

THE PICTURE OF  
LAS CRUCES

A ROMANCE OF MEXICO

BY CHRISTIAN REID

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PART I.

I.

There is not in the whole of the lovely Mexican land, and it is doubtful if there is in the wide world, a more picturesque and delightful city than the city of Morelia, or one more fascinating to the artist eye and soul. So at least Ralph Ingraham thought, as he paced slowly along the beautiful Calzada de Guadalupe, drinking in, as it were, at every pore the perfect picturesqueness of the scenes around him. For Nature had given Ingraham a true artist's soul, and his friends among the kindly fraternity of the pencil and the brush were often heard disinterestedly to lament that he had not the spur of necessity to force him to efforts which are seldom made without that disagreeable but salutary incentive. Yet he had won an honourable place among them by work that could not be decried as that of an amateur, but was of a sufficiently original character to prove his ability and give promise of better things in the future, were love of art and the strong creative impulse that we call genius to triumph over the temptation to dilettanteism offered by great wealth.

But never had the qualities which conflicted with the artistic half of his nature been more in abeyance, or the artist more vigorously alive within him, than on this exquisite morning in the Calzada of Morelia. The great stone causeway forty feet wide, with stone parapets and benches along its sides, and double rows of giant trees shading it, while masses of roses rioted among their stems, appeared to him the most delightful of promenades. An aqueduct crossed the valley in a succession of graceful arches, and, spanning the Calzada with one great arch, gave him an opportunity to read in half-effaced characters that this structure was erected in a year of famine by the then Bishop of Michoacan, Fray Antonio de San Miguel Iglesias, in order to provide work and so procure food for the starving people. Ancient churches with richly and quaintly sculptured façades, and dwellings inclosing courts full of flowers, lined the way, while overhead arched a sky of brilliant sapphire, and far and fair spread the lovely valley, encircled by heights bathed in magical light and colour.

Presently Ingraham found what he had been in search of, a good point for a sketch, and, turning, beckoned a boy who, like himself, was idling along the causeway, only in a more pronounced manner, for he had collapsed upon one of the stone benches, with the sketching-trap which he had been engaged to carry beside him, while he watched the unaccountable movements of the stranger who had retained his services. The beckoning gesture, however, brought him to his feet, and his dark eyes quickened as he saw the trap unlimbered, the easel set up, the umbrella opened, and the canvas placed.

"It is a picture, se ñor, that you will make?" he said, in a half-interrogative, half-assertive tone.

Ingraham smiled. "When it is done you can tell what it is," he replied. "Meanwhile — what is your name?"

"Pancho, se ñor."

"Well, Pancho, you can either stay here and wait until I am ready for you, or you can go, and return in two hours."

"And you will paint, se ñor?"

"Yes, I shall paint."

"Then," said Pancho, with decision, "I will stay."

He said no more, but, subsiding into a corner of the bench nearest the spot where the painter had set up his easel, watched the rapid progress of the sketch which the latter began, with intent, absorbed interest evident in every line of his face.

An attractive face it was, like those of many of his race. A bronze-tinted skin, delicate features, large dark eyes under level brows and sweeping lashes — who that knows Mexico does not know this face, with its charm alike of beauty and expression, seen as often under the ragged head-covering of the peasant as the silver-laced *sombrero* of the gentleman? It is a face full of artistic possibilities, of the artistic genius which this extraordinary people possess and display in a hundred ways — in architecture, painting, modelling, and music. To this boy there was a pleasure, which no *gamin* of another race would have found, in observing such work as he had never seen before. Often had he sat for hours on the pavement of some great old church, watching the painters frescoing the soaring domes with glowing forms of saints and angels; but never before had he seen an artist sit down in the open air and transfer to a canvas before his eyes the Calzada with its noble old trees, its carved benches and parapet, and the arches of the aqueduct beyond, by strokes that looked like magic in their swiftness.

Ingraham, for his part, entirely forgot his silent companion as he worked with that sense of satisfaction in his work which an artist feels who is conscious of success in catching an effect that he desires, and in making his own some fragment of that great beauty of Nature which is as baffling as it is enchanting. There is an elation as great in such success as the corresponding depression when the success is not attained, and Ingraham only expressed aloud his inward sense of this when at the end of more than two hours' work he threw his head back, took in the effect of what he had done, and said, audibly, "That is pretty good!"

"Permit me to agree with you," observed an unexpected voice, speaking in English at his shoulder. "It is very good."

The young man started and turned, full of astonishment and not a little vexed that his self-congratulation had been overheard by any one capable of understanding it. "Confound your impertinence!" was the thought in his mind and written legibly on his face, as he met the smiling glance of a man whose approach he had not heard at all.

"You must pardon me," said the latter, with easy courtesy, "but I have been admiring your picture for some time, and the temptation to answer and agree with you was irresistible."

To show vexation would only have made the situation ridiculous: so Ingraham smiled in return as he answered, "A man who talks aloud in a public place can not be surprised if he is overheard; but I was not aware that I had a listener, much less one who understood English."

"English is my native tongue," replied the other, "though probably you would not think so to look at me."

Upon this, Ingraham did look at him, taking in his whole appearance with a comprehensive glance, and decided that he would certainly not have thought so. What he saw was a spare man of medium height, fully as dark as the average Mexican, with a thin, keen face lighted by quick observant eyes and full of shrewd expression. In attire he was altogether Mexican, wearing the close-fitting breeches decorated with silver buttons and the short jacket of the country, together with an elaborately-trimmed *sombrero*, while the small foot in its pointed

shoe and the slender hand with finger-ends deeply yellowed by cigarette-smoking were points that intensified his striking resemblance to the native type.

"You would never take me for a 'gringo,' eh?" said this easy personage, smiling, in reply to the glance that travelled over him. "I am a pretty good imitation of a Mexican, I flatter myself, and pass for one anywhere. You see, when I came to Mexico, a quarter of a century ago, foreigners, especially Americans, were not in as good odour here as they are now, and it saved trouble if one adopted the national habits and did not challenge remark by one's appearance. I lost no time in becoming *plus royaliste que le roi*, and now I have almost forgotten that I was ever anything else than a Mexican — probably because I made my identification complete by marrying one."

Ingraham laughed. He saw that he had made an acquaintance out of the ordinary, and, having a large slice of Bohemianism in his disposition, determined to encourage this frank stranger, at least as far as the point where amusement is apt to become boredom.

"You are to be congratulated upon your success," he said. "I should certainly never take you for anything but a Mexican. Nature, however, gave you an appearance which made your assumption of the character easy."

"Yes, Nature made me a spare, dark man," replied the other. "But that was only the foundation. In order to change one's national type, much is needed besides a tint of skin. There are habits, manners, a hundred indefinable things— But pardon my egotism! I am wandering far from your charming picture. You must really allow me to remark that you are evidently a painter of great talent and skill."

"You are very kind," said Ingraham. "I can not do less than remark in turn that you are evidently a person of appreciation and cultivation."

"I know a good picture when I see it," was the confident reply. "I have always been a lover of art — when I was young, as a connoisseur; later, as a more practical matter. You are a stranger in Mexico, probably, se ñor?"

"From your point of view — that of a quarter of a century in the country—yes. I have been here only a few months."

"And you are (forgive the question) a painter by profession?"

"I have no higher ambition than to be reckoned so."

"Then, Se ñor Painter, has it occurred to you to consider or to know that you are in a country rich not only in such natural beauty as this" —and he waved his hand toward the scene around them —"but also in works of art, paintings of the great masters, which, so far from being known and catalogued as they are in Europe, are many of them in obscure places, totally unknown to the world?"

"No," answered Ingraham; "I can not say that I am aware of anything of the kind. I have found some fine paintings in the churches, a few of which were apparently without recognition of their value; but nothing has led me to believe that there are a great number of such works of art in the country."

"Ah!" said the other. He drew a cigarette-case from his pocket, opened it, and offered it to Ingraham, who declined the proffered civility by a gesture, while he resumed work on his picture, putting in touches half idly here and there. The cigarette having been lighted with the care a Mexican always displays in this operation, the other end of the double-headed wax taper put back in its box, and a deep whiff of smoke exhaled, the stranger went on:

"It would astonish you if I were to tell you how many such works of art are to be found in this country. I do not speak of the great Murillo of Guadalajara, or the Titian of Tzintz úntzan—"

"I must see that picture, by the bye," interpolated Ingraham.

"But of many, equally fine, that are buried in country chapels, where they are seen only by Indian worshippers, or in private houses, where they have drifted from the despoiled convents and monasteries. Some of these pictures" — he lowered his voice impressively — " might be purchased for a comparative trifle, and disposed of most advantageously in London or Paris, or

even New York. It is a speculation which I have long had in view, but in which I need intelligent co-operation — and capital."

To the credit of Ingraham's self-command, it may be said that he did not move a muscle, although this seductive offer, for such he readily interpreted it to be, thrilled every nerve of the painter and the collector. His own experience, limited though it was, told him that the man's assertions might be true, and that, if he could successfully manage the matter, some of the treasures spoken of might become his own. There was a moment's pause before he could control his voice sufficiently to say, carelessly —

"The co-operation and capital ought both to be easily obtained if the pictures really exist. There is not an art dealer in one of the great cities you have named who would not give you carte blanche if you could procure for him genuine Murillos and Titians."

"Very true, if I could convince him of my ability to do so," was the reply. "But that is difficult without exhibiting the paintings, and the paintings are not to be obtained without money. Behold my dilemma! Now, if it were possible that you, se ñor" — and the keen eyes surveyed the young man very closely — "could command the confidence of these dealers, as I judge from your evident talent may be the case, you might make your visit to Mexico more profitable than by painting pictures of your own, however admirable."

"But before entering into any negotiations of the kind, one would like to be assured of the existence and value of these paintings, to see and judge for one's self, if possible," Ingraham suggested, quietly.

"There would be no difficulty in that," replied the other, quickly. "Good faith once assured — and you will pardon me that I mention what is of essential importance in all business arrangements — I could convince you by such ocular demonstration as no painter would think of questioning."

"In that case, we will talk of the matter further," said Ingraham, as he began to put away his canvas and close up his trap. "Perhaps you will do me the honour to take dinner with me at my hotel, when we can more fully discuss the subject. Here is my card."

The stranger received the bit of pasteboard and bowed. "I am very happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Ingraham," he said. "Allow me to reciprocate the introduction." And from a breast pocket of the jacket came forth a pocketbook, and out of that a card, which he presented with another bow to Ingraham, who read inscribed thereon —

"Gilberto Rosa."

"Your name, as well as your appearance, is Mexican, se ñor," he observed. "Yet I understood you to say you are an American from the States."

"And have you never heard of translating a proper name?" asked the other, smiling. "All foreigners living in Mexico use the Spanish form of their Christian names, and I saw no reason why the rule might not be applied to a surname, especially when the change only involved the difference of one vowel."

"Your name in English, then, is—"

"Gilbert Rose, at your service. The change, you perceive, is not very great."

"But certainly much more musical," said Ingraham, with a smile. "Se ñor Rosa, I shall expect the pleasure of seeing you at my hotel, and until then will bid you good-day. Pancho" — the boy on the bench sprang alertly to his feet — "*vamonos!*"

## II.

"I suppose," said Ingraham to himself as he sauntered back along the Calzada, "that the first thing a prudent man would do would be to find out who this plausible Mexicanized American is, and how much credence may be attached to his stories of unknown treasures of art."

But why should I take that trouble? No doubt he is an adventurer; but what possible harm can he do me? He certainly can not impose worthless pictures upon me, and there is the probability that he may have discovered something of real value. When one thinks of the history of this country, of its past opulence and splendour, and of the extreme likelihood that many of the works of the great Spanish painters found their way here at a time when no one took note of such things, there seems a very decided probability that he is speaking the truth. Certainly a fellow of this kind, shrewd and with cultivation enough to know their value, would be just the person to unearth such treasures; and if he should lead one into adventures by the way, why, so much the better. Adventures, perhaps, would be even more desirable than possible Murillos and Titians. Life is a terribly humdrum affair; and if Señor Rosa can for a little while assist in making it otherwise, I care not how much of a sharper he may prove. A few inquiries, however, may not be amiss. Pancho!"

