of having been interrupted in her toilet. The general was in such an urgent heat of vengeance that he would not spare her time to prepare to die.

The officer had his sword to his nose, a command on his lips. The priest fell back, to stand before the prison door with bowed head, eyes on the page of his little book. The guard closed in around the prisoner, the march to the place of execution began.

In the center of the plaza the two soldiers were bringing the cannon in place to command the road that came into the pueblo from the north. The horses were trampling with a great noise above the sad silence of the people, with a disturbance of yellow dust which rose like the pollen of wild mustard between those who stood waiting and the light of the east, where the sun seemed laggard out of pity. The drum in the barracks was still; soldiers were assembling before a certain door, which opened now to discharge General Garvanza, in green uniform laced with gold, his sword at his side.

“I cannot look!” said a woman, turning away.

The old mother whose mantilla had slipped from her ash-gray head sank softly to her knees in the dust. It was as if the leader of a flock of doves had settled down in a meadow. Scores of women bent to their knees, in a rustling of brocaded silk,

a murmuring of plain linen, the whisk of poor cotton about their pious limbs.

They were marching along the wall to a certain pitted place which marked where others had stood before the soldiers' guns, Helena tall among the mean-statured, uniformed men. She walked calmly, no faltering in her feet, no turning of the head in the vain expectation, the unreasonable hope, that help might come. There was a pause now, waiting, it seemed, for the men with the cannon to unlimber the piece and remove the horses which obstructed the view of the people, whom the general desired so greatly to witness this deed, for the moral effect and repression of traitorous desires.

"Jesus! if there were ten men!" said the workman. He had pulled his broken hat down; it threw a shadow over his face.

"If there was one!" the young man who had been reproved by the old soldier said.

There was a great uprising of dust from the trampling of the four horses in the plaza, which the man in charge was lashing for some real or fancied fractiousness; those who were not praying, stood straining and stretching to see. The soldiers were placing her against the wall.

It seemed a long time to those who waited, the few moments that passed between the opening of the jail door and this short march beside the wall. The heart labored so in the bosom that it seemed smothering in the sea, the eyes strained until they

burned as in smoke. Pity was in the throat, pity was dry on the lips. It gave pain to bestow so much pity; it was as if the heart had gone dry.

“Jesus!” said the workman, tearing his shirt open on his hairy throat. “If there was a man!”

The young man who had replied bitterly to him before stood silent now; his head was bowed, the blood was gone out of his lips. The only answer to the workman’s passionate wish was the murmur of women’s praying, the sighing of men’s breath as they braced themselves as for a leap.

Then, what a start, what a surging to the feet, what a bristling of wild hopes and terrors in that crowd! What a yell it was that came like a crashing stone into the plaza! what a rush of charging hoofs! Now shots, and wilder cries, and dusty horsemen riding into the plaza, death flashing from their hands.

“The Americans!”

“Fly, fly—the Americans!”

Some ran for the church door, some crouched against the church wall, some ran in the confusion of beating feet and flying dust from the plaza. In a moment, it seemed, the crowd was swept from the place where it had stood, broken, dispersed as smoke is scattered by the wind. Dust was a cloud that obscured everything; it swirled yellow as the smoke of an autumn fire in green chaparral against the lifting sun.

There was shouting in the plaza, and many shots. Only two horsemen had come against the

soldiers, it appeared, but they must be only the outriders of a thousand, they rode so boldly, shouting their defiance in the general's face, shooting down the soldiers as if they had pistols that never needed a ball.

Over against the wall one of them was engaged with three soldiers, the others who had formed the firing squad either having fallen or run away—there was such a tempest of dust that one could not see, except by glimpses as the desperate combat whirled. There was the gleam of the blessed young lady's dress—she was not hurt—there! A soldier had lunged out of the blinding cloud, the maddening, heart-stifling cloud, and driven his bayonet into the belly of the rescuer's horse! He was down, the legs of his horse turned upward like a toy, while it thrashed in the agony of death. Then the dust of the struggle closed around them; it was a blank.

The other of these daring, courageous angels—what could they be but heaven-directed to come in a moment of such pitiful need?—had flung himself from his horse, after driving the soldiers on that side of the plaza before him like leaves before a gale, and was now engaging the two artillerymen, who stood with bravery beside their gun.

“This is the time to help!” said the young man, looking about him with eager eyes as he stood against the padres' garden wall.

“I am with you, comrade,” the workman answered. They ran together into the plaza, into the

sirocco of dust, where the red flame of death was leaping from pistol and gun.

Others came after them like the surge of released waters. It was a shout that ran the breadth of the pueblo, startling old men as they turned in their beds.

Over against the wall, Gabriel Henderson rose out of the misfortune of his fall, the gun of a slain soldier in his hands. His pistols were lost, his horse was groaning with its last breath; the dust was thick around him as fog on the hills. A moment, a little gleam. Helena's white dress fluttered, her hand was on his arm, pressing a pistol into his hand. Out of the fog of dust a soldier leaped, his blood-red bayonet darting like a serpent's tongue.

Thank God for the eyes of love, that could see the flung pistol fall against the wall; thank God for the quick heart of love that could find its way to his side, even through the obscuration of death. The soldier's bayonet was in the dust, his comrades' feet sounded as they ran.

Henderson had left the extra horse tied behind the corral of Felipe's friend, afraid that his charge into the plaza might be impeded by its tugging. His own animal, upon which he had relied to carry both Helena and himself out of the plaza, if fortune should give him the passage, was dead.

Felipe was at the cannon, for what sane purpose no man could tell, dismounted, master of the situation for the moment, but peril before him, where

General Garvanza was forming his panic-scattered men; behind him, it seemed, where the crowd came rushing like an overwhelming wave. Henderson was not cognizant of the people's friendly purpose. He believed they had won and lost.

"Fire! Charge them! Fire!"

It was the voice of Roberto, raised high in a shriek of fury at sight of this havoc among his forces.

"Come!" said Henderson, catching Helena by the hand.

"Charge them!" General Garvanza commanded, with no man steady enough to obey.

Panting, wild-eyed, bloody from wounds; amazed, confused, fearful that a force of these wild devourers was upon them, his soldiers huddled before him where he stood at the barracks door. He cursed them for their cowardice, threatened them with terrible punishment. Falteringly, confused in their movements, the soldiers from the plaza formed. Others came running out of the barracks, from the safety they had sought when the two comrades in this desperate chance had charged with the noise of twenty, the valor of a thousand.

Now another situation confronted the demoralized soldiers and their frantic general. The people had turned against them; they were pouring into the plaza, gathering around the man at the cannon, who stood with pistol raised in defiance of General Garvanza and all he represented. Gen-

eral Garvanza knew him and despised him. If curses could have blasted a man, poor Felipe must have fallen there.

A man out of the crowd stripped the harness from the saddled artillery horse, and put the bridle reins in Henderson's hand as he came up with Helena. A moment; Gabriel was in the saddle, Helena lifted to his arms by hands that touched her tenderly as if to soothe the hurt of the brutal usage that had bruised her heart.

It was a glad shout that bounded from the façade of the low brown garrison, fuel to the fury of Roberto's breast. He snatched a gun from a reluctant soldier, and shot him dead; from another, who fell to his knees in supplication at the general's feet.

“Charge!” Roberto shouted.

His fury descended to the soldiers, slow as they were to shake off their terror. They saw that no greater force was coming against them; that they had been shamed and defeated, their comrades slain, their general humiliated and defied, by two common men who were not even soldiers.

Now the people were against them, they were threatened with drawn pistols, with cobble-stones snatched from the top of the padres' wall. The soldiers crouched to the charge, bayonets fixed to tear out these treacherous people's hearts.

“Here—help me with this cannon!” Felipe shouted. “So! there now, back with you, my friends!”

“Your horse, comrade—go!” It was the young man who led the people, the friend whose wall had sheltered them in the night.

“I wonder if it is loaded?” Felipe muttered, training the cannon to bear on the soldiers, who came at the double on their charge.

“Felipe! Quick, your horse!” Henderson shouted.

Felipe raised his left hand like a fencer, seized the lanyard, the people fleeing from the impending discharge.

“Felipe!” Henderson appealed, reluctant, even in the peril that came charging across the plaza, to ride away and leave him there.

“Fire!” cried Roberto, lifting his sword high.

As the soldiers halted suddenly at the command, their pieces lifted in quick accord, Felipe pulled the lanyard. While the cannon rocked from the discharge he leaped to his saddle.

“Away then, comrade,” he said.

Felipe waved his hat to the people as he passed, turning to see what slaughter that charge of grape-shot had made among General Garvanza’s men.

“Yes, undoubtedly it was loaded,” said Felipe, as he rode hard at his comrade’s side.

The smoke of the cannon-shot still hovered blue in the early sun, shrouding from the shocked eyes of the people those who had fallen in its blast, when Don Abraham came galloping into the plaza at the head of thirty men. His belated expedition for the rescue of his kinswoman from the hands of

his vengeful son, in the expectation of which Roberto had placed the cannon in the plaza, swept with consequence before the eyes of the people, who thought at first the Americans, indeed, had come.

Don Abrahan would have been too late to stay one tragedy that day. He had come only in time to dismount and kneel in the dust of the plaza beside his fallen son.

CHAPTER XXI

A SNAKE IN THE ROAD

PABLO GONZALES was returning home leisurely from the pueblo, his long legs appearing like an extra pair belonging to the burro which carried him, his toes were so near to the ground. It was an old burro, as Pablo was old, long-haired, shaggy, gray. It pattered along in short strides, head down, ears lopping forward, the bell on its bridle scarcely jingling, its gait so smooth and unbroken. Pablo said there was not another animal in the world that went with such an easy foot. It was comparable only to riding on a cloud.

Pablo squinted his eyes against the sun, at that level in the west when it strikes under a man's hat-brim, no matter how he slants it. He carried a sack in front of him, across the burro's withers, a lump of his purchases in each end, sitting himself on the soft long hair of the ancient beast, not so much as a saddle-blanket to give him dignity. As for comfort, neither saddle nor blanket, cushion nor pad would have added to that, according to his own long usage and belief.

It was said of Pablo's burro that it was as old as its owner, and more esteemed by him than all his other possessions combined. Such creatures, it was well known, lived to incredible age; there were

records of them in Mexico that had lived ninety years. Pablo refused to discuss its age. A woman's age should be inquired into only when she goes to be married; a burro's when it is to be sold. There was no money that could buy Pablo's friend and companion out of his kindly hands.

Pablo was still several miles from home; he could not reach it now until well after dark. It was well enough, he said, speaking to Benito, the ass, for there was a pleasure in seeing the hills at that distance as a man rode on his way. It seemed to him that he never had seen so much beauty in the hills before, the sun just looking back on the world over its shoulder, as a man might say, lighting the tops of them, ridge after ridge, peak after peak seeming to stand like islands out of the blue mysterious something that filled the canyons like the smoke of a million fires. And it was nothing when a man went down the mountains into it; nothing but shadows and gray rocks, and sage and laurel and chaparral, with little blue and red flowers between. That was the mystery of the blue filling that floated into the canyons at this hour of the day. A man might walk on the solidness of that blue, it seemed from here, or from the mountain tops, as he knew very well. But let the sun go down and it would vanish, cheating the eyes like a rainbow that seems to rest its column in a man's field.

No, truly, the hills never had appeared so beautiful in his eyes before. It troubled him to find the

world so fair at this late day. It was as in the case of a man who must leave home, never to come back to it again, walking about among things that have been familiar to him many years, discovering new beauty in each common shrub and flower that makes the heart hurt more when he turns away forever. Perhaps he must be leaving the hills soon, and the vega spread at their feet, and the soft winds that came roaming it from the sea. In paradise, it was said, were things sweeter than of this earth, but—but—— Well, a man would rather stay at home.

Now, who was this scarecrow that rose up in a man's way with a rag on his head? Not Simon of the eight mules? Truly, Simon. There was a lying look in the man's face. He turned his head to listen like a fugitive who expects horses at his heels.

"Pablo! for the love of Our Señora!" said Simon, putting out his hand like a beggar at the church door.

However loquacious to Benito on a long and unfrequented road, Pablo was a man whose tongue did not move with the wind. He stopped Benito, and sat looking at Simon with little interest and less of friendliness in his dry, brown face.

"Help a man whose life hangs by a thread!" Simon appealed, laying familiarly hold of Benito's bridle.

"Who is the man?" Pablo inquired, making his close eyes smaller.

“That man is I, Simon Villalobo. I am in the greatest danger that a man ever breathed.”

“There is the whole world,” said Pablo, sweeping his hand to embrace it. “Hide yourself from your enemies, Simon.”

“I am weak; I suffer from a wound.”

“Well, I can’t carry you.”

“You can help me, Pablo.”

“I have helped many an honest man.”

“I have broken from Don Abraham’s prison, curse him in the seven places! Because I helped the young American, Don Gabriel, escape, by a cunning plot between us it was, Pablo—have you not heard?”

“Would the wind tell me?” Pablo asked, indifference in his unmoved face.

“Of course it is impossible that you have seen him. I rave like a drunk man. Well, it was this way, Pablo, between Don Gabriel and me: I feigned that he struck me with the water pitcher, putting my head into his cell to take away his straw bed. We broke the pitcher against the bars, and I gave him my hands to tie, and opened my mouth for the silencer he put into it. But Don Abraham is sharper than seven doctors. For the blow I pretended to receive he gave me this knocked head, he locked me in his prison, he swore he would hang me if Don Gabriel was not caught. Did they catch him? You have been to the pueblo, good Pablo—tell me if Don Gabriel has been caught?”

“There is life a mile long in a man who has so

much breath. Go your way, Simon Villalobo; that way is not mine."

Pablo clamped his knees three times in rapid sequence against Benito's ribs, that being the private and confidential signal between them for a quick and decisive start. Benito responded faithfully, if not with any shocking rapidity, jogging off on his short legs with dainty steps. Simon, not to be abandoned in his extremity in this cynical manner, came trotting beside Benito, well able to outrun him and have plenty of speed to spare, at the best gait he ever struck in all his useful years.

"For the love of Our Señor!" he pleaded, "do not run away and leave me here to die."

Pablo rode on, no pity in his face. Simon put out his hand to catch the bridle; Pablo pushed it aside with a manner of contemptuous denial and disbelief.

"I have heard there is a secret place somewhere on the old Guiterrez ranch, a place where the Franciscans hid, when the king's days ended here. They say that only you and Don Felipe know of this place, and Don Felipe, God receive him! he is dead."

Pablo rode on, his old eyes but a very little crack, indeed.

"Hide me in this place, Pablo, and all I have saved will be yours. Here — take this money and show me the place. What is gold to a man who is already dead!"

Simon produced several small gold-pieces as he

spoke, and offered them in his cupped hand to Pablo while he trotted easily at the burro's side. Pablo pressed Benito's sides in the signal to stop.

"Simon, your danger is greater than you understand," said Pablo, his voice deep and stern.

He rode on, leaving Simon in the road, his palm covered with the little gold coins, at which he looked now, and now after the dusty old man who had given him nothing but his contempt, and that without price.