"Señor."

"Do you know the gentleman who has just been talking with me?"

"Certainly, señor. Every one knows Don Gilberto."

"And what does every one know of Don Gilberto? Who is he?"

Pancho hesitated. However extensive his knowledge, it was evidently a little difficult to formulate, and after a moment he could only reply, "He is a *gringo*, señor, and married to Doña Josefita Valdez."

"And is that all you know of him? What does he do?"

"Many things, señor. He buys and sells lands and mines, he travels and knows every one — he has much business (*muchos negocios*), Don Gilberto."

"Is he rich?"

"Oh, no, señor " (with conviction). "He is not rich, but he has much business, and it may be that he will be rich some day. Doña Josefita has told my mother, who is her *lavandera*, that Don Gilberto will be very rich when he has sold the great mine of La Luz to some English señores."

"Ah!" said Ingraham, with a smile. He could place Don Gilberto very easily now. It does not require a long sojourn in Mexico to become familiar with a class of speculators, mostly of foreign birth, who are ready to sell anything in the country — mines, haciendas, whatever one may chance to desire — at a moment's notice. That they are not themselves the owners of these things does not at all matter. They can put their hands upon what you want at once, they assure you, and it is only a question of putting your own hand deeply enough in your pocket to secure it. The enterprising *gringo* who called himself Señor Rosa" plainly belonged to this class, and was only a little out of the ordinary, inasmuch as he tempted a painter with tales of unknown pictures bearing the names of great masters. "He is a genius in his line, and deserves to make a fortune," thought Ingraham; "but I hope he will not sell the mine until he has given me a chance at the paintings, else I fear he will become a collector and absorb them himself."

That he had correctly estimated the man he was quite sure by the time they had finished an agreeable dinner together. If a sharper, he was certainly not a vulgar one, and there were indications about him which went far to prove to Ingraham that whatever he was now he had been at one time a gentleman, and was a man of liberal culture. He talked well and easily on many subjects, and did not betray the cloven hoof of the speculator until, over the wine and cigars, Ingraham himself led the conversation in that direction. And then the floodgates were opened! As the young man listened, interested and amused, he could not but own that there was a singular fascination in these stories of mines of fabulous richness waiting only the magic touch of capital to develop them, of haciendas with leagues of territory and almost uncounted flocks and herds, where coffee and cane grew side by side, of forests filled with the rare, precious woods of the tropics, and even of the buried treasure of which so many tales are rife in Mexico. But at last he said, laughingly —

"Come, come, Señor Rosa, do not tantalize a poor knight of the brush any further with these wonderful chances for fortune. Let me hear something now of the pictures and where they are to be found."

"To find them is easy," was the quiet reply, "but the question is — after they are found? What then? If we are to enter into business negotiations, it is well that terms and conditions should be made clear at once."

"With all my heart," said Ingraham. "Let me hear what you propose. You will readily perceive that, knowing nothing, I can propose nothing."

The other looked at him intently for a moment, as if he were bringing all his powers of penetration to determine how far the d'Éonnair young stranger was to be trusted; and the result of the scrutiny was so far favourable that he spoke, presently with an apparent impulse of candour:

"In a matter of this kind some degree of mutual confidence is necessary. To treat a gentleman as if he were an unscrupulous dealer prepared to take any advantage of one, would be a mistake that I flatter myself I am incapable of making. I shall speak to you frankly, Mr. Ingraham, and then we will settle what is best to be done for the benefit of both of us. As I told you this morning, I have long had my eye upon some pictures which are undoubtedly of great value. What would you say, now, to a genuine Velasquez?"

"I should say," replied Ingraham, "that I would want very convincing proofs of its genuineness."

Don Gilberto waved his hand. "If you are the artist I suppose you to be," he said, "you will not want any other proof than merely to look at it. The picture speaks for itself. But there are other proofs. It has never been out of the possession of the family for which it was originally painted, and the family tradition is unwavering that it is an original Velasquez."

"And can it be purchased?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"There are few things that can not be purchased — if one offers enough," was the reply. "The family owning this picture are now comparatively poor; they suffered much in the revolution, and they would not refuse to sell it. I am sure of that. But I have never been secure enough of my own profit to be able to offer them their price."

"Let me see the picture," said Ingraham, "and if it is what you believe, the price will be forthcoming."

"And the profit?"

"The profit!" He paused a moment, then decided that he would continue to support the character of a wandering painter, not presumably overburdened with worldly wealth, which chance had given him. "The profit we will divide. There can be no difficulty about that. Only convince me that your picture is genuine."

"I wish I were as certain of eternal salvation as of its genuineness," said Don Gilberto, piously. "And it is but one of many hidden away in the nooks and corners of this country. Why, I know a little chapel on the lake not far from here — the church of an obscure Indian village — that has no less than three splendid Riberas!"

"How did such a church come to possess such treasures?" asked Ingraham, breathlessly — for surely statements and possibilities like these were enough to take away the breath.

"The padre of this church is an eccentric," replied Don Gilberto. "He is a man of private fortune, but so peculiar that he has been left to spend his life in this village, where, by the bye, he is perfectly happy. The pictures are his personal possession. Once he went away on a journey, and he came back with these treasures. Where he obtained them he never said, but it is supposed by the few people who know of their existence and their value that he purchased them from some of the dispersed religious communities. There were many such pictures in the rich old monasteries, and, since nothing was easier than to take a canvas out of its frame, roll it up, and carry it away, very few of them came into the possession of the government. Here is an example — which I know to be a fact. At the spoliation of the great monastery of San Francisco in the city of Mexico, two pictures fell by some means into the hands of a soldier, who sold them both for twelve

hundred dollars. The purchaser immediately carried them to Europe and readily obtained for them sixty thousand dollars apiece. They were fine Murillos."

"And do you know of any pictures still in the country and in private hands equal to those?" Ingraham inquired.

"Equal I could not say, for those I did not see. But I know of the existence of many pictures of great value. Some I have seen, others I have heard of. They are generally to be discovered in places where you would least expect to find them."

"What a country it is!" said Ingraham, who began to feel excitement pulsating in his veins.

"Ah!" Don Gilberto lifted his shoulders: "when you have lived in it for a quarter of a century you feel that you are only beginning to know it. Mexico, Señor Ingraham, is one of the few countries left in the world where the marvellous is still possible. It seems to you, no doubt, being an artist and a man of cultivation, brilliant, picturesque, and interesting—"

"Beyond anything that I had imagined," said Ingraham, fervently.

"But what you see on the surface is commonplace compared to the depths in the life of the country which no stranger can possibly know. What stories I could tell you of the people, what glimpses I could give you of the existence which they still lead, almost untouched by what is called modern civilization, which, as you well know, is death to the romantic and the picturesque!"

"Señor Rosa," said Ingraham, "I perceive that you are the man for whom I have been looking ever since I entered Mexico. All those with whom I have come in contact heretofore have been eager to prove to me how far Mexico is progressing toward that civilization you accurately describe, which is making the whole world so drearily and hideously alike that there will soon be no place left in it for the lover of the romantic and the picturesque. My effort has been to refrain from expressing to these people the horror with which I regard their achievements, and at the same time to remove myself as far as possible from the effects thereof. But a stranger has indeed limited opportunities for seeing anything below the surface of a country. Therefore I shall be deeply your debtor if you can afford me any of those glimpses of which you speak."

"It will be my very great pleasure to do so," replied the other; "for allow me to say that if I am the man for whom you have been looking ever since you entered Mexico, you are the man for whom I have been waiting for half a decade. You shall have glimpses of Mexican life such as are offered to few strangers, and at the same time the opportunity to realize a fortune from the pictures I will show you."

"I begin to suspect that you have stepped out of the Arabian Nights," said Ingraham, laughing; "but I accept your offers. How soon can you show me one of these pictures — say the Velasquez?"

"The Velasquez is one that I can show you most easily, for it is in a house where I am sufficiently intimate to take you without previous arrangement. Can you leave Morelia with me to-morrow?"

"Readily. Where shall we go?"

"First, to Patzcuaro, a place in itself well worth seeing if you have not seen it"—  
Ingraham shook his head — "and thence to a hacienda where we shall find the picture of which I have spoken. The family are connected with my wife, and I can introduce you as a distinguished artist who, having heard of the painting, desires to see it. You can then form your own opinion of it; and incidentally you will find yourself in a Mexican household where only the purest Mexican customs exist, where, in fact, all things are exactly as they were a century ago, except that the family have, in the interval, managed to lose the most of their wealth, and with it a great part of their importance. But this will not make them less interesting to an artist like yourself."

"On the contrary," said Ingraham. He smiled as he spoke, with an exhilarating satisfaction in the prospect before him. No shade of misgiving crossed his mind. Let Don Gilberto be what he would — and that he was an adventurer of a rather slippery type the young man still believed — he was evidently possessed of a knowledge of the country so great, and was opening

the prospect of an experience so alluring, that even if the Velasquez should prove to be spurious, the quest for it offered sufficient elements of interest to compensate for a possible disappointment.

### III.

It was, however, with a certain sense of whimsical amusement, directed against himself, that Ingraham waked the next morning to the consciousness that he was booked for an adventure into an unknown country with an unknown companion, in search of something almost as fabulous as the Golden Fleece. For one of artistic temperament — which means generally all things sensitive and impressionable — he was very little a person of moods; but he could not, any more than the rest of us, altogether escape the defects of his qualities, and to him also came in some degree that subtle ebb and flow of feeling, that depressing sense of the unsatisfactoriness of all things, which in one of his temperament is the reaction almost certain to follow upon any mood of more than ordinarily keen excitement or interest.

This reaction was strongly upon him in the cool, clear light of those waking hours, when such reactions are generally likely to make themselves most strongly felt. "I am a fool!" he said to himself, with unflattering brevity. "I am about to undertake what will probably be a very fatiguing journey, with a man who I have no manner of doubt is a sharper, to look at a picture that is certain to prove a spurious daub! And that, too, when I am in a good vein of work!" He gazed regretfully at his sketch begun on the Calzada the day before, and it seemed to him better than he had imagined it to be — so much better, indeed, that the inclination to return and complete it at once became almost irresistible. "I have the greatest mind to throw the whole thing over!" he thought, impatiently, as he rose.

But what was there in the freshness and brilliancy of the morning which had power to change his mood, when he presently stepped forth from his chamber? Exquisite and indefinable, indeed, is the charm of the early day in Mexico, exhilarating alike to mind and body, communicating its ineffable buoyancy to the most jaded energies and the most despondent spirit. For a creature so responsive as Ingraham to resist its influence was impossible. His spirits rose like mercury: the prospect before him assumed an entirely different aspect; he suddenly saw that it abounded in possibilities of interest and pleasure. The Velasquez! He said to himself with a laugh that he had no belief in the Velasquez; but the adventure, the visit to the old house where it was supposed to be, the glimpse into the inner life of this fascinating country — these things were surely worth much fatigue and possible boredom. As for his sketch, Morelia would be as beautiful, its Calzada as picturesque, when he returned, as now, and he had meant to see Patzcuaro in any event.

It was a very cheerful companion, therefore, whom Señor Rosa found awaiting him, and with whom he presently set forth. That anomalous gentleman himself seemed to be in excellent spirits, the result also of the morning influence, perhaps; and it struck Ingraham that he was more Mexican than ever in appearance, probably owing to the fact that he had put the last touch to his costume in the form of an ivory-handled revolver, which protruded from his hip pocket, below the short jacket that made no pretence of concealing it. A stranger to the country might have supposed from this warlike preparation that there was some danger in the expedition. But Ingraham had by this time learned that pistols in Mexico are regarded as purely ornamental adjuncts, and are seldom, if ever, brought into use.