Simon returned the money to his pocket. There was more cunning shrewdness in the fellow than malevolence; nature had not designed him for a villain of the first class. As a pirate Simon would have failed in business, in spite of his audacity, his swelling manner and boastful, vain heart. He had sense enough to do what his patron ordered, and simplicity enough that he never troubled over the consequences. It was but a very small matter to him to kill a man if Don Abraham desired it of him. It had been done.

"Old fool!" he said, looking after Pablo's dust. "Just as if you could swallow the road!"

Pablo went on his way, disturbed in his contemplation of the beauty of his native place. When he looked toward the hills now it was with another thought. Night closed upon him fully an hour before he reached home, hard as he pushed little Benito on the road. Felipe came softly out of the darkness near the sycamore to give him greeting in low and cautious word.

“Is everything well with the others?” Pablo inquired.

“Very well.”

“And the young lady is tranquil?”

“She is as placid as if death had not come near enough to breathe in her face so lately.”

“Well, there is news,” said the old man calmly, his voice as dry as his lean face. “Roberto is not dead; he is on his feet again with nothing worse to show than a cut forehead.”

“I thought the grape-shot took him, I saw him on the ground,” Felipe said.

“No, it was a soldier struck him down with the butt of his gun when he gave the command to fire on the people. A hundred eyes saw it done. That man is a hero, though the blow he gave his general laid him flat and saved his skin. The grape-shot passed over him like a swarm of bees, but the man who struck him was killed.”

“It must be that Roberto has been reserved for a rope,” Felipe said. “I would not interfere with Providence; let him live.”

“His day is approaching. It is true that the Americans have taken Monterey. Their general is marching into the South with cavalry.”

“So it is true? Gabriel and Helena will leap at this news.”

“Also, soldiers are coming from San Diego to reinforce General Garvanza and defend the pueblo. Don Abraham has put down his quarrel with his son, the governor is united with them, all to make

a stand against the Americans. They swear they never will yield to the Americans, and Roberto, he has made a vow to Our Señora to burn Don Gabriel in chains."

"And for me? what has he sworn for me?"

"There is a paper speaking of reward for all of you posted in the plaza, another nailed to the church door. This is given above the general's hand. The lady and you are charged with treason, Don Gabriel as a spy."

"There is only one answer to Roberto's intention, then."

"I was told by soldiers who heard, that Don Abraham pleaded with, commanded, his son to leave the lady out of this paper, but in vain. Roberto swears she shall die before the soldiers' guns. He is furious that two men should come between him and the vengeance of his jealous heart, by defeating his twenty-seven valiant soldiers."

"And a man can understand the state of his feelings," Felipe said.

"Nine of the soldiers will fight no more, Don Felipe. It was a fight of giants, all in the pueblo say."

"Nine thieves and murderers less in the world! So the republic pays for injustice and oppression, Pablo. I struck a blow for myself also, when I struck for Helena Sprague."

"They say the cannon took five of them, wounding others. The soldiers are no less furious than

General Garvanza; they are riding day and night in search of the three of you."

"They were at the door twice today," Felipe said.

"That is to be expected."

"We had anxiety of you, Pablo, so long on the way. We thought you had been held because it is known you are my friend."

"It is a slow business to hear many stories, and get hold of the handles of the true ones," the old man replied. "Well, I encountered a snake in the road."

"Of a color, Pablo?"

"The devil's color, you might say. Simon Villalobo is abroad with Don Abraham's gold in his hand."

"He brought it to a poor market," said Felipe with such emphatic confidence that admitted no greater expression of praise for the old man's fidelity.

"He is following, a thought of Don Abraham's promised reward, of the reward posted in the plaza, in his coyote's head. The ground has opened under the feet of fools, I have heard it said."

"It may swallow this one," Felipe returned. "There will be fools enough to stock the world, even without Simon."

CHAPTER XXII

THE KING'S ROAD

GABRIEL HENDERSON had no feeling of security in that place "where no soldier could follow." In the day of the old Guiterrez, surrounded by simple Indians who had no thought of the Spaniard's fondness for many exits to his abode, this tunneled retreat was very well; in the day of Roberto Garvanza, who knew all about its existence, though he might not know exactly where to find it, the thing was more a trap than a mysterious place of security.

It would be a small matter, when the reinforcements from San Diego arrived, to throw a guard of soldiers around old Pablo's place and cut off every hope of escape. Though the soldiers might fail to find the exits at once, hidden as they were in the brushwood and trees, a close search under determined direction would disclose them. Two men might hold off a regiment for a while, but endurance and ammunition would not last forever.

They were poorly armed. Henderson had lost two of his pistols in the fight, Felipe's weapons were old and ineffective except at close range. There was little ammunition between them; it was unsafe to raise the inevitable suspicion that would attend the purchase of more by Pablo.

The one wise thing to do was flee into the north. If there was truth in the news that Pablo had brought, they must meet the American forces on the move toward Los Angeles. If there was nothing but the fear of the oppressors and the hope of the oppressed in the rumor, they would be able to find refuge among strong friends.

Henderson was reluctant to assume command of the little party of refugees, although Felipe had invested him with the responsibility and dignity of leader from the moment they rode away from Don Abraham's lane together. Henderson felt that his was a case where all should have a voice, the peril of all being equal.

Two of them already stood condemned as traitors, himself as a spy. Roberto had closed the case against them; no plea would soften the judgment he had pronounced, if any among them would be so base as to plead. With a thought of each of them being in a measure responsible for his own life, and himself responsible for Helena Sprague's entirely, Gabriel called Felipe into a discussion of their situation a little while after Pablo's return from the pueblo with his news.

They were in their underground quarters, the horses, saddled and ready for instant mounting, close at hand. The heavy door that the old hidalgo of other days had closed the mouth of his tunnel with was down from its hinges now, only the acacias clustered along the crumbling adobe wall that stood a little beyond the exit, shutting out the star-

light. The wind came in, fresh and sweet from the hills, moving the candle-flame, finding its way like a spy around the angles of the tunnel and compartment walls.

Felipe was tracing a map of the road to Monterey, marking its difficulties, its long windings through hills and along the coast-line.

“You see it is a very long road, Gabriel.”

“Yes, it looks like there are no short cuts to liberty in this land. But the risk of the road is not as great as the risk of being trapped here.”

“Besides,” Felipe pressed, strong in his faith that his grandfather's tunnels would shelter and protect them as they had many refugees before them, “besides, Gabriel, we are not certain that the Americans have taken Monterey. We may look tomorrow to hear it denied. That is the way of this country.”

“I've not allowed myself to expect anything but its denial, Felipe. We must go out prepared to face great dangers and run many perils, but we will be safer on the road hunted by a few soldiers, than shut here surrounded by many. Helena, what is your opinion?”

Helena had remained silent and apart, taking the place assigned to women in the affairs of the adobe dons. A woman was either a mother of a family, or a daughter designed to become a mother of a family. In the councils, plans, business and advancements of life, she had no word. Mass and confession attended to, safely married, a string of

children at her heels, a woman's work was well begun; with her bed made in holy ground, *Aqui Descansa* on the cross at her head, it was well done.

In spite of the fact that Helena had gone beyond her day and a woman's prerogatives in the business that had brought her to this perilous stand, she was surprised by being called, as an equal, into the council of their fate.

"I will follow the way that you lead, Gabriel," she said in simple trust.

"That is well spoken," said Felipe hastily, quick to cover his friend's weakness in appealing to the opinion of a woman.

Helena, cruelly wrenched by the experiences so lately passed, when "death breathed in her face" as Felipe had said, was white as orange blossoms in the candlelight. She sat on a heap of hay, enveloped in a loose dark cloak, a dark scarf over her head, the ends of it streaming down her bosom, a background for the two men who bent over the paper spread between them. It seemed that the bold spirit, the independent will, was broken in her. Anxiety strained out of her eyes; she seemed like one who sits in patient, dull suffering, counting the night hours, from whose eyes sleep has fled away.

Henderson sat on a keg that once had contained cognac, its burned brand plain to be read, the crippled wing of his hat still held gallantly up by a thorn. His face was rough and hairy, untouched

by razor since the night he quitted Don Abrahan's house.

Across from him was Felipe, seated on a block of wood, the black islets of his face now almost submerged in the forest of beard that sprung thick around them. Felipe's sombrero was pushed back from his eyes, admitting the light to his face. The candle stood between them on a broken chair, drawing their strength and weakness in strong, revealing lines. A man did not consider the niceties of bodily adornment when life itself was running in frantic seeking, like a mouse shut in a room.

At one side of them the three horses loomed large in the shadow, their eyes luminous as they turned a head now and then and caught a beam of light.

Such was the picture of the refugees from Don Roberto's jealous vengeance as they considered life and death, calmly as other men and women, in happier surroundings, their hopes unclouded, considered their dinners or their amusements for the night.

"Soldiers will be here, and here," Felipe said, indicating the spots on his map, "keeping the road, Gabriel. Here, at the summit of the pass, three could hold a regiment."

"Roberto hasn't the men to spare to guard all these places, Felipe."

"You forget that Don Abrahan has raised his friends. He can gather forty or fifty men."

"From what I've seen of them, Felipe, they're

not the kind that would stand sentinel at night along the road."

"The news of your brave rescue——"

"Felipe! I'd have been like a gun without a bullet only for your counsel and help. It was more your success than mine."

"Not so, not so, Don Gabriel. What if the cannon had not been loaded? Ha! I was only a spark that the wind blew, falling in the right place at the right time."

"We'll not argue it over again now, Felipe," Henderson said, smiling at his friend's vehement depreciation of his part in that adventure. "Let's leave it for a contention between us when we're old. Is there no pass, no road, through these mountains called Santa Monica to the west of here?"

"There is a pass, coming down into the king's road to the north near Buena Ventura, but it is steep, long and difficult. Few travel that way. It would require two days, at least, to cross by that pass, only to come out into the arms of soldiers on the other side, I fear."

"That would be a road too slow for us, then."

"But here, sheltered as we are, soldiers may pass up and down, over our very heads, and never find us. If I did not know how the Franciscan fathers lay here, Gabriel, with eager soldiers of the republic hunting them, it would be a thing to doubt."

"Yes, but they were priests, after all, Felipe. I doubt if the hunt was made with both eyes open."

"No man but Pablo has entered this place in years, the memory of it is gone, the servants of my grandfather's day are in their graves long ago. Why, I can lead you to wine-barrels, Gabriel, that are full since my grandfather's time. Pablo is saving them in the hope that I'll step into my inheritance on a day, but that is a hope without a leaf. Do you think those barrels would have lain there full of wine if the way to them had been known?"

"It doesn't seem reasonable that they would, Felipe."

"No, it is out of all human probability to consider such a thing. Trust my sanctuary a day longer, then, Gabriel. Pablo has arranged for a friend to come tomorrow with news of the Americans. If they have not arrived at Monterey, if we must expect no help from that quarter, then it will be time to go."

"Very well," Gabriel agreed, "we will wait one day more." He folded Felipe's map hurriedly and put it in his pocket. "It is past ten, and my watch at the door."

There was no moon, yet in the peculiar clearness of those summer skies the stars were almost of tropical effulgence. The acacia trees, quick-growing, thick, and dark of foliage, clustered along the high adobe wall that once had enclosed the old Guitierrez' extensive grounds. Beyond the acacias,

sycamore and live-oak spread in a rambling growth along the little stream, dry in summer, which drained the rainfall from the distant hills. Between these trees there stood a thick growth of smaller trees and shrubs, and beyond them the upgrown lands which once had been the tilled fields of the Guitierrez ranch. Except for large trees, this land had returned to the wilderness of its original state, no particular line being apparent now between the old fields and the virgin country.

Cattle of the neighboring drovers grazed over this territory, which varied between open pasture and tangled brush-growth for miles. Trails known to the vaqueros ran through it all, familiar to Felipe. Gabriel knew that Felipe could lead them in a confusing and entangling race against any who might pursue them, if they had alarm of the searching detail in time.

The landscape lay dark under the stars as Henderson mounted to the fallen coping of the adobe wall to look over it and listen into the shadows of the trees. The measured sawing of insect fiddlers rose and fell in the acacia grove, pulsing, with the beat that nature seemed to set for all night-singing creatures of the woods, with those whose music dimmed away into the distant bosque. One might pass along the wall within a dozen feet of their retreat, never thinking that those sought lay so near. Again, one might creep close and lay his ear to the ground, listening for footsteps, for low voices that might, in the sense of security,

lift a note too high. Such a one was Simon, crafty, sneaking, fit figure for the night.

So, by the wall Henderson leaned and listened, the night full of its strident cacophony, beaten in the rhythm of nature's eternal metronome. It seemed secure there, yet night gives that sense to a hunted thing, too often beguiling and perilous. And in his waiting the horned owl came into the sycamore grove to prey on the feathered creatures that reposed in the false security of the dark, his rolling voice startling them in bewilderment to blunder in confusion into his talons. The snake glided along the adobe wall, the rustle of its passing in the leaves, stealthy upon the track of field-mouse that danced in the deep shades and felt secure; the armored beetle the cold, repellent worm—all came from the place that covered them to seize and destroy, pursue and slay the things beneath them weaker in their order, impotent in their defense. Even the moth slipped into the beehive to suck the product of the drowsing swarm; the mean to prey upon the industrious, the loathsome to swallow the beautiful, the sluggish to spread its slime to ensnare the fleet.

There was no pause in the great tragedy of nature, Henderson reflected, leaning with arms against the crumbling wall. Man swallowed man by day; snake gulped mouse by night. It was a cloying, despicable situation that a man held among these rapacious things, cursed with passions that would not let him rise above the little and the

loathsome of creation that devoured their weaker kindred in the dark.

“It is one o’clock,” said Felipe, coming softly behind his watching friend, a note of chiding in his voice. “You have let me sleep too long.”

“I haven’t noticed the passing of time, Felipe. You are welcome to the hour.”

“Look at the Great Bear, sinking behind the hills like a boat that goes down in the sea,” said Felipe. “It will soon be dawn.”

“Yes, in two hours it—the bell!”

“Perhaps a bird——”

“Twice! Pablo is——”

“It must be that he turned in a dream,” said Felipe, after they had stood listening for the bell to ring again, breath suspended, hearts beating low.

“I don’t hear any movement around the house,” Henderson whispered. “If it was the signal—unless the string parted.”

“No.” Felipe laid his hand on Gabriel’s arm, straining to read some sound of danger in the dark. “If it comes three times——”

The tinkle of the bell in the roof of the vault broke Felipe’s breathless speech.

“Three! They have come!” said Henderson.

“The signal to go!” said Felipe, almost stunned by amazement. He was reluctant to believe that danger could threaten them in his ancestor’s burrow. “Hear it! that is a horse sounding its nose.”

“They are surrounding the house,” Henderson whispered, coming down from the wall.

“They will try to force Pablo to show them the place. Simon must have read in his face that we were here.”

“They’ll never be able to torture it out of him,” Henderson said, “but his wife might tell, to save him.”