His own chief impedimenta — to wit, the sketching-trap — received a glance of unqualified approval from Señor Rosa. "That," he said, "is well! You are not only going to see, but to make, pictures. And let me tell you that you will enter an artist's paradise, one of the most beautiful regions of the globe, and a *terra incognita* to people who are running the world over in search of the picturesque. Do you know that Patzcuaro signifies in the Tarascan tongue 'place of delights'? And, although they have no advantages of comparison, the people who named it were



right. In climate, in beauty, in every advantage that Nature can lavish, you will acknowledge when you see it that it is truly a place of delights."

"All Mexico seems to me that," said Ingraham — "a place of delights and an artist's paradise, beyond any other country that I have ever wandered into."

"But when you see Patzcuaro you will see its crowning beauty," said the other, confidently.

Ingraham did not attach much importance to this assurance, for he knew that the artist and the mere lover of natural beauty often look at the same scenes with different eyes, and he did not suppose that he could possibly find anything more enchanting than he had already found in this land of abounding picturesqueness. There was, consequently, a surprise in store for him when the railroad made its final pause at the foot of the high hill on which is situated the city of Patzcuaro, that ancient stronghold of Tarascan chiefs, from whence went forth the embassies which welcomed peaceably the first Spaniards that ever set foot in Michoacan, brown-robed friars, sons of the gentle St. Francis.

Up this hill, along a winding road of two miles, a diligencia conveyed the travellers and their luggage in the accustomed manner of Mexican diligencias — that is, with a fine disregard of any obstacle of less size than a house; but its tremendous jolts were hardly heeded by Ingraham as he hung out of the window, enraptured by the view opening below him — the sparkling lake from which the city takes its name, the green islands upon its bosom, the mountains draped in heavenly tints as they receded into distance, the smiling valley set with domed towns and villages. Wider and wider spread the picture as the lumbering vehicle mounted higher; but although Señor Rosa kept a gratified and observant eye upon the young artist, as far as attention to his own comfort and a futile attempt to hold himself in his seat would allow, he made no remark upon the scene. He was reserving himself for a more supreme occasion.

But, once within the city, it was difficult to tear Ingraham from the contemplation of its picturesqueness. Delightedly he wandered through the nar-

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imperfect for him to realize how far this exquisite lake, lying so high above the ocean-tides, in a wonderland of atmosphere and climate, is more perhaps than any other spot in Mexico the meeting-place of the ancient life of the country and that new yet also old life which the Spaniard planted with his flag and his cross.

"A place of delights!" he said at last, speaking to himself, though aloud. "Surely yes. No later comers will ever challenge the name its old possessors gave it."

"One may be quite sure of that," said his companion, briskly. "The atmosphere alone is enough to make it one of the most delightful places in the world. Have you ever felt anything like it? — so stimulating, yet so balmy? We are more than seven thousand feet above the sea, you know. This is the highest navigable water on the globe. And yonder is the steamer on her way among the islands. You must take a trip on that before you return to Morelia."

"Yes," said Ingraham, with a start of recollection, "I want to go to Tzintz úntzan. Why did I not think of it earlier? We might have gone to-day."

"To-day, no. The horses from the hacienda are no doubt by this time awaiting us at the *fonda* below. I telegraphed yesterday that we would be here to-day. They are expecting us. If you are ready, we will return now."

Ingraham rose with a sigh. It was hard to tear himself away from the picture which he seemed to have only begun to enjoy. But it was a consolation in leaving to think that whenever he returned he should find it awaiting him, untouched in its beauty, its magical freshness and charm, and he assured himself that he would return soon and remain long. Let him only settle this matter of the Velasquez, in which he had now scant faith or interest, and he would come back to Patzcuaro for an indefinite period. Never had he felt more gratitude for his leisure, unlimited by

any such demands of necessity as limit the time of most men, than in contemplating the prospect of a prolonged sojourn on these enchanting shores.

"If it is necessary to go, I am ready," he said; and then as they began to descend the causeway he asked, "How far is it to the hacienda?"

"About four leagues," was the reply. "If you knew where to look, you could see it from the Calvario — at least part of the lands. If they have sent good horses, we shall be there in less than three hours."

"You seem to know the people very well," Ingraham observed.

"Did I not mention that there is a connection? My wife is related to the family, and my daughter is at the hacienda at present."

"Indeed!" said Ingraham. He made no further comment, but his belief in the Velasquez descended a few degrees lower.

As they approached their hotel, a man who had been leaning in the doorway with an air of patient waiting came forward to meet them. He was a typical Mexican *mozo*, or servant, of the class found only in great houses. His dark, clear-cut face, of the pure native type, was keenly intelligent, and, even to the ordinary observer, altogether trust-worthy, and his slender, well-knit figure was well set off by his picturesque dress. Breeches of deer-skin were partially unbuttoned on the sides, and out of them flowed the folds of the white *calzones* worn below. His waist was girded by a scarlet sash, his short jacket, also of deer-skin, was elaborately braided, and his richly-trimmed *sombrero* must have cost at least a half-year's wages.

"Ah, Miguel!" cried Señor Rosa at sight of him. "I thought I should find you here. Have you been waiting long?"

"A little time, Don Gilberto," replied the man. "When I arrived they told me you had just gone out."

"You have come from the hacienda this morning, of course?"

"Certainly, señor."

"Then you will want some time to rest and feed the horses?"

"That is already done, señor, and I have come to know at what hour you wish to start."

"It is early yet. We have all the afternoon to make four leagues. Let us take two hours for dinner and digestion. Yes, that will do. Bring your horses in two hours."

"*¡Sta buen*, señor. In two hours they will be here."

He lifted his hat and departed.

"A perfect servant, that," said Don Gilberto, looking after him. "One of the family as much as the members of it. His own family brought up for generations on the hacienda. Faithful, attached, absolutely honest; his master would trust him with anything, and be perfectly secure in doing so. Now let us order dinner. That is something in which one should never allow one's self to be hurried."

Two hours later the horses were at the door, better-looking and better-equipped animals than Ingraham had expected to see, with Miguel and another *mozo* of less dignity in attendance. They mounted; the inferior *mozo* took charge of the sketching-trap; they clattered through the narrow streets, and soon found themselves in the open country beyond.

In the course of the ride Ingraham discovered that he had not up to this time appreciated the companion whom fate had given him at that individual's full value. Perhaps Don Gilberto discerned that the young man's interest in the expedition was flagging, and desired to revive it. At all events, he exerted himself to talk more entertainingly than he had talked yet, drawing upon an apparently inexhaustible store of knowledge of the country through which they were passing — knowledge of its past and present, its vicissitudes in war and peace, its traditions and stories, its great families and estates. Vivid, dramatic in the extreme and full of wild romanticism, most of these stories were; and as they rode onward in the golden afternoon, through the wide valley, outspread like a pastoral idyl and framed by hills of heavenly fairness, Ingraham had a pleasant sense of turning his back upon the nineteenth century, with its prosaic jar and fret, and entering

into the heart of a land where all the elements of romance appeared to meet and mingle, where social conditions forgotten by the modern world still existed, and all things seemed possible to the fancy.

They made such good progress that in less than the three hours of which Don Gilberto had spoken he told Ingraham that they were well upon the lands and fast approaching the residence of the hacienda. "As far as the eye can reach," he added, with a comprehensive wave of the hand over the valley, "once extended the estates of the family. But they are now much reduced. The present hacienda is not more than three leagues in extent."

"One can not exactly commiserate a man as a pauper who possesses nine miles of such territory as this," said Ingraham, looking over the richly fertile lands around them. "By the bye, who is the possessor? You have not yet mentioned his name."

"Don Luis Fernandez del Valle," replied the other, in a tone which implied that the name meant much. "There is no older family in Michoacan, nor any which possessed in times past a greater influence. But they were unfortunate in the revolution; they found themselves on the losing side, and ever since have been under a cloud. Nevertheless, Don Luis is a man of great ambition. It is easy to see that his heart is set on climbing the ladder to its utmost height again. He has influence still — a Fernandez del Valle must have that in Michoacan — but he lacks money; and here, as elsewhere, money is the key that unlocks all doors. I know his ambitions, I know that he has been much in Mexico of late, and I know also that nothing is gained in Mexico without this" — he made the significant gesture with the forefinger and thumb which means coin: "therefore I have brought you to see the Velasquez. At this time — for he desires much to be our next governor — he will be tempted to sell it as he may never be tempted again."

"Let me only be assured that the Velasquez is genuine," said Ingraham, whose hopes began to revive a little, "and I think I can offer him a temptation that, under such circumstances, he is not likely to resist."

"I have no fear of your opinion of the Velasquez," said the other, with a confidence which if assumed was very well acted. "But some diplomacy will be necessary, and that you must leave to me. Meanwhile, here we are at the gates. Yonder is the *casa grande*."

As the great gateway was thrown open and they passed through, Ingraham saw before him, crowning a gentle slope and in strong relief against a darkly-green, wooded mountain, that seemed to rise almost immediately in the rear but was in reality a mile or two distant, one of the most picturesque piles, and most strongly suggestive of a feudal castle, that he had yet seen in the country. Built of gray stone, with the solidity of a fortress, in two stately stories — the lower massive and solid as if for defence, the upper arcaded on the sides that were visible — and with the beautiful open belfry of a chapel rising at one end, it looked, in its noble proportions and massive strength, capable of defying time and change, and of sheltering generations within its gray old walls for centuries yet to come, as during centuries of the past.

"A fine old house, isn't it?" Don Gilberto observed, as they rode up the slope that led to the open space in front of its vast, arched entrance. "I said to myself that it would be certain to delight you. And yonder is Don Luis awaiting us in the door. Ah, *mi amigo*, how goes it with you!"

#### IV.

Altogether in harmony with the house on the threshold of which he stood, was the man upon whom Ingraham's glance fell at the last words of his companion. A tall and stately figure in the richly picturesque dress which Mexican gentlemen now seldom wear except on their estates, he had the poise and bearing of one accustomed to command, while his face, with its look of power in the breadth of the olive brow, the bold chiselling of the features, and the expression of the deep dark eyes, recalled the type of those great Spaniards of the sixteenth century who

conquered and ruled a new world. "What a subject for a picture!" the young man said to himself as his glance took in the whole scene — the great archway, the court with its pillars opening in perspective behind, and the figure of the *hacendado* as he stood in his dress of dark cloth laced and embroidered with silver, his handsome head uncovered, showing its fine intellectual outlines. As the horsemen drew up, he came forward, and, Don Gilberto throwing himself from his saddle, the two men embraced and patted each other on the back in the fashion of the country. Then the latter turned toward Ingraham, who had meanwhile dismounted.

"I was not able in my despatch to let you know whom I was bringing you," he said to his host; "but I have now the pleasure of introducing a distinguished painter from the States, Señor Ingraham."

"I am happy to make the acquaintance of Señor Ingraham, and to welcome him to my house," said Don Luis, in excellent English, as he grasped the young man's extended hand.

"Señor Ingraham speaks Spanish perfectly," observed Don Gilberto.

Ingraham laughed at this transparent flattery. "Very far from perfectly, señor," he said to Don Luis, "but sufficiently to understand and be understood. Not half so well, however, as you speak English."

"Oh, it is not perfect by any means, my English," replied Don Luis, with a slight, deprecating gesture, "but I have travelled in your country and in England, and have had the practice which you perhaps have lacked in Spanish. But enter, señor, enter! This house" — he indicated it by a graceful gesture as they passed under the great portal — "is yours. Honour me by considering it so."

A paved court, in which a thousand men-at-arms might have manoeuvred with ease, was surrounded by apartments of various uses, the most of which were plainly storehouses and domestic offices. On one side, near the entrance, a broad stone staircase led to the second story. Up this the three gentlemen proceeded, Don Gilberto explaining as they went how his friend was an enthusiast in art and very anxious to see all the fine paintings in Mexico, so he (Don Gilberto) could not fail to introduce to his notice the Velasquez of the Fernandez del Valle. By the time this had been explained, they had passed across a landing at the turn of the staircase, and, mounting its second flight, found themselves on a wide, tile-paved corridor, or gallery, which encircled the four inner sides of the court. Here a lady received them. She was advanced in age and very plainly dressed, but had the same stately figure, the same fine patrician head, as Don Luis. Don Gilberto hastened forward to greet her, and the master of the house presented the new guest.

"Here, my mother," he said, "is a distinguished painter from the States, whom our good friend Gilberto has done us the favour of bringing to our house. And this, señor, is my mother, the Señora Doña Antonia Roméro de Fernandez del Valle."

Ingraham bowed deeply, but the lady held out her hand with a cordial gesture. "You are welcome, señor," she said. "Do us the honour to consider our house as your own. You come from Patzcuaro to-day?"

"From Morelia, señora."

"In that case you must be tired, and ready for the *merienda*. You will take a cup of chocolate? Come, Gilberto, my friend."

"With your permission, a little later, Doña Antonia," replied that gentleman; "Where is Carmen, that she has no greeting for me?"

"She has probably not heard that you have arrived," Doña Antonia answered. "But yes — here she comes."

And along the corridor at that moment came a girl, hastening with quick, light steps toward them, who seemed to Ingraham's first careless glance little more than a child. She was dressed in the extreme of simplicity, her gown of cotton print was fashioned as plainly as possible, and the only touch of grace about her costume was the *rebozo*, of some silky material and soft neutral tint, which she wore thrown over her head and wound in drapery about her neck and

shoulders. So quiet and reserved was her air, so childlike and unworldly her aspect, that as she advanced she looked like some young novice from the cloister.

It was only when she reached them and lifted her face toward her father that Ingraham perceived with surprise that she was possessed of a beauty which he would not have expected to find in Don Gilberto's daughter. It was a beauty like the brilliancy of flowers, that struck upon the senses at once and left no room for question — at least to an artist's eye, though it was possible that her timidity and lack of manner might have concealed it to an ordinary observer. Later, Ingraham knew the details of the face by heart, but now he only received an impression of exquisite fairness of complexion, delicately-chiselled features, and dark Spanish eyes, of wonderful softness and beauty, set under finely-pencilled brows. The hair, which her *rebozo* almost entirely covered, but which showed in delicate rings and tendrils about her temples, was of purest gold — not the pale tint sometimes called by that name, but the ruddy hue of the precious metal itself. As she turned her head the same hair was to be seen hanging in two shining plaits, like braided sunshine, down her back as far as her waist.

Don Gilberto met and embraced her affectionately. "Ah, Carmencita," he said, "it is a pleasure to see thee again! We miss thee much at home, but thou art well and happy here with thy good *madrina*, no? One has only to look at thee to see it."

"Very well and happy, papa," the girl answered, with the caressing softness of Spanish speech. "And are all well at home — mamma and the little ones?"

"All well, and salute thee with a hundred loving messages. Thy mother bade me say that she would have sent some things she has for thee, had I not left unexpectedly and in haste."

"You are on your way to the mine, papa?"

"No: this is my destination. I bring an American gentleman See, here is an opportunity for thy English!"

He drew her forward as he spoke, and the dark lustrous eyes looked up at Ingraham, who on his part regarded her with unconcealed admiration.

"This, Mr. Ingraham," said Don Gilberto, "is my daughter. She is supposed to speak English; but I fear it is very much a matter of supposition only, for I have never been able to induce my children to speak my own tongue."

"That is because we know that we do not speak it well," said the girl, essaying the language with a charming blush and a very foreign accent. "But it will give me much pleasure to try to speak with Mr.—"

"Ingraham," said that gentleman, as she paused. "It is a name rather hard of pronunciation for lips accustomed to Spanish sounds. But one's name is like one's temperament: one can't get rid of it."

"Follow my example and translate it," said Don Gilberto. "What is your Christian name?"

"Ralph. As untranslatable as Ingraham, I fear."

"On the contrary. Ralph is plainly Raphael, and that is a very common name with us. So we will christen you Don Rafael. That is better than Mr. Ingraham, Do ña Antonia, eh?"

"Much easier for us, at least," answered Do ña Antonia, smiling. "And you do not object, se ñor?"

"I am delighted," Ingraham replied. "It seems to make me a more picturesque and interesting person in my own eyes. I shall feel flattered if you will allow me to be Don Rafael as long as I am within the walls of—"

"Las Cruces," supplied Don Luis, as he in turn paused. "That is the name of our hacienda, se ñor. But here are some more members of the family, who have come to greet an old friend and welcome a new one."

A group of children — a girl of ten or eleven, a boy two or three years younger, and a tiny maiden of four or five—came trooping along the corridor as he spoke, and were presented to Ingraham by Do ña Antonia, as Elvira, Arturo, and Concha. "The children of my son," she added. "Their mother is dead."

These small persons saluted the stranger with the graceful courtesy in which Mexican children are carefully trained, and then threw themselves, as it were, upon Don Gilberto, with whom they were evidently on terms of closest intimacy and who plainly stood high in their regard. They were still clinging around him as the entire party moved, at Doña Antonia's second bidding, toward the dining-room for the *merienda*, or afternoon collation.

The room which they entered seemed to Ingraham, in its immense size and the extent of the table that filled its centre, as suggestive of feudal customs and traditions as everything else around him. Unlimited hospitality seemed expressed by the board at which fifty guests might have found place; while the simplicity of remoteness and earlier times breathed in the absence of any adornment to the apartment, which, to modern eyes, was almost austere in its bareness. Yet not ugly, for the walls and ceiling were covered with the bright, delicate fresco-painting in which Mexicans excel, and the great windows framed enchanting glimpses of distant mountains, plains, and sky. The little party gathered at one end of the long table, cups of foaming chocolate were brought to them by a *mozo* dressed in spotless white cotton, and Ingraham as he sipped the fragrant beverage said to himself that he had been fortunate indeed in embarking upon this adventure. Where could he possibly hope to find anything more novel, picturesque, idyllic, than such surroundings? And of the quality of the people who dwelt within these walls he had not entertained a moment's doubt since he first stepped under the doorway. More wealthy and consequently more influential they might have been in the past, but never more emphatically of the class to whom the inheritance of good blood, and the qualities and virtues which in other times were supposed to accompany such an inheritance, had come down through centuries. Every artist is in greater or less degree a physiognomist, and he had no difficulty in reading the characteristics imprinted on the countenance of his host as the latter sat in a stream of light from an open door, his striking head thrown into relief against the delicately-painted wall behind him. "Ambitious, yes," the young man thought, remembering what Don Gilberto had said; "but unscrupulous, no. This man could not, if he tried, lose the sense of honour. He is born to rule, however — his brow and nose prove that — and rule he will, unless circumstances are too overpoweringly against him. He is also very proud, too proud to be arrogant, and altogether a very fine specimen of what one finds in but few places in the world now, the born seigneur. Doña Antonia belongs to the same order. No, the Velasquez may not be genuine — most likely it is not — but, if so, these people are not aware of the fact. A fraud in this house is impossible."

Meanwhile the Velasquez was naturally the topic of conversation, and Don Luis, with some surprise that any one should have thought it worth such a journey perceptible in his manner, was giving its history to the stranger.

"That it is a genuine Velasquez, señor," he said, answering Ingraham's thoughts, "I am unable to declare with certainty, for I am myself no judge of works of art, and we have no evidence concerning it beyond a family tradition that has never been questioned. There is no doubt, however, that about two centuries ago one of our ancestors, the Marqués Fernandez del Valle, resided many years in Spain, where he was a great favourite at court, owing to his immense wealth, which he spent lavishly, and his many gifts and graces of person and mind. At this time the celebrated Velasquez was the court painter, and there seems, therefore, nothing improbable in the story that he painted the portrait of the young wife of the Marqués — a Spanish lady of great beauty and high rank. The portrait was painted, it is thought, immediately after the marriage, following which the married pair led a very gay and brilliant life in Madrid for several years, and the Marquesa became as great a favourite at court as her husband. But suddenly this brilliant life came to an end. There was a tragedy — we know not the particulars. But one of the greatest nobles of the court was found run through the heart — it was said, in a private duel — and the Marqués abruptly returned to Mexico, bringing his wife with him. They did not make their home in the capital, as every one anticipated, but came here at once; and after the Marquesa had once entered this house, she never left it again until she died a few years later. There are stories that she was a prisoner, and that in loneliness and solitude — for the Marqués was seldom here — she

expiated some great sin. But she was very beautiful, and her life ended very sadly, so we will endeavour to think no ill of her. It is possible that there had been some great mistake."

"It is a story that adds interest to the picture," said Ingraham. "Poor lady! whether she were guilty or innocent, it was a hard fate to be torn from the most brilliant court in Europe and brought here to be imprisoned."

Don Luis shrugged his shoulders. "In those days," he said, "men like the Marqu s were absolute lords, in all except life and death, of those dependent on them. And I should not call the punishment severe. Even now there would be few to blame him had he run his sword through *her* heart also. As it was, he gave her time for penance, granting that she had anything to repent. But now, as I perceive that you have finished your chocolate, I will have the pleasure of showing you the portrait of the lady herself. You will, no doubt, be able to judge whether or not it is the work of the great painter to whom it is credited."

Ingraham rose with alacrity. Few and simple as the words of the story had been, they sufficed to fill his imagination with suggestions of passion and tragedy that were like a sensible atmosphere about him as he walked with his host around the wide, arcaded corridors, and thought of the expiating penance wrought out within these fortress-like walls. A beautiful, mournful presence seemed to glide before him and lift appealing eyes to the blue, alien sky that overarched the court. How often, in the long sadness of her exile, had the Marquesa walked here, and thought, no doubt, of the brilliant days that had once been hers in distant Spain! This interest in the human story, for the time, overpowered that which he felt in the authenticity of the painting. Whether Velasquez or another had painted it, he should like to see the portrait of the dead woman whose story had taken so strong a hold upon his imagination.

Presently, on the side of the great quadrangle over the entrance, Don Luis paused, and, pushing open a door, drew back with punctilious courtesy, and by a gesture invited his guest to enter. Ingraham hesitated, for, in contrast to the brilliant light which filled the court, all looked dark within; but Don Gilberto, taking his arm, led him forward into what he then perceived to be a large and lofty *sala*, the windows of which were closed by heavy wooden shutters that excluded all light. Don Luis crossed the floor and opened one of these, letting in a flood of sunshine, and giving at the same time so marvellous a view of valley and distant mountains that at another moment Ingraham would have had eyes for nothing else. But now he was absorbed in the aspect of the room thus revealed — one altogether characteristic of such great old Mexican houses as that in which he stood. While superb in space and noble in proportion, it contained very little furniture; and what it did contain was of most undoubted antiquity. Indeed, it might readily be that the apartment had undergone no change worth consideration since the Marqu s of Don Luis's story had brought from Spain those richly-carved seventeenth-century cabinets, those old chairs lined with Spanish leather, and the quaintly-inlaid sofa which occupied the place of honour at the head of the room, with rows of chairs facing each other on each side, and the tawny skin of an immense *toro* spread before it on the floor, giving, as it were, a touch of the wild, primitive life of the vast Mexican plains to what would else have seemed an apartment transported from some ancient castle of Spain.

"What a fine old room!" exclaimed Ingraham, speaking his impressions aloud with artistic frankness. "And what harmony in everything! There is scarcely an article here less than two centuries old. I never dreamed of finding such an apartment in America."

"You are in Mexico, se  or," said Don Luis, "where we are very old, and where we still cling to many things that you in your country have discarded."

"We have never had an opportunity to discard anything like this," said Ingraham, looking around with covetous eyes. "Our country was for the most part a howling wilderness, and the few settlers in it were living in log cabins and fighting Indians, when your stately ancestors were surrounding themselves with such pomp and luxury as this, and living like Oriental princes on their vast estates. By Jove! I should like to have had a Mexican ancestor! What superb Cordova leather!"

Don Luis smiled. The type of Americans whom he had previously known would have pitied, if they had not sneered at, the antiquated character of his surroundings, and would have been capable of advising him to furnish his room in modern style. It was a new and agreeable sensation to see a representative of the most modern society stand absorbed in admiration before relics of the past which it is to be feared the Fernandez del Valle themselves had never rated at their true value.