“No, she is of a piece with Pablo. They might as well build a fire against the sycamore tree expecting to make it tell. There is time for us to go. What road shall we try—the pass to the west?”

“No. We’ll be safest where we’re least expected, Felipe. We’ll take the king’s road.”

“Thank God for the night!” Felipe said.

CHAPTER XXIII

ONE LITTLE CANNON

“**N**OBODY is following,” said Felipe, satisfaction in his words.

He came forward to join his companions, waiting where the obscure path which they had been following joined the king’s broad highway that led to Monterey. Dawn had come before they emerged from the bosque through which Felipe had led them a cautious, winding way.

Henderson now recognized his surroundings. They had come to the *camino real*, or royal road, something more than a mile distant from Don Abraham’s house, near the point where the great highway branched, one road to enter the pass, one to go to San Gabriel Mission to the east.

“You are a master guide, Felipe,” Henderson praised him.

“Before the sun rises hundreds of cattle and sheep will cross and follow the paths we have traveled, covering our tracks like rain. Do we go on, Gabriel?”

“On to Monterey,” Henderson replied, giving his horse rein, “unless we meet better fortune in the road.”

“Then we would join with better fortune, certainly,” said Felipe, so well pleased with the

beginning that his spirits were rising over the disappointment of having to quit his grandfather's retreat.

To one who might meet and casually pass them on the road, it would appear that three men were on their way to the north that summer morning. Helena had assumed man's attire the day Henderson and Felipe brought her to Pablo's house, partly for the disguise it might afford, mainly to facilitate her flight when it came to taking horse again. She seemed a handsome youth, fresh of cheek as an apricot in that growing day, her abundant hair — which she would have sacrificed to her disguise only for Henderson's stern prohibition — gathered under her sombrero, the immense brim of which shadowed her face. Her all-enveloping cloak covered her limbs to the stirrups, leaving little of the lines of her body to betray her.

Helena's shocked mind had cast off its oppression of fear with the gloom of her underground hiding-place. She rode with a lively brightness in her eyes, a quick ear for every sound, a hearty determination in her pose, the fullest confidence in Gabriel Henderson's ability to carry her to safety in the face of the strongest army that ever marched. Now and then she turned to express this confidence in a smile that sprung in her sympathetic eyes and warmed her face with its glow.

They were approaching the dividing-point in the road, where the right-hand branch led eastward to San Gabriel, the left through the pass

to the north, riding with slack rein, conserving their horses, not knowing what hot race might lay ahead. Felipe rode a little in advance, beginning now to show some new anxiety as day broadened and they approached the point of their greatest danger. The pass would be guarded, he told them. How they were to get through, whether by strategy or fight, he was leaving to his general, as he called Henderson, to decide when the question should rise before them in the road.

Helena drew up suddenly, lifting a cautioning hand.

"I thought I heard horses," she said.

Henderson listened, facing his horse about. Felipe turned in his saddle, his young beard as black on his face as a mask.

"Yes, there are horses behind us," Henderson said, the wing of this approaching trouble flitting its shadow across his merry eyes.

"They are crossing the rocky arroyo not a quarter of a mile back," Felipe said. He returned a little way, listening to judge their numbers by their noise.

"There must be a great many," Helena whispered, one hand on her lips as if to silence her own fear, the other lifted in cautioning appeal.

"We will go into the bushes and let them pass," Henderson directed. "If there are men guarding the pass we must not be caught between two forces at the very start."

"There is a sound of wheels," Felipe an-

nounced, as they waited well withdrawn from the road, screened by the thick bosque.

“Yes; it may be only freighters, I’ll ride back for a glimpse of them,” Henderson said. “If they are soldiers, we’ll let them pass, then go on our way.”

“Our way?” Felipe repeated. “But, my general, it will be full of soldiers.”

“When I come back,” said Henderson, assuring them with a smile.

Henderson dismounted when he had gone a little way on his reconnoitre, thinking his head might be seen above the bushes. The road here wound close against the foot of the hills, flanked by the natural growth of brushwood and small trees, with the rounded top of a dark-green live-oak lifting here and there.

Henderson had his plan of action in mind as he returned to spy out the nature and number of this party that came with so much noise along the road. He recalled how he had surveyed the valley of San Fernando from the mountain as he lay hidden on Helena Sprague’s ranch; how the valley came down between the hills to join that of San Gabriel, like a river running into the sea. If these were soldiers, they would lie quiet in the bosque and let them go their way, then he would lead his little party to the mouth of San Fernando valley, around this pass where Roberto’s trap was set and waiting.

This course would lead them far from the road

they must follow to Monterey, delay them two or three precious days, perhaps. But the valley was broad and densely overgrown; an army could not cover it so completely that a determined few could not pass through.

The advancing party had crossed the stony bed of the dry wash—in winter a torrent of yellow, headlong water from the hills—and was proceeding with more speed. Now Henderson glimpsed them through the bushes. Soldiers. But far from the formidable force that he had expected from the clatter and loud clash of wheels. The sight of them gave Henderson a new hope, kindled the quick fire of an audacious plan.

Henderson saw a party of three soldiers, one of them a petty officer, conducting with a four-horse team if not the identical small cannon, then its twin, that Felipe had discharged in the plaza with such sanguinary toll. The detail must have left the pueblo before midnight to be so well on the way to the summit of the pass, whither Henderson supposed they were bound, doubtless to reinforce the guard stationed there to stop the march of the Americans who were believed to be coming from Monterey.

The soldiers were dusty, tired, indifferent; poor material at their best. The petty officer rode a few paces in advance, his cap pulled down to his eyes, so confident of the security of the road that he seemed to be asleep. One man rode a saddled horse in the lead team, the third sat on the am-

munition-box, wide enough awake from the jolting he had been given in crossing the rocky arroyo.

Henderson was still a short distance ahead of the soldiers, far enough that he calculated, together with his distance from the road, that he might mount and hurry back to carry out the scheme that had come to him with more boldness than reason to recommend it. The soldiers were approaching one of the innumerable short curves in the road. Henderson rode hard, careless of noise, to gain the farther side of this sharp bend in the king's highway.

Felipe heard him galloping through the bosque.

"It is the soldiers," he said, turning to Helena, pistol in hand. "If your poor defenders should prove too weak, ride fast to San Gabriel, seek a refuge there."

"No," she returned, calmly. "If my brave defenders fall, I shall fall with them. Don Felipe, you carry two pistols; give me one of them."

Felipe's admiration for her courage lifted him like the news of victory. He put the pistol in her hand as Henderson burst out of the brush into a fire-cleared opening not fifty yards away.

"He is riding past us, he is turning into the road!" said Felipe, consternation smiting him coldly. "It cannot be that he is leaving us!" He rode from the cover of the bushes, caution aside in the face of this astounding action by his friend.

"He is charging them!" said Helena. "He is a thousand men!"

“God protect him!” said Felipe. “Back—back to the shelter of the bosque until one of us returns!”

The officer had halted his little cavalcade, alarmed by the passing of somebody on his flank, whose noise he heard in the bosque like a whirlwind, but whose form he did not see. He was turning inquiringly, hand going slowly, as if he questioned the need of it, to his pistol; the man in the saddle behind him was leaning back on his hard-mouthed mount, holding the beast with curses; the soldier who rode the ammunition-box stood half-risen, braced by rigid arms.

A sudden dash of hoofs in the road ahead of them, a clatter of galloping, a wild yell. The officer in advance—Henderson never knew what rank it was he held—snatched his pistol and fired one quick wild shot at the rider who leaped into his astonished sight around the bend in the road. This duty done to his honor and his country, the officer wheeled his horse and galloped away.

The man on the ammunition-box leaped over the wheel, tumbled into the roadside bosque, disappeared like a rabbit; the postilion lifted his hands high above his head, straining to his tiptoes in his stirrups to stretch them higher, begging for mercy, his fear no doubt making every grain of dust that rose behind Henderson a terrible American, such as took no aim but never missed.

Felipe came charging through the curtain of

dust to strengthen this illusion, looking around with fierce whiskered face for somebody who stood his ground and wanted a bullet to make him yield it to a proper man. He saw only Henderson whisking the pistol from the artilleryman's holster, and commanding him to sit still.

"It is the cannon, it is the very cannon!" said Felipe, his eyes bright in the joy of this tremendous feat.

"Quick! see if it is loaded," Henderson directed.

Felipe flung himself from the saddle, ran to the cannon to sound it for a charge.

"It is not loaded, general," the soldier said, his eyes big with the fear for his life.

"How many are coming behind you?" Henderson asked him.

"Not a man," the soldier returned.

Helena had come up, Felipe's imperious command having stayed her in the bosque a little while, but no longer than the sound of the shot the officer fired, the one shot of the encounter. She was so thrilled by the sight she saw, her pride in the man who had seen his moment and employed it, rose with such welling tenderness that her eyes were blinded for a little by her tears. She rode forward, pistol in her hand. The frightened soldier again made his frantic signal of surrender, lifting his hands high.

"Do you know how to load it, Felipe?" Henderson inquired anxiously.

"I have been a colonel of artillery," Felipe returned somewhat haughtily, a little hurt.

"A million pardons, my good, brave friend. I might have known."

"It was nothing," Felipe waved it away, peering into the cannon's mouth; "it was not said."

Helena could not trust her voice to sound as a soldier's voice should ring in the moment of victory. She ranged her horse beside Henderson's, and paid him what she could with a smile. Felipe looked up from loading the gun.

"He is not only a thousand men; he is ten thousand!" he said. "Now, my general!" as he rammed the charge of grape-shot down.

"You are ready?"

"Ready, my general. To the pass! One shot will clear it, then on to Monterey!"

"No, not to the pass," said Henderson. "Turn it the other way; we're going back."

"Back, Gabriel?" Helena seemed to protest. The forces of her past anguish assailed her, driving her courage away.

"Back?" Felipe repeated, face blank in amazement. "Why, we'll meet the soldiers, they'll take the cannon away from us, Gabriel. With this little cannon we can go marching to Monterey like conquerors, we can clear our way like a fire."

"It is a long distance to Monterey," said Gabriel, "the situation there is doubtful. There is a better way. We will make terms with General Garvanza through Don Abraham."

“But how?” Felipe inquired, full of perplexity and doubt. “One little cannon, not more than twelve rounds of ammunition, and two men!”

“One little cannon can knock down a man’s house,” Henderson said.

Felipe looked at him, the light of understanding spreading in his black-whiskered face.

“It is a fine scheme!” he applauded. “In that case one little cannon can make a very good argument.”

“We’ll be equal to an army of five hundred men.”

“Ten thousand, five hundred men!” Felipe declared fervently. “Soldier,” addressing the artilleryman in his native tongue, “do you fight with us?”

“With pleasure, brave colonel,” the man replied.

“About, then, and forward!” Felipe commanded.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HUMBLING OF DON ABRAHAN

THERE was a gleam of yellow sunlight on Don Abrahan's gables as the party of the cannon, no longer refugees, drew up to the head of the olive lane. The stir of early morning gave a liveliness to the back portion of the premises of which the front offered no indication, for, like the houses of the great everywhere, Don Abrahan's front door was the last to open on the day.

Henderson and Helena rode in front, the artilleryman in his parrot-green uniform following with his four horses. Felipe rode the ammunition-box, ready to unlimber the piece in a moment and stand on his defense. Determination and confidence made up whatever the party might be lacking in numbers. Henderson flung the gate open; the cannon trundled under the spreading limbs of the oak where Helena had found refuge on a well-remembered night.

It was as if some monster came upon a man while he slept, the manner of that cannon's arrival in the courtyard of Don Abrahan's mansion. Don Abrahan, indeed, was asleep, far beyond his usual hour for waking. He had been on the road late last night, leading his men to surround Pablo Gonzales' house in the empty raid that came of Simon's

spying. It was almost the dawn of day when Don Abrahan returned home, his neighbors dispersed in no fine humor over the fruitless groping after these elusive refugees in the dark.

When the cannon was wheeled to place in the courtyard, swung around with expedition by Felipe and trained on Don Abrahan's house, there was a mighty running of those who witnessed it to spread the news. Don Gabriel had come back, bringing a huge great cannon, and was that moment about to blow Don Abrahan into eternity as he lay snoring on his bed! Such a wakening of old men who were unable to toil in the fields, such a hurrying of young ones to see this triumphant return of one who had served beside them in peonage only a few days ago!

Felipe chose his place for the cannon with a view to defense as well as assault, placing it near that end of the long warehouse in which his former office was. This gave him a defense in the rear and on one flank, the other being open, but easy to protect by a hasty barrier if need for it arose. Henderson rode into the patio and beat with his pistol on Don Abrahan's bedroom door.

Don Abrahan's wits were cloyed by the dregs of sleep, which lies heavily on a weary man or a fevered man at the hour of sunrise. He came in his nightgown to the door, opening it a little, showing his narrow face. No man is invested with dignity when standing in his nightgown with his face at the crack of a door, especially when sleep,

alarm, and the scurrying emotions that rise and fly out of his head like startled birds, all are contending for expression in his slumber-stiffened countenance. Don Abraham's voice was rusty in his throat.

"What is it? Who is sounding on a man's door at this hour?" the patron demanded, evidently mistaking Henderson for a messenger from his own clan.

"Open the door wide, Don Abraham, get into your clothes and come with me," Henderson ordered him, not gently in any particular.

"It is the voice of Gabriel, my errant son," said Don Abraham, quick to see that all was not beginning well for him that day, quick to lay the oil of his placative tongue to the trouble standing before his door.

"It is the body of Gabriel, also," Henderson replied, "and the pistol of Gabriel that you are looking into this moment. Be wise, Don Abraham; make haste. If you lay hand to a weapon, that moment, I swear, will be your last."

"This is an unfriendly manner to call a man from his bed, Gabriel, my son," the patron rebuked him in his patriarchal fashion.

"There is no friendship between me and your kind, sir," Henderson corrected him savagely.

"But it is not well, with the gentleness I always had in my heart for you, Don Gabriel, to come to my door with a pistol."

"Not alone a pistol," said Henderson. He

reined near, kicked the door wide open, motioned Don Abrahan outside with imperious gesture. "Look, Don Abrahan, at the animal that has come with me."

"A cannon!" Don Abrahan gasped. "God save us! Gabriel," appealing with supplicating eyes, "you would not——"

"I would," said Henderson roughly. "Now hurry."

In the door Don Abrahan twisted his neck to look back at the threatening cannon, Felipe standing ready, a growing crowd of the patron's Indians and subject countrymen gathering in wonder and admiration behind. That moment the patron's heart fell like a bucket in a well. He felt that his consequence had departed, that alien hands had laid hold of him and his at last. His limbs trembled as he drew on his pantaloons, his hands were cold when they touched his flesh. There was weakness in his legs when he came into the sun; the melancholy color of hopelessness was in his face.

"What is your pleasure, Don Gabriel?" he inquired, meek and afraid.

Henderson indicated that he was to proceed into the courtyard and make closer acquaintance with the cannon and those who stood at its breech. Helena withdrew into Don Felipe's office, as it was still called, as it would be designated during the memory of those who had known Don Felipe in it through all his faithful years.