"Come, come," said Don Gilberto, who knew the *sala* too well to find it interesting, and who would himself have preferred a little more modern furnishing, "you want to see the picture. It is yonder at the end of the room. With your permission, Don Luis, I will open another window."

He walked down the spacious apartment, the others following, and as they paused before a painting that in the obscurity could only be dimly perceived, he unbarred one of the heavily-shuttered windows opposite. Throwing it open, a flood of light poured over the canvas, and Ingraham, stepping back, uttered an uncontrollable exclamation.

"How beautiful!" he cried; and then, "It *is* a Velasquez, by heaven!"

To an artist of the school that holds no higher name in art than that of the great Spanish painter, this was a supreme and thrilling moment. A Velasquez, buried here on this remote Mexican hacienda! It seemed incredible; and indeed, in the shock of his surprise, Ingraham knew how little he had credited it; and yet it was true! He had not a moment's doubt of its genuineness as he stood gazing at the picture like one entranced. He had not spent weeks in the gallery of Madrid, steeping his spirit in the contemplation of the master's works, to be mistaken in one of them now. No other hand than that of Velasquez, he could have sworn, had held the brush which laid those colours on the canvas before him. And what a superb example of the painter's best work it was, as if, delighting in the beauty of his subject, he had lavished all his skill upon it! With an honest rush of enthusiasm the young man turned to Don Luis.

"There is not a finer Velasquez in any gallery of Europe — no, not even in Madrid!" he said, emphatically.

Instantly he felt a slight but significant touch upon his arm. Don Gilberto, standing just behind him, was evidently shocked at a proceeding so unbusiness-like as praising the wares he desired to purchase. Ingraham with difficulty restrained a laugh. He had forgotten the character of possible purchaser and speculator in which he had come; but he never remembered with a greater sense of satisfaction than at this moment the comfortable balance lying at his banker's. If the picture could be purchased, he vowed to himself that it should be his, no matter what the cost might be. Meanwhile Don Luis replied, quietly —

"It has always been esteemed a fine picture, se ñor. And she was very beautiful, the Marquesa, no?"

"So beautiful that she was worthy of having Velasquez for her painter," Ingraham answered. "It is no wonder that tragedy centred about her. Such a woman is born to make tragedies."

And indeed he would have been dull who could have doubted this, looking at the brilliant, imperious face, its beautiful lips slightly touched with disdain, and its dark, splendid eyes filled with depths of possible passion, gazing out of the canvas straight into the heart of whosoever looked upon her. Ingraham felt a shiver pass over him as he met those eyes, something akin to the shudder that superstition says marks the moment when an unconscious foot treads over the spot that will be one's grave. Across the centuries they seemed still speaking a language as old and as young as time, the language of an enchantment that might steal away the senses like the cup of Circe. It was plain that this woman had in life owned no common spell, but one equal in degree to her surpassing beauty. The superb figure stood in its robes of pearl-embroidered satin and brocade against one of those deep yet luminous backgrounds of Velasquez which are the despair of modern painters, while every line and tint of the face was laid upon the canvas with so matchless a realism that the proud, delicate features, the hair of wonderful red-gold, and the deep



dark eyes, seemed like an image upon a mirror, so strong was the impression produced of vigorous potent life. And, as he gazed, what resemblance was it which grew upon Ingraham in that fair and fascinating countenance? For a few minutes he struggled to grasp it; then, as if with a flash of inspiration, he turned to Don Gilberto.

"Do you not perceive a striking resemblance in your daughter to this portrait?" he asked.

"In my daughter — C ámen?" repeated Don Gilberto, much surprised. "No, I have never observed it. Yet — now that you make the suggestion — I do perceive a likeness, though I should not call it striking."

"That is because there is a great difference of expression," said Ingraham. "In point of fact it is very striking, for the colouring and the features are almost identical in the two faces. Put your daughter in a dress like this, give her the bearing of a woman of the world accustomed to command and adulation, above all, rouse in her the knowledge of her own power and the will to exercise it, and you would think that the Marquesa herself stood before you restored to life."

Speaking with that subtle instinct of the artist which sees below the surface so much that is hidden from ordinary eyes, the young man in his enthusiasm forgot the personal nature of his comments. But it was evident that he interested as well as surprised his auditors. Don Luis looked at the picture with a new attention, as if deriving from it a new impression, and then, with the quiet decision that characterised his utterances, said —

"You are right, se ñor. No one has ever observed it before, but C ámen is indeed like this picture. The Marquesa, you understand, is her ancestress, as well as mine; but it is surely strange that a likeness should appear in so remote a descendant."

"Not so strange as you imagine," replied Ingraham. "In every old race these resemblances have a trick of reappearing in different generations. One can trace them only by means of family portraits; but I have never seen a gallery of such portraits in a great house in Europe without being struck by the manner in which some strong individual type has laid, as it were, its impress on the race and can be traced now and again through its generations for centuries. If you could bring here the portraits of the women of your house since the day when the original of this picture entered it, I would wager much that you would find her type recurring at intervals, sometimes after having long lain dormant. But seldom, I think, could it have been reproduced more faithfully than in the present generation."

"The likeness is astonishing, now that one's attention is drawn to it," said Don Luis, still gazing at the picture. "And it is more astonishing still that nobody has ever before observed it."

Ingraham smiled. "Pardon me," he said, "but that is not astonishing either. You never thought of looking for such a likeness; and it is, moreover, disguised by the great difference of expression and manner."

"So well disguised," said Don Gilberto, "that I think you must possess remarkable powers of penetration to have discovered it, and that after seeing C ámen only once."

"An artist sees these things at a glance," Ingraham answered. "And the resemblance was the more readily perceived by me because I looked at both faces as a stranger. Familiarity dulls perception."

"There is at least no doubt that you are right," said Don Gilberto, who was evidently well pleased at this indisputable proof of the good blood that flowed in his daughter's veins. "The likeness grows upon one! Those are C ámen's eyes, features, hair! *Caramba!* How have we been so blind as never to observe it before? If she were dressed like this picture, it would indeed be the Marquesa herself brought to life!"

"An experiment I should like to make," said Ingraham, "would be to paint her portrait in the same manner as this — may the shade of Velasquez forgive my presumption! — and thus display fully all the points of likeness and of difference. It would be very interesting."

Don Gilberto looked at Don Luis. "*Mi amigo,*" he said, "is there any reason why Se ñor Ingraham should not make such an experiment? I, too, should find it interesting."

Don Luis made a gesture which even before he spoke seemed to place Las Cruces and all that it contained at his guest's disposal. "If Señor Ingraham will consider my house his own and command everything in it, he will confer the greatest favour upon me," he said. "As for the experiment of which he speaks, it could not possibly be other than interesting to all of us."

"I really spoke without considering it a practical possibility," said Ingraham, "and yet—" He paused. After all, why not make it a practical possibility? Leisure was his in unlimited degree, and, if Don Luis was to be taken seriously, unbounded hospitality was offered him, while temptation could hardly have worn more seductive form. A noble Velasquez to study, an attractive original subject to experiment with, and the inner life of a deeply interesting people to be observed as few strangers ever have an opportunity to observe it. Brief reflection was required to show him that to let such opportunities as these escape would be an act of stupidity of which he felt himself incapable. Moreover, his most important business was, if possible, to secure the Velasquez, and this he felt sure could be accomplished only by time and diplomacy. Any excuse for staying at Las Cruces was therefore to be desired. The pause in which he weighed these considerations was not more than a minute in length. He looked up, met again the dark, imperious eyes of the Marquesa, and turned to his host.

"Señor," he said, "I should like of all things to paint the picture of which I have spoken, using this portrait as a study. But to do so would require a stay at Las Cruces of several weeks. Could I venture to intrude upon your hospitality so long? Pray answer me with the frankness of my race, rather than with the courtesy of yours."

"I answer you," said Don Luis, smiling, "with perfect frankness when I tell you that your stay at Las Cruces, prolong it as you will, can only be a pleasure as well as an honour to us. I shall myself take the greatest interest in watching the progress of the picture which I sincerely hope you will paint."

"Then I shall certainly paint it," said Ingraham, with emphasis, "if Doña Cármen will consent to sit to me."

"There is no doubt of her consent," said her father. "She is but a child, and will do as she is told. She is a woman, also," he added, "and will be immensely flattered. Have no doubt about her."

"You will wish to paint here, señor?" asked Don Luis, with a glance around the *sala*.

"Here? Oh, no," Ingraham answered. "Have you not some vacant room that I can use as a studio, and to which this picture might be for a time removed?"

"There are many vacant rooms," replied the owner of the house. "Come, examine them, and choose which will suit you best."

So it was a small procession, for Doña Antonia's aid was invoked in the choice, which a little later made the rounds of the many vacant chambers of Las Cruces. Ingraham was led into one vast apartment after another around the great quadrangle of the first court, and then around a second court behind. There was not much difficulty in making a choice. Any of these chambers, with their large windows letting in floods of light, their tiled floors and high vaulted ceilings, would have made an ideal studio; but he finally selected one on the rear court, partly because of its greater seclusion and possible immunity from interruptions, but chiefly on account of its north light.

"This will be perfect," he said, after he had unbarred the windows and let in the radiance of the vast depths of luminous sky. "If ever I am to prove myself a successor of Velasquez, it should be in such an atmosphere and amid such surroundings as these."

Doña Antonia, who up to this time had only heard that the young artist desired a room in which to paint, now evinced curiosity with regard to what was to be painted therein. "It will be your portrait, perhaps?" she said, addressing her son.

Don Luis shook his head. "The señor has selected a fairer subject," he replied. "He has been much struck by the resemblance of Cármen to the portrait of the Marquesa, and he wishes to make an interesting experiment by painting her portrait in the same manner."

"Her portrait!" repeated Doña Antonia, with something of a gasp. "Not — Cármen's?"

"Yes, Cármen's," answered her son, quietly, while Ingraham observed that a slight flush rose into Don Gilberto's dark face. "Why not? She has seemed a child to us until now, but the señor here, with his artist's eyes, has discovered that she is a beautiful woman."

"Cármen!" said Doña Antonia again. It seemed impossible for her to restrain the expression of her astonishment, and of something evidently deeper than astonishment, some angered sense of a violation of the fitness of things. She drew herself up, the *grande dame* showing in every line of her figure and face. "I should have thought," she said, "that if any portrait was to be painted in this house it would be of yourself, its head, or perhaps of the children—"

Don Gilberto, with a slight motion to Ingraham, walked across the room and paused by one of the open windows—. "You see how it is," he said, without looking around, as the young man came to his side. "Doña Antonia's sense of the importance of the family is outraged that you have not chosen Don Luis, or one of the children, or perhaps herself, as your subject, instead of Cármen."

"But I don't understand," said Ingraham. "Is not your daughter one of the family also?"

"My daughter is — my daughter," replied the other, a little bitterly, "and that means nothing here. On her mother's side she is a distant and obscure connection — what we call at home a poor relation — of the Fernandez del Valle, and as such they recognise her, treat her with tolerant kindness, but never for one moment think of her as a social equal. You will soon find what is her position — that of a dependant merely — and you will not then be surprised at this old woman's indignation."

"But I fancied—" began Ingraham, and then paused, somewhat at a loss to express himself.

"You fancied," interposed the other, with the tone of bitterness still in his voice, "that, because it is '*mi amigo*' and all things smooth and courteous on the surface, these proud people forget that I am a poverty-stricken stranger, who lives by his wits, and that Cármen is my daughter, with only a few drops of their blood to render her worthy of notice. Not at all. I have won a certain place with them because I can be of use — my wits, you see, being rather keen — and she is Doña Antonia's god-daughter, and a pet in her childhood of the old lady's. But, for all that, our place is below the salt, you understand, and I fancy the project of the portrait will have to be abandoned."

"Never!" said Ingraham, with energy. "I don't know when I have been so possessed by the idea of a picture; and sooner than abandon it I will paint the whole family — including Doña Antonia herself! Portrait-painting is not my line; but I dare say I can manage to hit off such marked types. And Don Luis is a fine subject. I should rather enjoy painting him."

"Before you undertake so large a commission," said the other, dryly, "why not consider the alternative of negotiating at once for the Velasquez, taking it away, and then, if you like, painting Cármen at your leisure in Morelia?"

"Because," replied Ingraham, after a short hesitation, "I do not believe that Don Luis would entertain the idea of parting with the picture, if the proposal were sprung upon him at once. I think that time will be required to bring him to the point of even considering it; and it was this belief which made me take the opportunity for delay afforded by the plan of painting your daughter's portrait. But you know the man better than I do. If you think he can be tempted, sound him at once. There is no delay necessary on my part."

Don Gilberto regarded the speaker with some surprise. The tone of the last words seemed to him rather remarkable to be assumed by a mere producer of pictures. "Are you prepared," he asked, "to make any offer?"

"Certainly," Ingraham replied, promptly. "Offer him ten thousand dollars." Then, catching the increasing surprise of his companion's look, he added, with a recollection of his

assumed character, "I run no risk in saying this. The picture will easily bring twenty thousand in the world. That will give ten thousand to divide between us."

"You are so certain of its value as that?" asked the other, cautiously.

"Absolutely certain," replied the young man, impatiently. "Here comes Don Luis. Speak to him if you will; but I have little idea that he will entertain the proposal — now."

"I must speak to him alone," said Don Gilberto, hastily. "There are certain chords that I know now to touch. Leave the matter to me."

"Se ñor," said Don Luis, coming up to them and addressing Ingraham, "my mother misunderstood a little the object of your painting, but, now that I have made her comprehend, she is quite willing that you shall do as you like in the matter. You will understand that it was impossible to proceed without her consent, since she is not only the mistress of the house, but C ámen is her god-daughter."

Ingraham bowed. "Do ña Antonia is very kind to give her consent to a painter's caprice," he said.

"There now remains only one other person's consent to gain."

Don Gilberto with a smile pointed through the open door. "Yonder is C ámen," he said. "Go and satisfy yourself that her consent is easily gained."

## VI.

C ámen was passing along the corridor without, intent upon some household duty, when, to her great surprise, the American stranger issued from an unexpected quarter — a room that she knew to be unoccupied — and addressed her.

"Pardon me, se ñorita," he said, in Spanish, which he judged to be a better vehicle of communication than her English, "but I have your father's permission to make a request of you."

"Of me, se ñor?" she said, pausing with the look of a startled fawn.

"Yes, of you," he answered. "But first let me inquire if you have ever observed the portrait of your ancestress, the Marquesa, which you know I have come here to see?"

The surprise on her face deepened, and her large dark eyes opened widely with something which seemed to him almost apprehension. "Surely, se ñor," she replied. "I have seen it all my life."

"Seen it, yes — but observed it, I said. For instance, have you ever perceived that there exists between that picture and yourself a striking resemblance?"

She looked at him now with what he could not possibly mistake to be other than astonishment in which there was not one element of flattered pleasure, but rather of extreme repugnance. "A resemblance between myself and that portrait!" she repeated. "You must be mistaken, se ñor. How could such a thing be possible?"

"Possible or not, it is so," Ingraham replied. "There is between yourself and that picture a striking likeness — more striking even than I supposed," he added, as his gaze dwelt on her steadily.

Under that intent artist-gaze, which had not, however, a tinge of impertinence in it, she flushed deeply, and the thick-fringed lids sank over her eyes. "If it is true, se ñor, it is very strange," she said. "I am but remotely connected with the family of Fernandez del Valle, although they are kind enough to acknowledge the relationship."

"Nevertheless the Marquesa is your common ancestress, and you have inherited her face," said Ingraham, positively. "It is not uncommon to see such a type as hers reappearing at intervals through generations," he went on. "I have just remarked to Don Luis that I have often traced a likeness of the kind in a gallery of family portraits. But I never saw a more interesting example of the possibility than you present."

And again the keen, intent look was fastened on her face, as if through all outer differences he perceived more and more the likeness of which he spoke, as in truth he did perceive more clearly her remarkable beauty, concealed though it was from ordinary observation by lack of training, manner, and dress. It was no wonder, he reflected, that he had been the first to trace the resemblance which existed between this unformed child and the brilliant court beauty whose imperious charm Velasquez had fixed upon his canvas. He felt the pride of a discoverer in regarding her; and his fingers fairly longed for the brush by means of which he would be able to show to all what he alone now perceived.

"And so I come, se ñorita," he continued, after a brief pause, "to the favour I have to beg of you. I wish to be permitted to paint your portrait. I hope that you have no objection."

"To paint my portrait, se ñor!" She seemed able to do little more than echo his words, and Doña Antonia's displeased astonishment had not been greater than that which spoke in her voice and now uplifted eyes. "But — you will pardon me — why?"

Ingraham laughed. To answer frankly, "Because you are very beautiful, and full of undeveloped possibilities which it will give me pleasure to develop on my canvas," seemed too direct to meet the case. So he might have spoken to a woman of the world, but not to this girl in her ignorance and simplicity. "Because you are, if you will allow me to say so, a very good subject for a picture," he replied, "and because it will interest me, and interest your family, to see the likeness to the Marquesa brought out and made evident, as I hope to make it in my picture."

"But why, se ñor?" she repeated, with an insistence and a reluctance which surprised him. "Why should you, or they, be interested in that? What is it to any one if I chance to look like this woman who has been dead so long?"

"It is simply an interesting experiment, se ñorita," he replied, a little at a loss how to explain to her the delight he would take in the work for its own sake, and the intense eagerness he felt to begin it. "Your likeness to this portrait is wonderful in my eyes, and, if you allow me to paint you, I will make it equally wonderful to the eyes of others."

She did not answer immediately, and, remembering her father's confident assertion that she would make no difficulties, Ingraham wondered for a moment if her hesitation might not be set down to coquetry; but a glance into the dark eyes made him sure that it was not so. And then, for the first time, he saw in those eyes that she was not altogether the child which her appearance seemed to indicate. In their depths there was something that surprised him — an intelligence for which he was not prepared, and a deep reluctance to agree to what he asked which naturally only made him more eager to obtain her consent.

"You are afraid of the experiment," he said, quickly. "But I will make it easy for you. There is really nothing to dread. I shall not fatigue you with long sittings. And I shall make a very lovely portrait. I promise you that. I do not flatter myself that I can develop the power of Velasquez; but I have never before felt inspired as I feel inspired by the thought of this picture. I am fairly thrilling with the desire to get to work on it, and it will be a terrible disappointment to me if you do not consent to allow me to paint it."

In his eagerness he spoke in English, and so impetuously that it was difficult for the girl to follow him; but the last words were intelligible to her, if only from the appeal of look and tone which accompanied them.

"I should be sorry to disappoint you, se ñor, since you are so anxious," she said; "but if I speak the truth I must tell you that I feel a great dislike to this which you ask."

"But why?" demanded Ingraham, impatiently. "It is — it must be — because you have some totally wrong idea about what is asked of you. I only want you to sit to me for an hour of two every day, for a time not exceeding a fortnight."

"The time does not matter at all," she answered, gravely. "I would sit to you all day if it were necessary. But it does not seem to me that there is any necessity for this. If it is true that I resemble the Marquesa, what does it matter, and why should you wish to paint my portrait on that account?"

"It is difficult to explain, if you do not understand—" Ingraham began, with a sense of despair, and then, to his relief, hearing footsteps and voices approaching, he turned toward Don Gilberto and Don Luis. "I am driven to invoke your assistance," he said, addressing the former. "The se ñorita has no desire to have the wonderful likeness between herself and the beautiful Marquesa revealed, and she is averse to the idea of sitting to me. Can you not explain to her that I am not asking anything very dreadful?"

"What is the matter, Carmencita?" demanded Don Gilberto, turning to the girl. "Why are you averse to sitting to the se ñor, since he is kind enough to wish to paint your portrait?"

"Because there does not seem to me any reason for it, papa," she answered, looking at him with the dislike to the idea of which she had spoken manifest in her whole attitude and expression.

Don Gilberto frowned. He was not usually an unamiable man, but when he frowned his family knew that he was to be obeyed. Just now his daughter's unexpected opposition irritated him exceedingly; for he had learned that Ingraham was right, and that if Don Luis ever consented to sell the Velasquez it would only be after long and careful diplomacy had brought him to that point. It was essential, therefore, that Ingraham should remain at Las Cruces in order to exercise this diplomacy; and the only means by which he could remain was through the excuse of the portrait. Don Gilberto was consequently little prepared to be patient with his daughter's hesitation, and he drew his brows together in a manner which plainly indicated as much.

"This is nonsense!" he said, shortly. "I have promised Se ñor Ingraham that you would allow him to paint your portrait, and I fancied that, like any other woman, you would be flattered by his desiring to do so. Let me tell you that he is paying you a compliment which you do not seem to appreciate at all."

C ármén looked at Ingraham with a glance of apology. "I am sorry," she said, "if the se ñor thinks that I do not appreciate his compliment. It is no doubt very kind of him to wish to paint my face; and since you also wish it, papa, I shall of course be glad for him to do so."

The words, like the glance, were gentle and submissive, but Ingraham was convinced that her reluctance to what he proposed was as great as ever. He felt a momentary sense of compunction at having, as it were, forced consent from her. But the feeling was only momentary. He said to himself that the dislike could only have its root in ignorance, and that it would yield at once when she found how little was demanded of her; while his fancy was too strongly set on painting the picture to deny himself the gratification. Moreover, like Don Gilberto, he was sure that to obtain the Velasquez a stay at Las Cruces was absolutely necessary. And other excuse for staying, besides the painting of this portrait, there was none.

He therefore bowed gratefully. "It is you who are kind, se ñorita," he said. "I should hardly feel at liberty to accept your consent, since I think you still feel a little reluctance in giving it, if I were not sure that you will not find the ordeal at all dreadful, and that you will soon be interested in the result I hope to produce. Believe me — I speak with the frankness of an artist — some day you will be glad that such beauty as yours is not to pass out of the world without leaving at least its shadow behind."

She gazed at him in surprise too great even for embarrassment. Evidently, the idea of beauty as connected with herself had never before entered her mind. Nor was she the only person to whom it was a new suggestion. Don Luis, for the first time in his life, looked at her with the eyes of a stranger — in fact, it might almost be said, for the first time in his life looked at her at all — and he, too, perceived, under the familiar aspect of the humble, child-like favourite of his mother, the beauty which Ingraham had at once discerned. Something in his eyes drew C ármén's glance, and when she met his intent regard — a regard as if he too were studying her as a stranger — her astonishment suddenly broke into confusion. She blushed deeply, and looked at him appealingly. "The se ñor is laughing at me," she said.

"No, Carmencita," Don Luis answered, kindly. "He is not laughing. You have been a child to us, and we have not observed; but your likeness to the portrait of the Marquesa is indeed wonderful, and that means that you are very beautiful. It is true."

He spoke with the gravity of one who makes an important announcement; and the girl, thus solemnly assured of the fact of her own beauty, stood for a moment as if uncertain what to do or to say in a situation so entirely novel. Ingraham watched her with amusement and interest. What a new type she was! For the first time her individuality, apart from her physical perfection, appealed to his imagination. "She may prove an interesting study in more ways than one, perhaps," he thought. And then he said —

"The se ñorita must forgive me if I can not refrain from expressing surprise that the woman lives who needs to be told that she is beautiful. My canvas must fulfil the neglected duty of her mirror in proving it to her beyond a doubt. And, by the bye" — he turned to Don Gilberto — "I have no canvas with me of a suitable size. Can I obtain what I want in Patzcuaro?"

"Doubtful," that gentleman replied. "But if you will give me your measurements, I will send what you want from Morelia. It means the delay of only a day or two, for I shall return to-morrow."

"That will give a little time for Do ña C ármen to become accustomed to the idea of standing for her portrait," said Ingraham, with a smiling glance at the girl. "I am anxious to copy the picture of the Marquesa as far as possible in every detail, and I only wish it were possible to duplicate the costume."