"Felipe!" Don Abrahan was shocked out of

his depression and fear at recognition of his former mayordomo. "So, you also return to humble me."

"Would I return to exalt you, small tyrant, slavemaker, oppressor of the poor?" Felipe asked, speaking in Castilian, that all assembled might understand.

A murmur and a movement passed through the crowd. It was as if men stretched in their bonds, lifting their heads again in hope.

"You, that came a beggar and left a thief!" Don Abrahan said, a flush of deep resentment spreading in his thin face.

"Here is the judge, here he stands!" said Felipe, laying his hand on the cannon.

Again the movement; again the murmur, that seemed now almost a cry. Don Abrahan gathered dignity out of his wrath, turned his back on Felipe as on one unworthy and low.

"Don Gabriel, what is your pleasure with me?" he asked.

"Send to the pueblo, or where he is to be found, for your son," Henderson said. "If soldiers or others accompany him, they must not approach within a mile of this place. Give him to understand that plainly. The moment this particular of my orders is ignored, I'll fire on your house. More than that, you, personally, will be held responsible."

"I cannot answer for him, Don Gabriel. He may refuse to parley, he may ignore a command

issuing from no higher authority than an individual who is proscribed by the laws of this land, if you will forgive me."

"Tell him I am acting for the United States government, in whose name I have seized this country."

There was a great deal of hope, not a little contempt, in Don Abrahan's face as he looked around, plainly for the army that was to enforce the demands of this self-appointed commander. The gleam like the reflection of firelight, of laughter that was not yet mirth, stood again in Don Abrahan's eyes. He was recovering himself, now that he saw through the mighty bombast, as he believed, of this simple sailor from a Yankee ship.

"I will send a messenger to General Garvanza and deliver to him your desires," he said with false complaisance, false respect.

"Not my desires, sir; my commands," Henderson corrected, the sternness of his voice like a stone against Don Abrahan's ear.

"I will send him the word, Don Gabriel."

"In the meantime, it will be necessary to restrain you," Henderson announced. "There is a compartment here," indicating the warehouse, "that I have occupied——"

"I give you my word that I will not attempt to leave this place," Don Abrahan hastily pledged.

"You could not be blamed, under the conditions, if you failed to keep it," Henderson replied, inflexible as Don Abrahan's own whipping-post.

That was the way it came about that Don Abraham occupied his own prison, with its cross-barred door of iron, its thick outer door of oak, both of which were locked securely upon him. His keeper was an ancient Indian, called forward by Felipe, a man whose proud spirit had remained unbroken through more than fifty years of injustice at the hands of Don Abraham's father and Don Abraham after him. This man had suffered hunger and thirst in the narrow cell; he had felt the bite of the lash at the whipping-post. It was not a merciful jailer that was set over Don Abraham Garvanza. In all his years Don Abraham had not been keeping an account that would credit mercy due him at the end.

Helena came from her retirement in Don Felipe's office when Don Abraham had been taken away. There had been great wonder, great admiration, expressed concerning this handsome caballero among the simple people. It was fitting, they said, that such as this one, and Don Gabriel with his laughing eyes, should bring liberty to the oppressed who labored their lives away to pay their endless debts to Don Abraham. For was it not well understood that when the Americans came, all men were to own land and be free?

"My general," said Helena, approaching softly behind Henderson, speaking over his shoulder.

He turned with such eagerness that many guessed the truth hidden by Helena's long cloak and broad sombrero. They were almost confirmed

in it when he smiled, and the light of his eyes grew happier.

“There is another order that I ask you to give,” Helena said. “Please send to the house and direct Doña Carlota to bring my dresses.”

“Why not go yourself? She can’t lock you up again.”

“It is a treacherous house, I’ll not enter it again, Gabriel. My place is in the field, besides. I am a soldier, I fare as soldiers fare—only I want my dresses.”

So it was ordered, and Doña Carlota came, not stooping to a maid’s service, certainly, but followed by women who carried Helena’s wardrobe overflowing in their arms.

“Where is my dove?” Doña Carlota demanded, full of terror for the cannon, giving it wide room in passing.

She stopped near the door where Helena waited her, a black mantilla over her sleek hair. She was afraid of the idle people who had given themselves a holiday without so much as a look toward Don Abrahan for permission. Simon, the temporary overseer—there being no new mayordomo appointed yet in Don Felipe’s place—being away on greater affairs, and not likely in the present state of things to be especially anxious to return. Doña Carlota was afraid, above all things, of Don Felipe, whom she had not recognized in his grim black smear of beard, his dusty clothing and fierce, keen fighting air.

“Oh, my little dove! save me from these savages!” she appealed, turning her fat eyes around in quaking fright.

“Inside with you now, old lady,” Felipe commanded.

Doña Carlota, not yet recognizing him, was almost dissolved in fright. Her knees were melting under her fat body, she was about to bend in supplication to this fierce, black man when Henderson, having regard for her sex, if no pity for her panic, directed her to Helena’s retreat.

Felipe had found a ready response to his call for volunteers. Many of the men on Don Abraham’s plantation, like himself, had borne arms, even if they had not done much fighting, in the rebellion. Their hope of freedom and equality before the law had vanished with the establishment of the new regime. No man’s debt had been cancelled by the shift from one rule to another, it appeared; the peon had remained a peon, and such was his sad condition still.

Now the Americans were coming, said Don Felipe; the dust of their approach was on the horizon. It was very likely that all of them would be American citizens or outlaws against American authority before the sun set twice. To such as came forward like good and valiant men at this time, rewards would be forthcoming.

Felipe took that assurance on himself, knowing the reluctance of men to risk even the smallest thing without the hope or promise of reward. The

artilleryman taken with the cannon had laid aside his green uniform, and now appeared in a workman's dress. He was active in his assistance to Felipe, whom he called colonel, knowing very well what his payment would be if he ever was so unlucky as to fall into General Garvanza's hands.

Don Abraham had several guns of assorted kind, the accumulation of years, and powder in great store, laid by for trading purposes in the warehouse. A few additional guns, hidden by the laborers on the ranch, were produced, making sufficient to arm twelve men.

Out of this number guards were set, Felipe himself keeping charge of the cannon. Privately he told Henderson that it was a little early yet to rely on the valor or loyalty of his recruits.

"A man who has been a slave a long time has little fire in him," he said. "There is nothing like a taste of liberty to put courage in a man's blood. But let the news get abroad that we are up, and three hundred men will join us before night. If the Americans do not come then, we will have a revolution, at least. We will overthrow the tyrants ourselves."

Then, if the Americans did not come? That was a question that began to rise before Henderson at every turn. Here they were, two men and one woman, in the midst of a vast country, by the authority of which they stood outlawed. Let it turn out that the story from Monterey was but a frightened rumor, that the Americans had not

taken that place, and what would their situation be?

He began to regret the impulse that had carried him into that adventure, tempting as the way of it had been. Perhaps it would have been wiser to have gone on as he had planned in case of encountering soldiers in the pass, around to the mouth of San Fernando valley, risking the perils of the longer journey, rather than to have made this bold step. It would be impossible to hold out indefinitely there; fatigue would overwhelm them in the end, though Roberto Garvanza might fail. But it was said that soldiers were on the march from San Diego. The fact that General Garvanza had sent his only cannon to hold the pass would seem proof that they were coming in force, well armed.

And, on the other hand, there was argument in Roberto's act of defense that seemed evidence that the Americans were on their way. Roberto would not have sent the cannon for any other purpose than to check their advance. No, it was not to stop three refugees that Roberto had dispatched his one little field-piece to that vantage-place in the road. The Americans were coming; the news was true.

Still, it was a long distance from Monterey to Los Angeles; two or three important towns which must be subdued lay between. It might take ten days, it might take longer, for the forces to come. Meantime, how long could they hold their ad-

vantage over Roberto? How long could they apart from any question of force, endure?

Don Abraham's life was in his hands, but, vindictive as he had felt toward him when he had vowed to avenge John Toberman's death, Henderson was not savage enough to consider any extreme measure in the old man's case. Only in the event that Roberto would not grant terms, and give guaranty that such terms would be respected, would he hang Don Abraham to his own oak, as he deserved, for his cowardly crime against Toberman.

This whole exploit seemed an empty thing now to have undertaken. The higher the sun mounted, the clearer this view of it grew. Day makes wreckage of so many defenses that men build in the night, as the illuminating beam of reason discovers the fatuity of so much that is prideful and vain.

There was very little hope of escape from the shores of that country by ship. The Boston ships would have sailed clear of those hostile waters on the first news of war; the ships of other nations seldom came there to risk the contraband trade which the Americans had pushed so boldly. Commerce always had been discouraged on that coast, even prohibited, under the Spanish rule, with little more encouragement under the Mexican government. No more Boston ships would round the Horn until peace came, and no man could tell when that would be.

What, then, would be the situation of these beleaguered three in a few days, perhaps a few hours,

more? Henderson now felt that he had added desperation to desperation by his wild charge on the cannon, his rash decision in coming there to compel Roberto Garvanza's leniency, even to granting freedom to them all, by striking through Don Abraham. It had appeared a simple solution of their troubles at first; now it seemed only a destructive blunder. What would he not give that hour, indeed, to know whether the Americans had come.

One thing was apparent, to a grave certainty: now that he had made this spectacular dash, he must maintain his position. There must be no weakening, no soft yielding to importunity or appeal. He was dealing with treacherous, unfeeling, unsympathetic people, cruel to their inmost fiber. He must make his heart as hard as an armadillo. If necessary to hang Don Abraham, then Don Abraham must hang with no more grace for his pleading or his prayers than he had granted to John Toberman in his somber extremity.

"Felipe, we must have a flag," he said, firm now in his resolution to carry his head high and hold his hand firm to the end.

"I have had that thought, Gabriel."

"Helena must contrive one for us; I'll speak to her. How long ought it to take Don Abraham's messenger to reach Roberto, how soon may we expect to hear from him?"

"The messenger will be two hours on the way to the pueblo, counting for gossip by the side of

the road. An hour more for Roberto, who must not seem in a hurry in order to save his dignity and his pride; another hour for him to make the passage from the pueblo to this place. It will be past noon, Gabriel.”

“Have them piece out a pole of some kind, and nail it to the whipping-post, Felipe. We’ll put it to an honorable use for once, at least. We’ll have the United States flag up when General Garvanza comes. It will be equal to another cannon.”

CHAPTER XXV

CARLOTA SEEKS A FRIEND

I WILL not go and leave you among savages," Doña Carlota declared.

"Your protection is neither necessary nor desired, Doña Carlota," Helena informed her, with cold, unfriendly front.

"I know the formalities, no matter for your unruly independence, young lady. I will remain. My despised protection may be something to cling to like a bird in a gale before this day is done."

"Your protection, Doña Carlota! Your memory is short. It was you that betrayed me to savages, it was your treason that sent me to what would have been my death but for the strong arms of valiant gentlemen. You are more of a savage than the meanest here, Doña Carlota."

"Doña Carlota, Doña Carlota!" the fat little lady repeated, with contemptuous mimicry, her face flaming at the affront. "Have you forgotten my relationship, do you no longer remember your duty to your elders—well, if I am not so much older, either!"

"The door opens to your hand, Doña Carlota; it will be well to go."

"Go? I shall not go until Don Abrahan commands you to the house again, to your room. Then

let us see them discharge their cannon into the house, let us see!"

"Don Abraham is to be hung for the murder of John Toberman before the sun goes down. Now, Doña Carlota, return to your prayers."

Helena opened the door as she spoke, extending her hand in expressive invitation to be gone.

"They will not dare touch Don Abraham!" Doña Carlota said, flaming in a fresh sweep of anger, rising with such speed as was her best from the chair where she had sat in defiance. "For every drop of his blood——"

"There is no blood when they hang a man, Doña Carlota. You shall see."

"I am going directly to Don Abraham to tell him of this threatened indignity to his person. This moment I am going."

"Pass close along the wall, Doña Carlota, and you will hear him groan," Helena said. If there was something of malicious satisfaction, of untempered cruelty, in her voice, in the triumphant brightness of her eyes, it was only her Castilian blood speaking, as it will assert itself on occasion unfailingly as a congenital taint.

"If these savages have laid a hand on him——"

"Is it possible you have not heard, Doña Carlota? He is in his own prison, where——"

"In prison! I will send at once to General Garvanza——"

"He has been commanded already to attend the American general, Doña Carlota."

“American general! peon that he is, poor villain!”

“If he knew that you betrayed him, that it was your treacherous tongue that sent me out to die, he would hang you beside Don Abrahan. Keep quiet, Doña Carlota, and go.”

Doña Carlota's anger left her with a draining away of blood from her hot cheeks. She seemed to sink and collapse, like some inflated toy; her anger had distended her to such importance and outstanding feather. Her voice was weak when she spoke; her fat eyes were wide with fright.

“But, my most dear little dove,” she protested, in wheedling, ingratiating tone, “Don Roberto did not intend the soldiers to fire. Did you not know? Oh, never such a heartless thought in his breast. It was only to frighten you out of further plotting with the base Yankees—that was his reason, my desired.”

“If you had stood where I stood, Doña Carlota, you would have known it was a lie.”

“Don't tell the American general, my beautiful! I am a weak old woman; I am a thing too despicable for his noble vengeance. Let me pass to my prayers, let me pass to my prayers!”

“The door is open, Doña Carlota.”

“But the cannon, the terrible cannon! It points to the house, Helena. If they fire it I shall be killed.”

“That is true; that is as they intend. Perhaps you'd better ask Don Gabriel to lock you up in the

cell with Don Abraham. You can exchange confidences there, Doña Carlota."

"I—but, Helena, in prison there are rats!"

"Yes, and there is remorse, and there is penitence, three things that you could suffer with profit to your body and soul, Doña Carlota."

"Ah, you call me only Doña Carlota; you forget the tender tie of blood. But you jest, Helena; you do not mean for me to seek a safe place in prison. There must be another place—here, here with you, my little Helena—let me remain."

"It is impossible, Doña Carlota."

Helena was unmoved by the plea of blood, by the quaking cowardice of the weak creature who had betrayed her.

"There is no shelter; they will tear holes in the house with the cannon," Doña Carlota moaned.

"Try the houses of the poor; they are safe from the cannon," Helena suggested. "If there is one that remembers a kindness at your hands, there you will find a friend."

Doña Carlota stood looking into her niece's face with appealing eyes. She saw only denial there, the unforgiving coldness of distrust. The fear that Helena would disclose her treachery to Gabriel Henderson grew in her like the infection of a foul disease. As the small in kindness, the narrow in benevolence, the niggard in generosity invariably judge, she measured Helena's thoughts by her own, unable to see that her punishment lay only in the young woman's distrust and denial of her.

"I am afraid, I am afraid!" Doña Carlota shuddered, turning back again from the open door.

"You were a member of Don Abraham's household many years while I was away in the convent school," Helena reminded her. "Think, Doña Carlota; there must be somebody who owes you for a kind word or deed who will repay you now."

"Oh, I fear to leave your protection."

"The general is coming this way, he is coming here, Doña Carlota. You must go; he has eyes like the magic crystal that reveals the secrets of the heart."

"There was Cecilia, if she would remember," Doña Carlota said, but doubtfully, in trepidation, one foot toward the door.

"She has a good memory. There is her house, the last one, with the goat pen under the window. Here — draw your mantilla close around your face — the general may not know you. My cloak — here, cover your dress — and be quick, or I will not answer for you."

Helena watched her from the door as she hurried away to seek sanctuary against no other danger than her own conscience and fear. Weak sycophant that she was, treacherous friend that she had been, Helena felt the humor, rather more keenly than the punishment, that attended Doña Carlota's downfall. She could not restrain a smile as she watched the pudgy figure waddling off like a Yiddish mama going from market with a goose under her arm.

Yet Helena was implacable in her determination that Doña Carlota should suffer to her full capability for the babbling that had brought this sudden cloud of tragedy into her own life. John Toberman, good friend, honest man, competent adviser, was dead as a direct result of Doña Carlota's great eagerness to win favor with Don Abraham.

Doña Carlota was dependent on the charitable mercy of her people; she had no estate of her own. She had looked forward to a sunny room in Don Abraham's patio for her age, when she had sent him word that her niece was hiding the American sailor on her ranch, from which betrayal all this outspreading trouble had grown.

Let her go now to the poor, and gather the harvest of her kind deeds. It would be a scant one, Helena knew. Even Doña Carlota could not recall one act out of all her years that was bearing interest to her credit among the poor.

So Doña Carlota went on to the house of Cecilia, her legs bending under her load of flesh and fright like candles in the summer heat.

Cecilia stood before her door, watching the activities in the courtyard, or as much as she could see of them, with eager eyes. Cecilia's house stood well away from the patron's mansion, as has been said, on account of the strong flavor of the goat pens, especially in rainy weather. She was responsible to the patron for the goats, although the labor of ranging them out to graze had come down to the nimbler feet of her daughter Liseta. It was all one

to Don Abrahan, who worked on payment of the never-ending, and never-to-be-ended, family debt.

Cecilia had a stiff knee from a fall over a cliff in the early darkness of a winter day when Liseta was nine years old. Since that time Liseta had gone with the goats alone, becoming notable in her calling from San Gabriel to the sea. Yet there was no offer from the young men to marry Liseta, on account of her mother's debt to the patron, for many of them had hope that they might at length come clear of their own inherited obligations to Don Abrahan and walk away to shape their lives in other places.

This failure of Liseta to marry, although she was little more than a child in years, had added to the bitterness of Cecilia's heart and the sharpness of her tongue. When she could no longer go with the goats to the hills in winter and early spring, to the wide valley in summer, on account of her stiff knee, Don Abrahan had provided her a spinning-wheel and set one of the ancient women who knew the art to teach her.

Cecilia never had become deft in spinning, due to her natural stubbornness and determination not to make herself over into a new value to her tyrannous patron in the days when a woman ought to take the sun in peace outside her door, with knees drawn up, eyes half closed upon her dreams. Owing to this, Don Abrahan declared her debt to him was growing instead of diminishing. That being so, Cecilia reasoned, there was no sense in

working desperately against a thing that would have no end.

Cecilia was one of the most ardent secret champions of the Americans, since it was said that every person's debt would be forgiven when they came. She stood now at her door, hands idle from her task, waiting for somebody to come from the scene of activities in the courtyard and give her the latest news. Don Abraham had been locked in his own prison, she knew. She felt now that she was free; defiance sat on her lips, gleamed in her eyes. Poor Liseta, who had watched in hope from day to day for the Americans to come marching from Monterey, had missed this great development at her own door, out with the goats since the first break of dawn.

Now who was this coming down the hill, with the head of a woman and the body of a barrel? There was nobody on that ranch, man or woman, living under the pressure of Don Abraham's hand, who had the leisure or the substance to accumulate so much fat.

Cecilia's curiosity impelled her forward a little to meet this mystery on the way.

"I am looking for Cecilia," Doña Carlota panted, weak between terror and the labor of walking down the hill.

"Is it possible, lady?" Cecilia asked, rude mockery in her words.

She saw that Doña Carlota had not recognized her, and she was insolent in the strength of the new

estate which she believed had fallen to her, making her equal to the best.

“They said she lived down here where the goats are kept. Do you know — can you tell me?”

“Just there, but she is not at home. What do you want with Cecilia? She is not accustomed to such visitors.”

“Her door is open; I’ll go in and wait,” Doña Carlota said, passing on.

“I am taking care of her house, woman,” Cecilia spoke with rude familiarity; “you can tell me what you want, as well as Cecilia herself.”

“Come in, then,” said Doña Carlota, entering without formality, unable even in her imagined peril to understand that a trespass could be imposed upon the poor. “Close the door—so. Now, run for Cecilia; tell her to come to me at once.”

“She will come soon—the other chair, the other chair! that one was not made to hold a horse. What do you want, Doña Carlota, coming to this house?”

“You know me? But I do not remember——”

“No. How should you remember? Well, what do you want?”

“I am in deadly peril; the American general threatens to hang me to a tree! Go, good thing, and call Cecilia.”

“What could Cecilia do to stop him? How do you know she would try?”

“Cecilia loves me dearly, old woman — we were

girls together, Cecilia and I. Do you think she will come soon?"

"She is here now, Doña Carlota. I am Cecilia."

"You Cecilia? Yes, but forgive my fright; I did not know you at the first word. But now, but now!"

"No wonder you did not know me, fat, monstrous animal!"

Cecilia, standing before her visitor, bent to bring her face near. She was rude, insulting, triumphant in her belief that the day of liberty had arrived.

"But now, dear little Cecilia, but now," Doña Carlota whimpered, abasing herself in her cowardly, foolish, unsubstantial heart before this poor creature whom she had, but a moment ago, patronized a little openly, and secretly despised in her superiority.

"No, you did not know me, Doña Carlota, because work has made me old, and a hard master has made me lame; because hunger and tears have scratched my face, and sorrow has made me gray. No, you did not know me, Doña Carlota. All the years that you lived here in Don Abraham's house you did not have a word of remembrance of the days when we played together, little girls, when I was too small to work and you were too young to be fat."

"I do remember, dear Cecilia."

"And so do I remember. You were a stingy, greedy, selfish little pig, just a little picture of the

big sow you have grown to be. When were you kind to me? When did you speak to Don Abraham to spare my Liseta her long days on the hills with the goats?"

"Ah, but you will hide me from the savage Americans, good Cecilia — I will give you my earrings — here, here — good little Cecilia!"

"There were times when I stood by the road in the rain, and you passed in the carriage with no recollection of other years. When my Man'el died — and he was my husband; we were married by the priest — I did not feel your hand on my sad head. Now, when you need a friend, oh what a tender heart!"

"They are pointing the cannon toward the mansion, ready to fire. I cannot hide there, I cannot hide there! But here, pretty Cecilia ——"

"You betrayed Don Gabriel; your false tongue killed John Toberman, who never kept man or woman in slavery for a debt. It was your fat tongue, licking lies, that sent that white dove Helena to stand in the plaza before the soldiers' guns. Let the rope be a strong one that Don Gabriel puts around your neck!"

Doña Carlota forgot her station, her dignity. She precipitated herself to her knees, debasing hidalgo blood as it never had been humbled before, lifting appealing hands to the half-Indian peon woman, who drew back from her in disdain.

"Here are the rings from my fingers, the chain from my neck, my rosary — it has pearls ——"

“Keep it for your last prayer,” Cecilia said, repelling her with hand outspread.

“There is a mantilla half made, of the finest——”

“It would not make my cheeks round again, Carlota, nor cure my stiff leg. Ask them to cover your face with it when you are dead. I cannot hide you here. You must go.”

“I have no more to offer you—I am poor,” said Doña Carlota in despair.

“I do not hide people who betray the noble and the kind. You must leave my house this moment, Doña Carlota.”

“There is no place under heaven that will hide me from them!” Doña Carlota said, her tongue stiff with terror.

“Go to the one you have wronged deepest,” Cecilia counseled, laying her hand with something of tenderness, something of pity, on Doña Carlota’s shoulder.

“She drove me from her!” Doña Carlota groaned.

“Go back in penitence, poor fool! The Americans do not fight women; Don Gabriel will not hang you.”

Doña Carlota climbed the hill slowly, shame and contrition in her foolish, shallow mind, where fear had flooded but a little while before. Her fat face was drenched with tears, which came as easily to her as sweat on a summer day, when she appeared before Helena’s door.

“You are the one I have wronged deepest. Cecilia sent me,” she said.

Gabriel Henderson’s straw pallet still lay in the harness-room behind Don Felipe’s office. There Helena composed the weeping creature, who felt true penitence for the first time in her selfish life.

CHAPTER XXVI

SIMON TAKES UP ARMS

CECILIA'S repute as a needlewoman was as wide-reaching as her daughter's fame as a fleet-footed keeper of goats. All the years that Cecilia herself had followed the flocks of Don Abraham on hill and valley pasture, she had taken her sewing with her. From the crudity of untutored beginning in necessity of clothing herself, she had advanced to artistry such as few among the deft-handed women of her race attain. Many a wedding garment she had fashioned by candle after her long hours with the goats, no compensation for her labor but the benefaction of love.

Once, when Helena was a child, Cecilia had worked for weeks, perhaps months, decorating with fine silken flowers a sash for the occasion of her first communion. It had been her tribute for some kind act on the child's part, some considerate, sympathetic little thing that would have meant no more in the lives of those intimately associated with her than the rustle of a leaf. In Cecilia's barren existence, her heart hungry for human kindness, it had been a noble, a sweet, memorable deed. The passing of the gift had been accepted as a pledge of friendship by both; that dainty sash, wrought by rough fingers in the devotion of grati-

tude, had bound them in strange sympathy all the years after.

Now Cecilia was gray and wrinkled, aged by the hardship of her lot twenty years before her time, but no older, indeed, than Doña Carlota, whose hair was showing only a little sprinkling of the salt of time, and this easily hidden by drawing the untainted locks down over it. But Cecilia's fingers remained as cunning as ever, and to Cecilia's art Helena turned for assistance in contriving the flag that Henderson required for his staff.

"We cannot make all the little stars, Helena, and have it finished before Roberto comes," Cecilia said. "The stitching around the edges to hold them when the wind blows would take hours alone."

Cecilia looked out of the door as she spoke, and turned her ear to listen for horses on the hard road.

"They are not coming yet, Cecilia?"

"No, but they will come. Roberto will be full of fire and spite, like a cat. Let us cut two stars for each side, one for you, one for Don Gabriel."

Helena hesitated, shears idle a moment in her hand. Presently she shook her head.

"No. I do not know that my star belongs with Don Gabriel's," she said.

"There is no doubt of that. Two stars——"

"One," said Helena decisively, shaping it hastily.

The little community had been laid under tribute to furnish the color for the flag, but it was the

most willing contribution to any cause they ever had made. Helena provided a white satin gown for the foundation of it, two poor women produced cloth for the red stripes, one a scarlet bit of silk, treasured long in the hope of adding to it some fortunate day enough to make a dress; another a red cotton sash that had graced her girlish waist in fiestas long ago. Cecilia herself furnished the blue for the field, silk as delicate as the impalpable curtains that spread in the canyons at eventide.

While Cecilia stitched the star in place, Helena sat in pensive attitude, chin in hand, gazing through the dusty window where Don Felipe's back used to be seen by those who passed. Henderson was talking with the captured artilleryman, who had changed his allegiance with his clothes. The man was pointing toward the pass, doubtless giving information concerning the destination of the cannon. Men were arriving from the fields, where they had dropped scythe, hoe, and plow on hearing the news. There was doubt and fear in the bearing of most of them, eagerness in a few.

Felipe was receiving these arrivals from Don Abraham's fields, whither they had gone before sunrise to begin their long and burdensome day. A group of them collected around him, listening with turnings of the head as if to watch against some treacherous surprise. Some of them seemed ready to follow the former mayordomo who appeared before them today in open and armed defiance of the authority that he had been the

embodiment of in their eyes but a little while ago. Others withdrew, still with that doubtful turning of the head, that silent movement of fear, the promise of a larger liberty too dim and improbable to tempt them out of their established ways.

Helena felt doubt and fear cloud coldly over her as she sat watching this scene so strange for the courtyard of Don Abraham Garvanza. There were but two out of the many who came and went, and stood at arms in her sight, that bore the unquestionable stamp of determination—Gabriel, steady and grave; Felipe, a flame in the wind.

These two alone could be relied on if it came to a desperate stand of days against Roberto's harassing forces. The poor fellows who strutted now with their arms would dwindle away into the safety of the bosque if the test of vigilance by night and defense by day should try them. Their kind and nature she knew too well.

"Here is the flag," said Cecilia, "the last stitch done in time."

Helena held it by its corners at arms' length before her, looking at the curious effect of their hasty collaboration. The result was not artistic, rather crudely flamboyant, but it was better than she had expected.

"Call Don Gabriel," she requested, drawing back according to her breeding and the traditions of her caste from so forward a thing as hailing a man from the door.

Henderson hurried to her, appearing at the

door with his dusty hat in his hand. She spread the flag before him, lifting it until she was all hidden but her eyes.

“What a beautiful flag you’ve made!” said Henderson, looking over the blue field of it into her eyes.

“We hurried to finish it,” she explained; “there wasn’t time for all the stars. So we made only one; Don Gabriel—Gabriel. One star—for you.”

“Why, Helena,” he said, pleased, embarrassed, flushing to his fair hair, “you made it—it’s your star.”

“No,” shaking her head gravely, “mine would be so lonely all alone.”

Henderson let his thorn-pinned hat fall as he stretched his arms to receive the flag, laying hold of the hands that held it, lowering them a little to uncover her face.

“There is no star in the heavens as lonesome as mine would be without one for you beside it,” he said.

Cecilia withdrew a little from the door, wise in her hour. She stood aside like a sentinel, guarding the romance within.

“Then, if it is neither your star nor mine, Gabriel?” Helena asked, glad in what he had declared.

“It is California’s,” he answered, with happy inspiration.

Henderson raised the flag with his own hands, Helena watching from the window. Felipe saluted

it as it stretched in the wind; the women and children stood in the road before their houses to see. But in the expectation of Roberto's coming, and the doubt and uncertainty that waited on that event, nobody but those under arms was now permitted to approach the courtyard.

According to Felipe's calculations, it was time for Roberto to answer the summons, either by courier or alone, as directed, or at the head of his soldiers, as expected. Felipe and his assistant gunner stood ready to train the cannon on the quarter from which a charge might come. It was Felipe's pride that he had disposed his artillery in such position that this could happen in only two points.

It was past midday; the men who had volunteered in the precarious cause of liberty as championed by Henderson and Felipe had been served bountiful rations from Don Abraham's storehouse. There was no dust of Roberto's coming in the road to the pueblo—only the sound of a tinkling bell out of sight beyond the olive lane. Henderson paused in his impatient, disturbed striding up and down beside the storehouse wall.