"To duplicate may not be possible," said Don Luis, "but there are in this house many rich old dresses and stuffs belonging to the past, which I am sure my mother will take pleasure in showing to you. Among them you may find something suitable to your purpose."

"And do you think," said Ingraham, doubtfully, "that Do ña Antonia will consent?"

"I am sure of her consent," Don Luis replied. "Let us find her."

To find Do ña Antonia was not difficult. They met her on the corridor of the great court almost as soon as they entered it, and when she heard the request she smiled with a graciousness which Ingraham did not expect. Her manner seemed to say that, having by her son's desire consented to the whim of the painter, she was willing to assist him in carrying it out in all its details. Moreover, he fancied that there was gratification in the alacrity of her consent. Opportunities for exhibiting these relics of the opulent past were doubtless few, and Do ña Antonia was perhaps not sorry for an excuse to draw them forth, and impress the *gringo* with their splendour.

"Yes, we have many old costumes, se ñor," she said; "some that have been handed down for centuries. They will interest you, and I shall have pleasure in showing them to you, even if you do not find what will serve your purpose. Come with me."

She led him into a spacious chamber which he judged to be her own. Like all other rooms of the house, it was simply and very sparsely furnished, containing two small, hard, narrow beds placed in opposite corners, with very primitive lavatory and toilet arrangements, but Ingraham's glance fell at once on several great carved chests of dark wood, with heavy locks, fit companions for that chest in which the hapless bride of "The Mistletoe Bough" met her fate. In such chests the trousseau of a princess might in old days have been conveyed over land and sea. Do ña Antonia smiled at the quickening interest of his glance.

"You like these, se ñor?" she said. "They are very old and very secure. No one could easily carry them away. There have been times, *vágame Dios!* when had they not been so immovable they would have been carried away with all their contents. But let us hope that those days will never come again. These I use for the clothing of the household at present, but yonder stands one that has not been opened for many years. It is full of ancient things. We will examine it."

"What a lucky fellow I am!" thought Ingraham, as he saw the clumsy old keys fitted in the ponderous locks. "Suppose I had not met Don Gilberto on the Calzada of Morelia; I should have missed all these delightful adventures."

But when the great lid of the chest was raised, and two women whom Doña Antonia summoned began to draw forth the treasures it contained, he even forgot to congratulate himself on his good fortune, so lost was he in admiration, so beset with covetous desire to make some of these beautiful things his own. For here were such rich old stuffs, such exquisite embroideries, such brocades and damasks, with tints harmoniously faded by time, as he had never seen in equal profusion in the bric-a-brac shops of Rome or Madrid. One after the other they were lifted forth, until the whole room seemed to glow with colour, and to suggest a hundred memories of courts and palaces and those grand ladies of the past, who in such superb fabrics gaze in stately splendour from the canvases of the great painters. Here was a robe of richest Venetian silk, mellowed by time to an incomparable ivory and covered with brocaded masses of flowers in tints that simply ravished the eye. As the waiting-women shook out its glistening folds and held it up, and the children, who had been attracted as bees by honey, cried out that it was "*hermosísima*," Ingraham turned quickly to Doña Antonia.

"Señora," he cried, "it is in this dress, above all, that I should like to see the señorita, and — if you will graciously allow me — to paint her. It belongs to the same period as the portrait. I am sufficiently a judge of styles and fabrics to be sure of that; and if I am permitted to paint her in it, I think that you can not fail to be charmed with the result."

"Your judgment is good, señor," Doña Antonia answered. "This dress is certainly of the same period as the portrait, for, according to a family tradition, it belonged to the Marquesa, and therefore has been carefully handed down in all its details, even to the shoes which were worn with it. Manuela, are they not there?"

"Sí, señora," answered the woman addressed, lifting from the chest, as she spoke, several articles that had fallen from the folds of the dress as it was shaken out. Doña Antonia handed the shoes to Ingraham. They were such as could hardly be matched out of the collection of the Hôtel de Cluny — antique, very small, and fashioned of the same rich brocade as the dress. A strange sensation assailed the young man as he took them in his hand and thought of the slender, arched feet that had once worn them. It was difficult to realise how long those feet had mouldered into dust, while he held these shoes that still bore their shape and impress.

"This is far more than I could have ventured to hope," he said, eagerly. "Señora, you will allow me to paint Doña Carmen in this costume, is it not so? You can not refuse what I shall esteem at once a great privilege and a great pleasure!"

He looked at her entreatingly. Those who knew him best often said that there was a very beguiling quality about Ingraham when he chose to exert it. Perhaps Doña Antonia felt it now. She certainly smiled as she met his eyes.

"I know of no reason why you should not be gratified, señor," she said, after a slight hesitation. "Carmen is in a certain sense a daughter of the house, and it is therefore not unfitting that she should wear the dress. Would you like to see her in it at once?"

"At once, if you will be so kind," replied Ingraham. "I am very curious to find whether her resemblance to the portrait, which is, in my eyes so remarkable, will be increased or lessened by her appearance in this dress."

"Go to the *sala* and wait," said Doña Antonia. "I will bring her to you presently." Then, turning to one of the women, she added, "Bid Doña Carmen come to me."

## VII.

It was by this time sunset, but a brilliant glow from the western sky was filling the great *sala* with glory as Ingraham stood again before the Velasquez, absorbed in admiration alike of the genius of the painter and the beauty of his subject. In the flood of light now pouring upon it, the



portrait seemed more than ever a thing of life, the splendid eyes held his with a more potent enchantment, the lips smiled with a more disdainful loveliness, and the whole spell, alike of the woman and of the art that placed her on the canvas, seemed more absolutely irresistible. Never had Velasquez appeared to him so great as in the work his brush had wrought here; and never had he felt himself thrilled to the heart by the beauty of living woman as now by the mere shadow of this woman whose sceptre had so long since been wrested from her hand by death, and her magic philter spilled.

"There is nothing those eyes might not lead a man to forget," he said to himself as he gazed into their mysterious depths and felt their fascination like wine in his veins. "Good or bad, guilty or innocent — who could look on her and ask such questions? One would have no alternative but to lay one's heart down at her feet, that she might tread on it if she liked. For such a woman men would commit crimes and dare dangers without number. I have never before comprehended how such things might be; but now— Thank God that you are dead!" he exclaimed, with sudden energy, speaking aloud.

A low, apparently irrepressible laugh sounded behind him and made him turn quickly. In his amazement he recoiled a step, for there stood the woman he had addressed — alive.

The shock of surprise was so great that for a moment he did not remember or comprehend that C ármén stood before him. He only saw, line for line, tint for tint, the original of the portrait hanging on the wall. The same red-gold tresses were piled like a crown above the fair brow, the same wonderful dark eyes gazed out of the beautiful face, the same distinction was in the poise of the head and the fine, melting lines of neck and shoulders, the same rounded grace of form was revealed by the perfectly fitting robe of rich old brocade, with its accessories of pearl-embroidered stomacher and priceless lace. It was as if the Marquesa had stepped from her frame, to stand in the sunset radiance, more young, more fresh, more fair than when Velasquez painted her three centuries gone by.

"It is a miracle!" Ingraham exclaimed at last, looking from the picture to the living girl. "The likeness is beyond anything that I imagined. Se ñorita, you are transformed!"

It was no exaggerated phrase. The nun-like maiden who had glided along the corridors of Las Cruces an hour before, in her clinging gown and shrouding *rebozo*, seemed to have absolutely nothing in common with this brilliant vision. And it was a transformation which did not rest altogether nor chiefly on the mere accident of dress. Deeper than that it lay, in manner and bearing so changed that Ingraham felt as if some process of magic had taken place before his eyes. For what had touched the chords that roused this wonderful resemblance? Was there some spell in the ancient robe the girl had assumed, some potent influence left by her who had once worn it? Or, in the mould of flesh so wonderfully handed down, and fashioned in a likeness stronger than is often seen in mother and child, did there lie hid the resemblance that now displayed itself in every turn of gesture? How else should one who in her short existence had known only poverty, obscurity, and the dependence which is not likely to produce the manner of a great lady, wear court attire as if born to it, bear herself with all the pride of long descent, and in her splendid beauty seem ready to challenge the notice of a king?

These things astonished Ingraham more than the personal resemblance which at first appeared to him so great; and as he gazed, even admiration was for a moment lost in the sense of astonishment. "It is simply marvellous," he repeated, "your resemblance to this portrait! I could not have conceived anything so amazing! Is it possible that you are not yourself aware of it?"

Thus challenged, C ármén lifted her eyes to the picture, and he fancied that there was something of reluctance in the glance. But if so, the expression vanished after a moment. The eyes of the portrait seemed to meet and hold hers in the resistless and, as it were, living spell that he had himself felt; and as she gazed, he could not but observe that the resemblance between herself and the painting grew more marked through the subtle medium of expression. Unconsciously, and almost as if acting under the influence of magnetism, she lifted her head with the very air of the proud beauty, the same smile slowly curved her delicate red lips, and the same

light wakened in her eyes. After a moment, she turned and looked at Ingraham; and it was no imagination on his part that he felt something of the same thrill that had passed over him when he first met the eyes of the Marquesa.

"Why did you thank God that she was dead, *se ñor*?" C á rmen asked, speaking for the first time; and her voice seemed to him as changed as her manner. Its full, sweet cadence was now as imperious as the light in her eyes.

"Because there seemed to me infinite possibilities of harm in her beauty," Ingraham answered. "But I was premature in thanking God that she was dead. She lives again in you, *se ñorita*; and, if you will, all her power may be yours."

"Why not?" she asked, as if speaking to herself. "Power is sweet, is it not? I do not know, for what power have I ever had? Not even so much as to order one of the tasks of my life. But now I feel as if it might be sweet, and as if" — she spoke slowly — "it were mine."

"It is yours," said Ingraham. Despite himself, he uttered the words with a solemnity which at another moment would have made him smile. But he had a strange sensation, as if the sudden development of a character, like the bursting open of a night-blooming cereus, were at this moment taking place before his eyes. More than once in the heart of the tropical night he had seen that lovely miracle of nature, the sheathing leaves of the long, green, close-shut bud folding back within an hour to reveal the unearthly beauty of its dazzling flower; and he felt as if the same miracle were repeated now.

"The power that is the birthright of beauty is indeed yours, *se ñorita*, in full measure," he went on, after a short pause. "But, if I may be permitted to ask, I should like to know what has wrought so sudden and so great a change in your sentiments? You could have had no such thoughts as these when a short time ago you were reluctant to allow me to show, by painting your portrait, how great is your resemblance to this picture."

"No," she answered, "I had no such thoughts. But something stirred in me — I know not how to say it — a dread, a foreboding of anything that might connect me with this picture. From my earliest childhood it has had an influence over me which I can not comprehend or explain. In looking at it I have always had strange feelings, as if something were folded here" — she laid her hand on her breast — "which would one day make itself felt, as if there were thoughts and desires in me not born of my own life, which the mere sight of it wakened. And there was also something in me which shrank from and feared this waking. I speak to you obscurely, *se ñor*, because I do not myself understand that of which I speak. I am only sure — I can not tell you how or why — that this picture has always had power to rouse in me longings for things so far from my life that I know not how I ever dreamed of them. And so it was that I felt averse to your request."

"You interest me extremely," said Ingraham — which was indeed true; since to find such a psychological problem as this was even more remarkable than to find the genuine Velasquez which hung before him. "But now?" he asked, eagerly. "Are you averse to my request now?"

She looked at him with something which was almost scorn in her brilliant glance.

"Why should I be averse to it now?" she asked, in turn. "All that I shrank from and dreaded, without knowing why I dreaded it, has come to pass. I seem to have put on another being with this dress, which belongs to me as if I had worn it in another existence. I have looked at myself in a mirror, and I know that I am as like her" — she glanced at the portrait this time proudly and without reluctance — "as if I were her daughter; and, like her daughter, I have inherited all her passions and desires. But I am no longer afraid of them. I feel now that it is well to be beautiful and to have such power as she possessed. No, *se ñor*, I am no longer averse to your request. You may paint my portrait."