There was a familiar sound in that bell, but he was unable to determine where, under what conditions, he had heard it before. And the picture of Pablo Gonzales and his burro rose in his mind, provoking a smile. In a little while Pablo himself, seated in dignity and ease on Benito's back, came in sight between the olive trees.

Pablo was not unattended. A man trudged

ahead of him, and from the carriage of that man it was easy to see that his hands were tied at his back. It was easier to determine, in the eyes of all who knew him, that the man who marched in such public disgrace was nobody but Simon Villalobo, the driver of eight mules.

The discovery of this fact set up no small commotion among the people gathered before their houses on the slope of the hill. They passed the word from one to another that Simon was to be shot, without any foundation for it at all, except, perhaps, their belief that he deserved no less, and their hope that he might be paid according to his merits. Simon's wife appeared, weeping and frantic, and had to be restrained from rushing to meet him. Her neighbors held her back with gentle determination. Don Gabriel would have her shot if she set foot near the cannon, they said. It was a thing to see, the look in Don Gabriel's face, so calm and cold it made a man's blood sink to his heels.

When Pablo came through the gate it was seen that the rope which bound Simon's hands was snubbed around Benito's thick little body also. Not trusting the long legs of his prisoner, in spite of the two pistols and knife which he carried at his belt, Pablo had anchored him so he could not run without dragging the burro after him.

The old man's face was as drowsily dusty as if he had just been stirred from a nap beside the road when he pressed Benito's sides and stopped him near the cannon. He was smoking a little cigarette

in corn-husk wrapper; it seemed as if he closed his eyes against the sharp savor of it as he sat with dangling legs, toes almost on the ground, never a word out of his bearded, dry old mouth. There was a look of cynical pleasure on his face that Henderson never had seen before.

Henderson knew him well enough to give him his own time to tell what there was to be told. Simon stood looking at the flag, the cannon, the men with guns, plainly very much concerned over his situation.

Pablo united the rope that passed around his donkey's body and gave the end of it to Henderson.

"Here is an old goat," he said.

"There's rope enough to hang him here," Henderson remarked, as seriously as if the speculation were a forecast of his intention.

"It will do the work," Pablo nodded.

"But it would seem like a waste of a good rope," said Henderson. "What have you got to say for yourself? you sneaking scoundrel!"

"For the love of Our Señor, Don Gabriel, do not hang me!" Simon pleaded.

"What do you think, Pablo?"

Pablo raised his thin shoulders, lifted his shaggy eyebrows, spread his hands, in expression of complete surrender of all opinion in the case. That done, he lapsed into an attitude of serene and complete indifference.

Simon was an unhappy figure to see, dusty and jaded between fear and fatigue. His big mustache

hung over his mouth; his lean jaws were black with a beard-growth of several days. He saw his neighbors strutting around the courtyard under that strange flag, with guns on their shoulders; he saw Don Felipe, grown fierce in a day, looking at him as if to put a pistol behind his ear and blow out his light. Still the rascal had the vanity in him, the foolish confidence in his own cunning, to attempt another tale.

“Now, it was this way, Don Gabriel,” he began, setting his voice in confidential pitch. “When Don Abraham left me there to watch the house of my old friend Pablo, it was a thing that I despised myself for doing. But what was a poor man, whose wife and children were at Don Abraham’s mercy, to do? I wanted to come to your side, always; I swore a vow to Our Señora that I would not lift my hand against you at any man’s order again. So the word came that you had caught the cannon, and had hung Don Abraham to a tree for his crimes. Then I told myself it was the time for me to desert and go to your side, Don Gabriel. But Don Roberto might catch me; he might hang me for a deserter, although I am not a soldier. That would be a small matter to Don Roberto. Is it not so, Don Gabriel?”

Henderson indicated by an impatient movement of the hand that he was to hurry on with his defense. Simon turned a shade paler, and swallowed like a man breathing smoke.

“So I put my back against Pablo’s wall and went

to sleep, making it easy for the old man to tie my hands. It was the way I had planned it. Pablo would have no fear of me asleep. So I arranged it, knowing that Don Roberto would not have cause to hang me for being forced to fight on your side, Don Gabriel. But you see that I wink my eye when I say forced. Give me a gun. I will fight like seven doctors."

"All right," Henderson said. "Don Felipe, give this fellow a gun, and post him in the most dangerous place. If he falters before the enemy, or fails in his duty in the slightest degree, shoot him without a word."

"With the greatest pleasure," Felipe replied. "Go to the gate," he ordered Simon, "and when General Garvanza arrives presently, open it and let him pass."

CHAPTER XXVII

PASS, YOUR GRACE

GENERAL GARVANZA arrived about mid-afternoon, unattended, as he had been instructed to come. Simon opened the gate to him with a feeling of weakness over him like a man rising too soon from a consuming illness.

“So I find you here, traitor!” General Garvanza said, giving the frightened sentinel a look that was his trial and condemnation.

“It will not shoot,” Simon whispered, touching his gun. “They forced me to join them. I selected a gun that will not shoot. Pass, your grace. You are where there is a friend.”

Roberto looked at the fellow curiously, and at the gun with sharp eagerness, verifying at a glance the truth of Simon’s statement. The gun lacked a hammer; it was as harmless as a stick.

But it was through no contrivance of Simon that he bore such a useless piece. Felipe had seen to that particular. Felipe needed his dependable guns for dependable men. His purpose was to double Simon’s peril in giving him one that would not shoot.

Roberto was dressed in the uniform of his rank, to which he had added something in the way of adornment, it appeared, over the amount his prede-

cessor had borne on his shoulder and breast. He rode forward with a sharp spurring of his horse, expressive of the defiance and contempt of those who had commanded him in the power of a situation which fortune had placed in their hands. Within a rod of the spot where Henderson and Felipe stood to receive him, Roberto threw his weight back on the reins, bringing the headlong advance to a spectacular and dusty stop.

Out of the dust of his defiant coming Roberto scowled on the two men who confronted him, his petulant long lip stretching at the corners as if he mouthed a bit. The end of a plaster covering the wound his own soldier had given him in the plaza came down to his eyebrow. He waited for them to speak; they, with more dignity, in spite of the dust of his trampling in which they stood, were determined that he must begin. Roberto must take the place of one who had come to sue, not to demand.

Roberto's anger swelled as they stood in silence. General that he was, his disposition was not founded on any great or substantial dignity. Seeing now that his consequence was not rated very seriously by the men before him, he boiled over like a pot of brose.

"If you have touched Don Abrahan you shall hang!" he said, his voice high and strained in passionate note. "Where is he? Produce him this instant!"

"Your bluster would not add an hour to Don

Abrahan's life if the time came to take it," Henderson told him, contemptuous of his wrath. "We sent for you, Roberto, to give you our terms, not to hear any from you."

"The terms I have to offer outlaws and murderers are settled in advance," Roberto replied. "I have come to demand my father, and the surrender of his property untouched. When that is complied with, then you shall hear my conditions touching yourselves."

"You may go back to the pueblo, Roberto," Henderson said, turning away as he would from a passionate, bigoted boy, considering the brief parley at an end.

"I will come back with a hundred soldiers!" Roberto threatened.

"When you are ready," Henderson replied indifferently.

"I tell you gravely," Roberto said, controlling his foolish anger, becoming more of a man, "that you are in a hopeless situation. You have played your hand, and what have you won? Nothing but a cannon and a few rounds of ammunition. You think with threats against my father's life and property you can compel me to grant amnesty for your offenses against the republic—permit you to leave, perhaps. Or you may think you can hold me off by these means until the Americans come from Monterey, where you have heard they are. That is a vain hope, poor rascals! It is founded on a lie. The Americans have not taken Monterey;

they cannot take it, or any other port or city that the valiant army of the republic guards."

"That is immaterial," Henderson said, his indifference seeming to increase as in a man who held a strong blow in reserve.

Felipe produced a cigarette, and the sun-glass for lighting it. He turned his back on General Garvanza to bring the little point of heat to the cigarette's tip. Where Henderson was merely indifferent, Felipe was lightly insolent. He jerked his shoulders; he sniffed with audible sound as he blew smoke out of his nose.

"And so you send your only cannon to the pass to stop the march of a lie," Felipe said, after a due and impressive silence.

"I believed the rumor until two hours ago," Roberto confessed, with what appeared sincerity. "Dispatches arrived after your foray on my poor cowards. If you had waited, you might have taken the messenger and confirmed what I tell you for yourselves. The United States navy has not been in the bay of Monterey; there are no United States ships on this coast."

"That was the smallest of our hopes," Henderson declared.

They had met Roberto about midway between the cannon and the gate. Roberto scowled as he looked around in the pause that followed Henderson's last word, pulling his long lip, flattening it against his teeth. He saw the few men under arms, and the nature of their weapons. None knew bet-

ter than Roberto what uncertain material such soldiers were.

"So that is your perilous situation," Roberto said, still gathering up in his eyes the details of their defense, open and unmasked as it was. He looked a moment at the flag, saying nothing of what passed in his thoughts on that particular. "If you expect offers and conditions from me, you expect too much."

"Return in peace," said Henderson, again starting to leave.

"I must see my father."

"That is impossible."

Roberto drew his eyes small, his long lip pressed thin again in that trick which gave an expression of inflexibility, of stern determination, to his face.

"I assure you as solemnly as man ever spoke that no help will come to you from Monterey. I ask you to believe me sincere and earnest when I tell you this, which I do to save, if possible, the tragic consequences of this foolish stand, if you persist in it. There is no hope for you."

It was difficult to conclude whether Roberto was telling what he believed to be true. Like all people of light and shallow conscience, Roberto had the faculty of giving the color of sincerity to the very thing that he intended for the deepest deceit. Henderson had seen many instances of this light regard for verity in the young man; he was not disposed to borrow any trouble on the account opened by Roberto's declaration now.

“My countrymen may not have taken Monterey yet, but if they have not it is simply because they have not arrived,” Henderson returned. “We are well situated here; we can wait till they come.”

“I will return in an hour to drag down that caricature of a base flag,” Roberto threatened, his face growing dark with anger.

“I’ll hang your father in your sight at the first shot you fire,” Henderson declared.

“My father’s life must not stand between me and my duty to my country,” Roberto said. “But if you venture any further indignation upon his person, then I swear I’ll burn you like a toad!”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less from a coward in the coat of a soldier, who would murder a woman for a public show and a private jealousy,” Henderson returned. “Now, get out of here!”

Roberto closed his mouth on useless words of retort. He had not lived long, but long enough to understand when there was no more to be said. As he passed through the gate Simon crowded close to his stirrup.

“Take me with you, your grace!” he implored. “That savage Don Gabriel——”

“You can serve me better here,” Roberto cut his plea. “Tell those monkeys who are marching around with guns that I am coming back in an hour with two hundred men. I will hang every one of them to a tree that stands against me with a gun. Tell them this; fill them with a fear that will make them run.”

Henderson and Felipe watched this little passage between the two at the gate, Felipe with hand on his pistol.

"Let the double traitor start to leave!" he said.

Simon closed the gate behind Roberto, and turned again with as much show of ease and loyalty in his bearing as he could assume before the two who watched him, and read what was in his tricky mind.

"It would not give Roberto much grief to see his father hanging from a tree," Henderson said, looking after the young man as he rode swiftly between the olive trees.

"Nothing would please him better, although he would make it a pretense to cover his personal hate against you if you stumbled into his hands," Felipe returned. "He has been chafing over money since he came home from the capital; he was called back on account of his extravagance there. Roberto has wild desires which Don Abraham refuses him the means to indulge."

"That angle of the case is to be considered," said Henderson, thoughtfully.

They were returning slowly to the place where the cannon stood. Old Pablo was emerging from the passage in the warehouse through which Henderson had made his dash to liberty on the day he broke from Don Abraham's prison. Pablo had hidden Benito there, out of the danger of bullets.

"What do you think of Roberto's declaration that there is nothing in the news from Monterey?"

“I think he is lying,” Felipe returned confidently. “It may be that a small force took the place, and is holding it, not attempting to march into the south. That is the way it looks to me, Gabriel.”

“Roberto appeared easy and confident,” Henderson said, doubt rising sharply again. “I believe he intends to attack us, as he threatened, and force our hands. The question is: Are we going to hang Don Abraham in that event, or turn the cannon against the house and threaten to batter it down? Which, in your opinion, would Roberto place the greater value on, his father’s life or his father’s house?”

“The house, by all means,” Felipe declared.

“My strategy is weak, I fear, Felipe,” Henderson confessed gravely. “I made a mistake in my estimate of Roberto’s filial affection and respect. And we are here, instead of on the road to Monterey, through my blundering.”

“We have the cannon,” said Felipe proudly. “It was a masterful stroke to take the cannon, Gabriel. We can cut them down like fire eats dry grass. Pah! Roberto and his hundred men! They are nothing—they are leaves in the wind.”

“Yes, we’ve got the cannon,” Henderson said, drawing a breath of self-justification, a sweet refreshment to a man in a doubtful crisis of his own contriving.

“And Roberto hasn’t got a hundred men. I doubt if he will come back, Gabriel, at least before

night. He may attempt something at night, but we shall be awake—the cannon will not sleep."

"We haven't got much ammunition for a siege, Felipe."

"There is powder by the keg in Don Abraham's storehouse—have you forgotten your invoice, Gabriel—*polboro*, you wrote it, the way the peones sounded it, instead of *polvora*."

"I remember, Felipe. I had forgotten the powder."

"And there are pebbles for grape-shot, and round stones made by the sea when it washed against these hills, for cannon balls. Cortez used them, as we shall use them if we need them, when he battered down the walls of Montezuma's capital."

"Felipe, you're the general of this army," Henderson declared, turning to him in admiration of his resourcefulness, and his enthusiasm over the round stones.

"Not so," Felipe denied vigorously. "When did I take a cannon with my own hands? When did I charge five soldiers in the plaza and carry a lady away to life and love?"

"I'd have made a mighty poor figure that day, Felipe, if it hadn't been for you," Henderson said, laying his hand affectionately on the little man's arm.

"But where is my scoundrel that I left to stand at the cannon?" Felipe wondered, looking about for the artilleryman. "It is strange conduct for a

soldier to desert his post. He shall have a correction."

Felipe hurried to the cannon, gave one glance at its breech, and turned to Henderson, consternation, dismay, in his face.

"He has spiked it—he has fled to Roberto!"

"But no, Felipe! How——"

"Look!" Felipe pointed to the touch-hole. "I cannot fire it. We are lost!"

"Easy, Felipe—the others must not know of this. It looks like the end of a file the scoundrel shoved in there and broke off—maybe we can get it out. Get a pair of pincers from the blacksmith shop and try."

Felipe was in a tremble of despair, almost panic. His reliance on the gun had been so entire, so confident, so vast, that he was now in the condition of one precipitated into the sea by an explosion that did not leave him a single plank to keep him afloat. Henderson was thankful that none of the volunteers was close enough to discover either Felipe's excitement or the cause of it. He waited at the cannon breech for Felipe to bring the pincers, inwardly dismayed, but outward calm.

The piece of steel wedged into the touch-hole was down too far for the jaws of the pincers; a trial proved that it could not be removed that way. Felipe threw down the useless tool, sweat of his mental turmoil streaming down his face.

"God save us! Only a drill will do it. We must fly, Gabriel, we must fly!"

"What would become of these men?" Henderson asked, as steady as if a cannon more or less mattered very little. "Roberto would hang them all."

"Their lives are not worth much," said Felipe, unmanned for the moment by this stunning loss. "The villain who has tricked us is with Roberto before this; he has told him all. Roberto will not wait the promised hour. He will come at once; he will hang us to a tree, and my God! I shudder to be hung!"

"Felipe," Henderson touched his arm, "I got you into it; I give you a free road to go. Take a horse and go, my good friend, and forgive me for bringing you into this peril."

"Not alone—never alone!" Felipe declared, steadied a little by Henderson's earnest plea that he leave him.

"Yes, alone. It's my stake, anyway. I should have gone to the north. Let me play it single-handed now."

"We have time—we can take to the bosque," Felipe pressed.

"And leave these poor fellows to hang. Calm yourself, Felipe; don't let them know of this little accident to the gun. Go quietly and get your horse; ride out——"

"And leave you and Helena to die alone! No, Gabriel, I will not go."

Henderson saw the fire in Felipe's eyes, the color come to his pale face above the black smirch of his

beard. His manhood seemed to descend on him and revive him, like a cool wind.

“As long as the men know nothing of this thing, they’ll make a good fight,” Henderson said. “Roberto can’t bring more than twenty men against us; you and I alone can hold that many off. We’ll tell the men we’re saving the cannon for a bigger force, and tonight we’ll get the tube open.”

“We might do it if we had time,” Felipe agreed. “Then we could give it to them—let a hundred come if they can!”

“Call Simon; order up all the idle men and put them to work with mattocks and shovels entrenching to flank the cannon. I’m going to commandeer all the guns and ammunition I can find—I know there must be a dozen good shotguns among the paid men on this ranch.”

“Yes, there are shotguns,” Felipe said. “I didn’t have them bring the shotguns because I didn’t consider the use of them in war exactly ethical.”

“This isn’t a matter of ethics—it’s one of saving our necks.”

“Since the cannon is useless, we are driven to them,” Felipe said, as if he excused their extremity to somebody who had questioned the act.

Felipe was himself again. He ordered Simon to him with loud and commanding voice, startling the others under arms out of their close talk in the shade of the warehouse wall, where they speculated in low tones on the result of the parley with

Roberto. He posted a sentinel on the slope of the hill above Don Abraham's house to watch for the soldiers.

“What is a cannon?” he muttered, as he watched Henderson hurrying from house to house collecting guns. “A general like Don Gabriel makes a cannon out of every man!”

CHAPTER XXVIII

A FLAG OF TRUCE

ROBERTO did not appear at the elapse of an hour, as he had threatened to do. Henderson believed the delay was due to this ridiculous general over a scant company of soldiers having to wait until enough of them returned from their various details to make the attempt with confidence. It was evident that Roberto had come unattended to the parley, or at best accompanied by only a few men. He must have returned directly to the pueblo to gather his forces, and in that way missed the artilleryman who had such important information for his ear. If Roberto had known the cannon was out of service, he might have attempted their capture and succeeded, very likely, with a squad.

Opposed to whatever advantage there was in this delay was a thing that far outweighed it. Few of the idle men had responded to Felipe's summons to come and work on the trenches. They had yielded their guns and ammunition readily enough to Henderson, no labor and no risk attending that; but they had hung back on going farther. It was noticeable, also, that a spirit of disaffection was growing among the few who had taken up arms with them that morning. These men were laboring

at the earthworks under Felipe's direction now, but languidly, without heart.

Henderson suspected they must have learned that the cannon, around which their confidence and admiration centered, was of no more service now than a log. He did not blame them for cooling in what appeared, in his own reason and conviction, a hopeless situation. Their disaffection did not matter much, nor alter the gravity of the case greatly. He had collected the guns with the thought that he and Felipe might make a desperate defense alone, inflicting such loss on the soldiers that Roberto would retire, giving them an opportunity to slip away in the night. He believed he saw something beneath the demeanor of the men that shook even this desperate hope.

Felipe also was of the opinion that the men's cooling was the result of someone who had a knowledge of such things having seen the spike in the touch-hole of the cannon before he had covered it.

"There is nothing to them, Gabriel; they are carrion," he said sadly. "When I said their lives were worth little, I spoke the sad truth. A man's life is valuable only according to the nobility of his heart. It would have been no treason to them if we had gone our way an hour ago."

The ten or twelve men who worked with Simon throwing up the defenses turned their eyes on their leaders as they stood apart talking, a watchfulness in their faces that appeared to Henderson at once

suspicious and threatening. The guns which they had walked about with in such proud defiance but a short time ago lay against the warehouse wall, together with those which Henderson had collected from the houses.

Old Pablo was sitting in the growing strip of shade near the guns. He had volunteered both to fight and to dig, but Felipe would not permit him, out of respect for his age and dignity, to stoop to a menial task. The old man was sitting with his back against the wall, knees drawn up, hands clasped around them, as serene as if he waited by the roadside under his own sycamore.

Helena had kept to her quarters in Felipe's office, content to lean on the wisdom and protection of those who had torn her from Roberto's hands. Henderson had told her of Roberto's threat to return and attack them; she knew the preparations under way were evidence of a desperate intention to stand against him. But she did not know that the cannon stood useless in its brave show.

Henderson drew Felipe a little farther from the men, nearer the heap of miscellaneous guns.

"You know them better than I do, Felipe," he said. "I am afraid they are unworthy and treacherous in the grain. I see treason in their faces; they're plotting among themselves right now to lay hold of us and set their patron free to save themselves from Roberto's punishment."

"It's Simon's work. I was a fool to permit him among them."

“That’s another blunder in this day of mistakes to be charged to me, Felipe. But we have gained one thing—the road to Monterey will be clear if Roberto has told the truth about that dispatch from the north. He’ll have called all his men in to take us.”

“You mean, Gabriel, that we are to depart?”

“That is the one sensible course open to us. We can’t depend on the men; our cannon is crippled. My great scheme for using Don Abrahan as a hostage has turned out a miserable mockery. It is the hope that we will hang Don Abrahan that is bringing Roberto against us. It isn’t duty, but hope of coming into his inheritance in short order.”

“That is true. But what of these men—how are we to dispose of them?”

“Take Simon, lock him up, and bring Don Abrahan to me. I will attend to the men.”

While Felipe was about this business, Gabriel explained to Pablo in few words how matters stood with them. He told of the cannon, spoke of the spirit of sedition among the men, of his determination to make a hasty retreat. Pablo did not show any concern over the revelation.

“I have been watching them; I have seen rascality in their faces,” he said. “They are waiting now for you to turn your back, then—the guns! Simon is the little head behind it all.”

“You’re right, Pablo. I had a right to hang the thief when you brought him here.”

“I am watching them,” said Pablo quietly, shift-

ing neither hand nor eye. "When one starts, I'll kill him."

"The guns—I'll remove them; I'll put them in the office. Helena must be told to get ready. If they make a rush while my back is turned, can you stop them, Pablo?"

"Go, Don Gabriel, and see to the lady and your horses. There are men among them who know how I shoot."

Henderson gathered all the guns and carried them to the office, where he told Helena how his great plans and abounding hopes of the morning had shriveled and come to nothing. He told her frankly that flight was imperative, the chances of the road as perilous to them as before. He requested her to change with all speed her pretty dress for the costume she had worn that morning.

"I will be ready in a few minutes, Gabriel," she said, calm, undisturbed. Her trust in him filled her life so completely that fear, it seemed, had no footing there.

Henderson turned back to the men in the trenches, who had left off work to gather in a close bunch like flies on a piece of sugar. They were listening gravely to one of the oldest among them, who was speaking in a low and earnest voice. Their ears were for this old man, their eyes for Henderson as he approached them, pistol at his side.

"That is very well done, men," Henderson said in hearty words, nodding to the work they had done. "You have done good work, and now you

may go; we'll have no further need of you. I'm sorry that I can't pay you right now for your labor here today, but when my countrymen, who are on the way with an army, arrive here, you shall be well paid."

This open and cheerful dismissal struck the men between amazement and shame. Henderson knew very well that they had been talking of winning their own safety from Roberto's wrath by making prisoners of him and Felipe; their faces betrayed it, for dissimulation is not an art with the simple. It was as if he had snatched their pardon away from them just as they felt it safely in their reach.

"You will give us back our guns, then, Don Gabriel?" the old man asked.

"I'll take care of your guns," Henderson returned, in quite a different tone. There was a commanding harshness in it that made their servile spirits cower.

"We were told that Don Felipe had deceived us—that the Americans were not coming," the spokesman said.

"Well, if you will listen to a liar," Henderson returned, with contempt.

Henderson knew they were trembling in the fear of Roberto's vengeance as Simon had pictured it to them. A bold front before them was necessary; they must be given to understand their services were no longer needed on account of the Americans being close at hand. They would not throw away this one price of Roberto's favor that lay in their

power to pay. If they got wind of the planned retreat, they would try to stop it at any cost.

"The cannon is broken," the old man said. "That man who ran off put something in the little hole. There is no use trying to deceive us, Don Gabriel."

"There are twenty cannons coming through the pass," said Henderson, in emphasis despising merely one. "Go to your houses, every man of you, and go at once!"

Felipe was approaching with Don Abrahan; Henderson did not want one curious ear in that vacillating crowd to hear what must pass between him and the patron. The men put down their tools with slow hands, sullen faces, and came out of the trenches in defiant sulkiness. They went off hanging together in twos and threes, talking shoulder to shoulder, looking back at Henderson with scowling eyes.

Don Abrahan was pale and worried. Doubt of what waited him looked out of his face. Henderson stood at the cannon, waiting him.

"Don Abrahan, I had a design in restraining you this morning that subsequent developments have caused me to revise," Henderson said. "Briefly, I intended to make a bargain with your son, our safety against your life. Roberto sets a low and contemptuous value on my security. Don Abrahan, he discounts it to nothing; your life is valueless in his eyes."

"My son refused to treat with you on those

terms?" Don Abrahan inquired, lifting his worried face quickly.

"He refused, Don Abrahan."

"Thank God that he valued duty above my life!" Don Abrahan said.

The magistrate's voice was vibrant with the fervor of his thankfulness; his eyes were bright with the fire of his pride. He drew himself up proudly, his head high, breathing deeply as if he tasted new life in the savor of the wind.

"There is another matter that I have held against you, Don Abrahan," Henderson continued solemnly. "You deserve to die for the murder of John Toberman."

"I am not a suppliant, Don Gabriel, even for my life," Don Abrahan replied, meeting the young man firmly, eye to eye.

"And I am not cowardly enough to strike down a defenseless man who is hopelessly in my power, as you struck John Toberman down. Don Abrahan, I leave you to the judgment of my countrymen when they come. You are free. Felipe, the horses!"

Felipe sprang at the word, running toward the stable. At the corner of the warehouse, where the road to the pueblo could be seen through the trees, Felipe stopped, turning back, throwing out his hands in a gesture of defeat.

"We are too late, Gabriel," he said calmly. "The soldiers are here."

Don Abrahan quickened at the news. He turned

to Henderson, laid a hand on his shoulder, looked him in the eyes.

“I owe you for your generosity to me, Don Gabriel,” he said. “You have restrained your passions and your hands where a smaller man would have struck. Go—make haste! I will meet the soldiers and hold them back as long as possible. I cannot promise you more—go!”

Gabriel started for the stable with Felipe, stopping at Helena’s door to summon her. She was waiting, her long cloak around her shoulders. As she came out to join Henderson, Roberto rode to the gate, waving a white cloth in his hand.

A look of understanding passed between Henderson and Felipe. It was too late, indeed. Don Abrahan’s good offices could not help them now.

“I’ll go and meet him,” Henderson said.

He gave his pistol to Felipe, and went on to meet Roberto unarmed. As he passed Don Abrahan he turned to him.

“Don Abrahan, for the sake of whatever you owe to my generosity, protect that persecuted girl,” he said.

“As my own life, Don Gabriel,” the magistrate promised.

Don Abrahan hastened to Helena as Henderson went on to meet Roberto in his truce. Doña Carlota loomed large behind Helena in the door, her eyes gaping to gather the understanding of this sudden flurry.

“Helena, my house is open to you. Come!”

Don Abrahan held out his hand; Doña Carlota's face glowed as if she stood in the light of a wedding night.

"No," said Helena in cold repulsion. "I prefer death with Don Gabriel to the treacherous friendship of your house."

"Oh, my little dove!" Doña Carlota pleaded.

Helena appeared neither to see nor hear. She was looking after Henderson as he went on to meet Roberto, who had leaped to the ground, flung the gate wide, mounted, and came galloping forward, the white token of his pacific intention in his hand.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TRIUMPH OF LISETA

THERE were twenty cavalrymen in the lane, Henderson estimated. They had come to a halt when their leader galloped ahead of them, bearing his signal for a truce, and now waited not more than two hundred yards from the gate, formed in a charging front of fours. The officer next in command was drawn off a little way ahead of them, waiting his superior's return.

Henderson had hurried to meet Roberto, whose dismounting to open the gate had interrupted his advance. Due to this barrier, the two met somewhat farther away from the cannon than the previous parley had been held. Roberto stopped his horse with the same regardless hand as before, throwing his weight suddenly on the reins, setting the creature back on its hams. It was not in a spirit of bravado or bold show that Roberto did this trick; it was the mode among the caballeros of his time and place.

Roberto could not conceal the surprise that the preparations for defense gave him. He looked at the two fresh heaps of brown earth beside the cannon, saying nothing for the moment, but lifting himself to his toes in his stirrups as if straining to see what forces the earthworks contained. Pres-

ently he seemed to remember that he had come under a signal of truce, which he still carried in his hand. He turned to Henderson quickly, severity in his face.

“I came to propose terms on account of my father,” he said, a certain unmistakable deference, a well-defined doubt, showing through his bearing of hauteur and defiance.

Henderson read his mind as readily, in the strained and sharpened acuteness of his own senses, as if Roberto had come honestly and told him all. The man who had spiked the cannon had informed his general of this great service. Roberto had advanced in confident eagerness to overwhelm them, but on the way had been assailed by doubt of the man's honesty. Caution had come whispering that this might be a trick of the Yankee sailor who had bribed the soldier. The sight of the earthworks that had been thrown up in the short time he had been away seemed to give substance to this shadow of doubt. The Yankee might be leading him up to the cannon, only to destroy him in a breath. All this Roberto's face and manner seemed to betray.

Henderson felt the jumping of a new hope, the outspreading of a new plan. It came to him in a flash, as the exigencies of his life seemed to demand of him to plan and decide. The doubt that Roberto had carried there with him must be blown into a blaze of certainty. Circumstances had shaped with peculiar nicety to further this design.

Don Abraham was there, in plain sight, as if they had brought him out to pay the threatened penalty. The fact that Felipe stood close by the patron, a gun in his hands, watchfulness in his attitude, and that old Pablo was posted behind him, likewise with a gun, seemed evidence of their grave and desperate intention. To add to Roberto's unrest and multiply his uncertainty, there stood by a third desperado in long black cloak, who, from the fairness of his half-face as he presented his side to Roberto, appeared to be a Yankee.

A flight of conjectures, which were more than slightly colored with fear, rose in Roberto's mind. Henderson could see the shadow of them cross his face. Who could this person be? Was it possible that the Americans had come, after all, and were lying that moment behind the mounds of earth?

"I am waiting to hear you speak, Roberto," Henderson prompted him, seeing that his growing perplexities had swallowed his words.

"I am willing to make a compromise with you," Roberto said, pulling his eyes away from the earthworks, the cannon, the stranger in the dark cloak, with a wrench, it seemed. "I am willing to allow compassion and humanity to obscure my duty. There is nothing bitter in my heart against you, Gabriel, when all is considered. You have been the companion of some happy hours. In exchange for my father's safety I will give you freedom. I will withdraw my soldiers until tomorrow morn-

ing; I will leave the way to the harbor open to you. There you will find a British ship that will give you refuge, and carry you back to your home."

"Does this condition apply to Helena Sprague and Felipe Guiterrez as well as to me, Roberto?"

"No, Gabriel; to you alone."

"You affront me in proposing it!"

"I cannot embrace the others in any condition of leniency," Roberto contended with harsh severity.

"Where I find them, they are mine."

"If you will withdraw your soldiers, leaving the way open to all of us, in whatever direction we may choose to go, I will accept."

"It is impossible," said Roberto, coldly.

"There is nothing more," Henderson said, speaking his thought aloud.

It appeared, indeed, that his use of Roberto's doubtful state had turned out another failure. In more skillful hands Roberto might have been led, he believed, or intimidated by a bold and insolent face, and compelled to grant terms to them all. Now it seemed there could be nothing more.

"It is not possible to admit the other two," Roberto said. "That is a different matter; they are Mexican citizens — they must answer."

"They must be caught first," Henderson returned, still able to play his part of confidence, no matter how low his hope.

Roberto was looking toward the laborers' houses, lifting himself, shifting and straining to

see. Curiosity was stronger than caution in the men who had been dismissed. They stood in their doors, wives and children behind them, watching with all eyes.

Roberto saw in this proof of disaffection the result of Simon's crafty work. He concluded that the poor-spirited fellows had taken fright and deserted, the promise of independence and ease from patriarchal restraint having lost its glamour beside the hard fact of impending punishment. He turned to Henderson, a gleam of mocking triumph in his face.

"I will have a word with my father," he said.

As he spoke, Roberto lifted his right hand, in which he still held the signal of truce, pressed spurs to his horse, sending it forward with a bound. Henderson, standing near the animal's head, sprang and caught the bridle rein as it passed. This interference brought the horse up sharply, in a confusing trampling of dust.

"Stop! You came here under a flag of truce, not as a spy," Henderson said.

Between the restraint of Henderson's hand on its bridle, and the agony of the spurs which Roberto ground against its sides, the horse was wild. It reared, so violent in its efforts to escape that Roberto, one hand wound in the white signal of peace, was in danger of being thrown.

Henderson hung to the bridle, furious that Roberto should attempt such treachery as to spy on

the state of their defenses under a white flag. Roberto, clinging desperately to the plunging horse, reached over his saddle-horn with his white-swathed hand and fired a pistol in Henderson's face.

Henderson had the dust that made him indistinct, the lunging of the horse that made the point-blank shot uncertain, to credit for the bullet streaking a fiery channel through his cheek instead of through his brain. He felt the searing trail of it like a branding-iron laid against his face, and the blood springing out of it, cold it seemed, copious as water thrown from a cup.

Roberto was menacing him with the treacherously hidden pistol, the cloth that concealed it impeding his efforts to raise the hammer and fire again. So much Henderson saw through the swirl of dust and smoke as he dropped the bridle rein and sprang, grasping Roberto around the waist, dragging him to the ground.

Roberto's horse knew nothing of loyalty to a master so cruel. It galloped away as Henderson wrenched him from the saddle, the beat of its feet loud as it dashed through the gate and down the lane toward the cavalrymen.

Roberto fought to retain the pistol, his bright uniform in the dust, the blood from Henderson's wound streaming on it, brought to this abasement by his own treachery. His throat was like dough in Henderson's fingers, but the sailor curbed his just fury in time to leave a gasp of breath, a clouded

spark of life. Henderson rose with the pistol in one hand, the burned cloth that had hidden it in the other, to see the cavalymen come charging up the lane.

“Get up!” he ordered Roberto, jostling him with his foot.

Roberto lay stretched and limp as if life had gone out of him, his arms flung out in the road. His face was purple, his lips were distended with congested blood; he was breathing with difficulty.

“Get up!” Henderson repeated, stooping to press the pistol to Roberto’s temple.

Roberto rolled his eyes in appeal for the fragment of life that still hung in his body. Henderson took him by the collar of his magnificent coat and heaved him up. And there, with Henderson’s knee at his back, the general of forty men sat in the dusty road. His plumed cap was lying by him, crushed by his horse’s foot; his heavy, black hair, powdered with dust, fell over his forehead and eyes. He was as bedraggled, limp, and vapid as a drowned man. The spectacle of his soldiers charging to his rescue did not electrify him with one perceptible thrill.

“If they come through the gate, I’ll shoot you,” Henderson declared in terrible earnestness. “Stand up — stop them!”

He pulled the overthrown general to his feet, where he stood weaving, groping to understand what was desired of him. He made no effort, by word or sign, to halt the approach of his men.

Henderson stepped back a pace, and presented the pistol at Roberto's head.

This pantomime was understood by the officer who led the charge. He wheeled his horse, bringing his men to a halt. The soldiers leaned in their saddles to see what mischance had overtaken their general. The officer who led them rode forward alone. When he reached the gate Roberto lifted his hand, stopping him there.

"Fortune has thrown me," Roberto said, turning ruefully to Henderson.

"Treachery has defeated you, coward!"

"Well, what is to be done, Don Gabriel?" Roberto inquired, a tremor of fear and anxiety shaking his voice. It was plain that with every breath of growing strength the love of life increased in him. He stood ready to make a bargain that would sweep away everything but that.

"In a moment—look to your men first. If one of them enters the gate, you die."

Henderson glanced back to his friends, considering whether to march Roberto up the road and join them, risking a dash and a rescue by the soldiers, or hold him there and have Felipe bring Don Abraham down. Helena had started towards him; she stood about half-way between him and the cannon, a gun in her hand, as if she had sprung at the moment of his greatest peril before the charging soldiers to throw her life away with his own. She had halted there when she saw the soldiers stop. Now she came running, her gun

flung down, her long cloak streaming after her.

“Gabriel! You are hurt, you are bleeding!” She ran to him, pressing her hand to his wound. “Oh, you are hurt, you are hurt!”

“Run to Felipe; tell him to bring Don Abraham,” Henderson requested her.

Roberto turned his head at the sound of her voice, the hateful jealousy that had ridden him to such unmanly length burning through his humiliation and distress. Helena drew back into the shadow of Henderson’s protection.

“If he moves, shoot him!” she whispered. “Do not trust him, Gabriel—shoot him dead if he moves a hand!”

She sped away to summon Felipe, who came marching Don Abraham down the road.

“So there is a new stake on the table,” said Felipe, full of admiration for Henderson’s victory against Roberto’s treachery. “But your wound, Don Gabriel?”

“A cat scratched me—it is nothing,” Henderson returned.

“It is time to cut its claws. And here is the old stake, that had become valueless, worth a fortune now, beside the new.” Felipe ranged Don Abraham beside his son.

Helena stood near Henderson, who still held Roberto at his pistol’s point. Pablo had followed the others down, no pressure in the lives of men sufficient to urge him out of his deliberate way. The laborers were coming out from the shelter of

their doors, astonished by the fortune that seemed to wait on this unaccountable Don Gabriel's call.

"This is the condition upon which I will grant you life, Roberto Garvanza," Henderson said. "Tell me first, with the honesty of a man who stands condemned, whether there is a British ship in the harbor, as you have said."

"There is," Roberto replied.

Don Abrahan stood beside his son, a few feet parting them, his spare figure drawn erect, his thin face stern and severe. He had not said a word to the young man, although he had seemed on the point of addressing him once, only to frown and turn away. Now he looked at him sharply, drawing his brows as if he peered against the light.

"Then you will order your soldiers back to the pueblo, and you and your father shall ride with us to the harbor. I assure you solemnly that you shall both be shot the moment you attempt to escape, or that any rescue is attempted by your soldiers or friends. You will remain in our company as surety for our safety until we are on board the British vessel, when you may return ashore. On this condition I grant you and your father life. Do you accept the terms?"

"I accept, Don Gabriel," Roberto replied, his head bent, his voice shamed and low.

Don Abrahan turned to him, hand lifted as if to strike him, his face blanched with passion.

"Coward!" the old man denounced him. "Twice this day I have seen you a coward!"

“I consider your life,” Roberto said. “As for my own——”

“My life! I value honor above life. Die like a man before you accept these terms!”

“I have passed my word,” Roberto said sullenly, resentful of his father’s arraignment.

“I have not!”

“Peace, Don Abrahan!” Henderson commanded.

“Peon!” the old man raged at him furiously; “only death can command my tongue!” He lifted his arm as if he held a sword. “Charge—to the rescue!” he shouted.

The officer at the gate dashed back to his men, who sat straining in the expectation of action. In a moment they were charging toward the open gate.

Henderson advanced his pistol until it touched Roberto’s hair. He put out his hand toward Helena, not daring to remove his eyes a moment from the man whom he held under sentence of death.

“Go to Doña Carlota—run!” he said. “Roberto, if they pass the gate!”

“They stop!” said Felipe. “It is well for you, Don Abrahan!”

“Charge!” Don Abrahan shouted, sweeping his long arm as if he struck with a sword.

“They are turning—they are leaving!” said Helena, who had not retreated a step at Henderson’s command.

“There is a dust in the road,” said Pablo, pointing to the north. “There is a sound of——”

“It is so,” Felipe attested, his vigilance upon Don Abrahan relaxed a moment in his great wonder over this sudden deliverance.

All stood looking and listening, Roberto and Don Abrahan as greatly amazed by the action of the soldiers as the others. There was a dust in the road just beyond the head of the olive lane; it rose high, and yellow as the summer smoke of a fire in the green forest.

“There is a sound, like the sound of——” said Pablo. He smiled.

The soldiers were galloping toward the pueblo, their officer riding after them as if threatened by some terror that would swallow him if he fell another rod behind.

At the turn of the road a flock of goats came pouring into the olive lane. In a moment they had flooded it, for they were being driven as no careful goatherd would urge a flock; in a moment they had found the open gate, and came running up the road to Don Abrahan's feet. After them there followed Liseta, carrying a long stem of the spear-like yucca that stands on the hillsides in summer tall and white as a stately bride.

Liseta's eyes were bright; her dark face was tinted with the red of her rich, racing blood. She was dusty, sweat-streaked, panting; her black hair blew in wild freedom about her face.

“Here are your goats, Don Abrahan Gar-

vanza," she said, coming straight to the patron. "Count them — see that every one is there. I will watch them no more! The Americans are coming — I am free!"

Don Abraham did not give the slightest heed to Liseta's defiant proclamation, although the others heard her eagerly. He was looking along the lane after the fleeing cavalrymen.

"What hope is there for a nation whose soldiers run from a flock of goats!" said Don Abraham, contemptuous bitterness in his voice.

"Goats!" Liseta mocked him. "If you had seen the Americans, Don Abraham, you would have run after the soldiers!"

"Where are they, Liseta?" Henderson inquired, doubting the girl's excited report.

"There, a little way behind me. I saw them coming through the pass. I had watched for them many days, since you told us, Don Gabriel, they would come. I gathered the goats ——"

"How many, Liseta? Where are they? There is nobody in the road."

"The road is full of them, I tell you, Don Gabriel. There are as many horses as Don Abraham has goats."

All had turned to gaze through the falling dust-cloud raised by the goats. Helena ran to the defenses, mounted the cannon, and stood looking up the Monterey road.

"They are coming!" she announced, almost shrieking in the mounting of her sublime joy. She

snatched off her sombrero and waved the others forward to share with her the sight of their deliverance.

Gabriel was thrilled with the hope that she had not seen a phantom worked out of the flying dust, but not sanguine enough to trust to any mischance by relaxing for one moment his vigilance over his two hostages. He signed to Felipe to bring Don Abrahan.

“There! Do you see them, Gabriel?”

Helena stood on the cannon, leaning and pointing, vibrant with delight. Her hair, coiled to fit into the crown of her sombrero, was falling from its anchorage in happy disorder; her eyes, her face, were alive with the fire of triumph kindled from the cold ashes of despair.

Henderson leaped to the mound of earth beside the cannon to see over the brushwood that grew close along the border of the road. He turned to Felipe, who stood expectantly.

“They are coming!” he said.

Roberto lifted his head from his crushed and humiliated shrinking.

“Don Gabriel, permit me to return and defend the pueblo,” he requested. “My disgrace in your eyes is complete. Allow me to redeem myself, at least before my soldiers, and die for the republic like a man.”

Henderson looked at Felipe. Felipe threw out his hand, raised his shoulders, shut his eyes, expressive of complete indifference in any further

adventures, honorable or dishonorable, that might come in Don Roberto's days.

"What is a general more or less?" he said.

"What do you say, Helena? You have most to forgive."

"Let him go, Gabriel," she requested, her compassion making her voice gentle for one who deserved no gentleness.

"There are some horses in the stable that belong to your government," said Henderson. "Take one of them and go. And here—here is your flag of truce. It has a black smudge on it, like your honor. Go!"

The tramp of horses was coming near in the road at the head of the olive lane, and the rumble of heavy wheels. The sun was low on the hills; their shadows reached into the valley, over Don Abraham's mansion, submerging the road along which the conquerors advanced.

The chaparral grew tall at the roadside just beyond the head of the olive lane; those who stood waiting, pulsing, straining with bright eyes and parted lips, could not see the advancing column whose dust rose high. But there was more than dust to prove that strong men were advancing into that pastoral, sleeping land that placid summer evening. Gabriel Henderson, straining until his eyes ached for the sight of them, removed his hat when he saw the token that appeared above the green bosque like a flame.

There the flag came, lifted high. The man who

carried it — honorable distinction! — and they who marched with him, could not yet be seen through the intervening bosque, where the shadow of the hills fell on them, but the flag proclaimed them like a herald, lifted high above their heads into the sun. A beam of it was bright on the gilt spear of its staff; it was golden on the warm colors that stretched in the western wind.

Don Abraham beheld it. He bowed his head as one who submits before a conqueror.

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