A princess could not have given the permission more royally, but for a moment Ingraham was too confounded to reply. What had he done? This was what he asked himself, forgetting that he had done little beyond what a child does who exposes a hidden spark of fire to a fanning breeze. The novice-like girl who first came into his sight had within her, already dimly perceived by herself, all the dormant characteristics which her physical appearance indicated. For Nature's

signs never fail, though we may often fail in reading them aright. Of the exact nature of that close and intimate bond between the spirit and the matter which clothes it, no one has ever been able to speak with full knowledge; but we know with the certainty of experience that by the outer we may tell unerringly the character of the inner man, by the shape of the head read the capacity of the brain lodged within, by the outline of the features recognise the disposition, by the very quality of the skin find an index to the temperament. And in all this the mystery of inheritance plays its full part. With family looks, family characteristics are handed down from one generation to another; and whenever we find a striking physical resemblance we find a moral resemblance equally great. By what strange working out of hidden law, or trick of chance, this girl had been clothed with a garment of flesh exactly reproducing that of her remote ancestress it is impossible to say; but given the reproduction of the type, there followed as an inevitable result the reproduction of those traits and tendencies of character of which the flesh is but the material expression and index.

Thoughts like these passed rapidly through Ingraham's mind as he stood silent for a moment after Cármen had last spoken; and before he collected himself sufficiently to answer her, Doña Antonia, accompanied by Don Luis and Don Gilberto, whom she had paused to summon, entered the *sala*.

"Ah, se ñor, it is more wonderful than you imagined, is it not so?" she said, as she advanced. "I thought that you were dreaming when you talked of Cármen being like the Marquesa; but when I put the dress upon her — *Madre de Dios*, it was like magic! Cármen seemed to vanish, and it was as if the Marquesa stepped from her frame and looked at me. Have you ever seen anything like it?" she asked, addressing the two men who followed her, and indicating the girl by a gesture.

It did not surprise Ingraham that they both looked at her for a moment as if stupefied. Evidently their former recognition of the likeness had not prepared them for such a startling vision as this. And Cármen, instead of shrinking and blushing under their steadfast gaze, as on the corridor only a short time before, met it now with the composure of one to whom the consciousness of beauty made admiration the most natural of consequences.

"*Caramba!*" said Don Gilberto at last, rolling out the word in a manner to express the extreme of astonishment. "I can hardly believe that this is my Carmencita! It is a great lady; it is the Marquesa herself! Had you any idea that the likeness was so astonishing?" he asked, turning to Don Luis.

Ingraham's attention thus directed to the latter, he was struck by the expression with which he was regarding the young girl. His deep dark eyes were fastened upon her with a look in which amazement and admiration were mingled, so that for an instant he did not seem even to hear Don Gilberto's question. Then he started slightly and answered —

"No: it is wonderful; it is a revelation! I ask myself if we have all been without eyes, that it was necessary for a stranger to come and show us this extraordinary thing. I have never seen or known anything like it. Cármen has disappeared. It is, as you have said, a great lady who stands there now."

"Then the great lady will disappear and Cármen shall return," said the girl. She made them a deep courtesy — such a courtesy as might have become a court — and, turning, walked with perfect grace and self-possession down the long *sala* to the door. They all watched her breathlessly, the same surprise, the same thought, in the mind of each: how had she learned such a manner and bearing? What marvellous instinct had in her case supplied the place of training?

The sunset radiance seemed to fade out of the room as she left it, and they looked at each other a little blankly, as people puzzled by something beyond their powers of comprehending.

"*Caramba!*" said Don Gilberto again. "After this I shall believe in magic."

## VIII.

Ingraham, too, believed in magic in the days which followed this remarkable day of his arrival. When he caught a glimpse of Cármen again — which was not until the late evening meal — he already began to ask himself if the scene in the *sala* had not been a dream, if the picture of the Marquesa had not so bewitched him that his own imagination had played him the trick of fancying that the girl had looked at him with the very eyes and smile of the long dead woman and spoken to him with her voice? Had he not dreamed that singular confession she had made of the power the picture exercised over her? He could not but ask himself these questions as he saw the quiet, unobtrusive maiden in her simple dress, plain and poor as that of a servant, glide with retiring manner and bent head into the dining-room, where, scarcely lifting her eyes, she seated herself at the end of the table occupied by the children and proceeded to supply their somewhat clamorous wants. No one noticed her; she was plainly filling her ordinary place and duties; but Ingraham caught once or twice a puzzled look in the eyes of Don Luis, as, like his own, they sought that bent head, with the golden hair smoothed in simplest fashion and hanging in its accustomed shining braids down her back.

After supper she disappeared completely, and the three men who sat together on the corridor smoking and talking until bedtime did not again allude to the Velasquez, or to the singular resemblance which had been revealed. It was only when Ingraham retired to his own apartment that Don Gilberto, following him there, again spoke of the picture.

"It is the unexpected which happens," he observed, as he placed himself on a wooden-seated chair, severely primitive as most of the other furniture was, and watched the young man open his portmanteau. "I had little idea when we started for Las Cruces that I should leave you here engaged in painting Cármen's portrait, with no certainty at all of obtaining the Velasquez."

"Has Don Luis refused to part with it?" asked Ingraham, sitting down, in turn, on his hard narrow bed and regarding the other by the light of the single candle which faintly strove to illuminate the large apartment.

"He refused, yes, but not in such a manner as to exclude hope," the other answered; "else I should make short work of Cármen's portrait, which is but an excuse for your remaining. If Nature by some freak has chosen to make the girl a living counterpart of the Marquesa, who was certainly no model of virtue in her day, the fact is not of such happy augury that it should be emphasized in the manner you propose, except that thereby you are enabled to stay here and by slow degrees, perhaps, work upon Don Luis."

"You had better give me some idea of what arguments will be likely to have an effect upon him," said Ingraham. "After all, it is a deucedly impertinent thing to ask a man — a gentleman of long descent — to part with what is not only an invaluable work of art, but to himself and his family the equivalent of a patent of nobility."

"There is only one argument that I know of to move him or any other man, and that is self-interest," replied the other, with cynical coolness. "As I have told, you, he is ambitious; and to further his ambition he needs money. Offer him enough, and in my opinion the Velasquez will be yours."

"Was not ten thousand dollars enough?"

"It will be well to increase the offer. There is no risk if you are absolutely sure that the picture is a genuine Velasquez."

Ingraham did not think that further assurance was required on this score; he simply nodded and said, "I am willing to go as high as fifteen thousand if necessary. But let us first be sure that it is necessary. For myself," he added, "I find the prospect of staying here and painting Doña Cármen's portrait so interesting that I am sincerely obliged to Don Luis for not accepting our offer at once."

Don Gilberto gave the easy speaker a quick glance, as if he would fain read him more thoroughly than he had yet been able to do. But a dim candle is a very baffling light by which to read anything, so after a moment he spoke, not without some hesitation:

"That is another point on which we must have a few words before we part, Mr. Ingraham, and these words I hope you will not misunderstand. You do not, I am sure, need for me to remind you how entirely our meeting was a matter of chance, and how little we know of each other. Stop!" — as Ingraham was about to speak. "Let me finish by saying that I have not forgotten days when I associated with gentlemen in my own country, and when I meet a countryman I never have the least difficulty in determining whether or not he is a gentleman. If I did not fully recognise this fact with regard to yourself, I should not be leaving you at Las Cruces now. But a man may be a gentleman and yet forget some things — for instance, how easily a girl who has seen nothing of the world can be impressed. You have been instrumental in revealing to us to-day that Cármen is no longer a child, but a singularly beautiful woman. This beauty may lead you to forget that in her thoughts and experience she is still but a child, and that the language of compliment and flattery is absolutely unknown to her. She has never even heard of that amusement called flirtation, which I presume still flourishes in our country."

"It is an amusement so hopelessly vulgar that I know little more of it than that it exists," said Ingraham, coldly. But the amiability of his temper asserted itself the next moment, as he felt the reasonableness of the other's words. "I understand you perfectly," he went on, looking frankly at Don Gilberto, "and, since you know so little of me, hold you entirely justified in your warning. But if you knew me better, you would know that there is no need for it. Even if your daughter's beauty did not affect me solely as the subject of a picture, I think I may safely say that I am incapable of either flattering or flirting with her. I should be glad if you would set your mind at rest by believing this."

"I do believe it," said the other, heartily. "I only spoke to guard against a possible danger. Now" — rising — "I shall bid you good-by and wish you good luck. I start at daybreak. Your canvas will be here as soon as possible, and I depend upon you to let me know how you progress in your negotiations with Don Luis."

Ingraham promised to do so; but it may be safely asserted that possible negotiations with Don Luis were very little in his mind when he waked the next morning to find a flood of brilliant sunshine streaming into his room through an unbarred window. His first vague sensation, before consciousness fully returned after the deep, dreamless slumber which followed physical fatigue, was of something pleasant awaiting him, even as the first confused waking sense — more familiar to most of us — after pain or grief is of something disagreeable to be endured. It required only a minute for him to remember what the pleasure was which smiled upon him with the smile of the opening day. A new subject for a picture, and such a subject! He almost laughed with exultation as he sprang out of bed. What would not and and (he ran rapidly over in his mind the names of half a dozen aspiring and already famous painters) give for such a chance as this which had come to him? Would they not call him half enviously, as often before, the Prince of Good Luck? He acknowledged to himself that it was luck almost too extraordinary to be true. "Taken all in all, the episode promises to be one of the most interesting I have ever known," he reflected, "and I can not sufficiently congratulate myself on my rare good fortune in meeting Don Gilberto."

He was still in this elated frame of mind when, breakfast over — at least the cup of coffee (or chocolate) and bread which in Mexico, as in most southern countries, does duty for breakfast — he suggested to Doña Antonia, who was the only member of the household he met, that, with her permission, he should like a sitting from Cármen as soon as possible.

It was not his fancy that Doña Antonia did not look very much pleased. "Will not the afternoon answer as well, señor?" she asked. "In the morning Cármen has many duties to perform. It will probably not occupy very much time, that which you desire, but it will be a distraction, and if she must put on the dress of the Marquesa—"

"That is absolutely necessary," said Ingraham, hastily but decidedly, for he felt sure that without the influence, occult or imaginary, of the court robe of the dead beauty, Cármen would not be in the least the subject he desired to paint.

"In that case," replied Doña Antonia, with equal decision, "it is necessary to wait until the afternoon."

The radiance of Ingraham's mood suffered something of an eclipse after this. If he was to be forced to waste the best light and best hours of every day in such fashion, the difficulties of painting the picture would be immense, and the delay most irksome to his patience and to that creative impulse now at high tide, but which in every artist is as certain to ebb as the waves of the sea, leaving the dreary period of reflux, when labour is no longer delight, but drudgery. Such a period Ingraham dreaded in himself. "I must paint the picture while I feel like doing so, if I am to make a success of it," he thought, as he wandered discontentedly into the great *sala*, and stood once more, lost in admiration, before the portrait of the Marquesa. Such an opportunity had never, he was sure, come to any painter as now came to him, and was he to lose it through the obstinacy of a wretched old woman, with no appreciation of art, whose consent at this moment he would have liked to shake out of her by the application of physical force? It was while he meditated somewhat ruefully upon these things, that the thought of Don Luis occurred to him. Perhaps by his intervention he might hope to have this vexatious restriction against morning sittings removed, since it had been by the exercise of his influence alone that he had secured the privilege of any sittings at all. But where was Don Luis? His impatience could ill brook delay, and sign of the master of the house there was none. "He must be an uncommonly late riser," thought the young man, who knew little of the habits of Mexican *hacendados*. But he was soon enlightened in this particular. Meeting a servant on the spacious, empty corridors surrounding the inner court, his inquiry was answered by the information that "*el amo*" had, according to his custom, ridden out in the early morning, and had not yet returned. Would he return soon? It was likely, since he had gone out even earlier than usual, at the time of Don Gilberto's departure. Thus encouraged, Ingraham went down into the court and out to the entrance, where, lounging and smoking on one of the stone benches placed on each side of the deep arch, he watched with interest the busy scenes enacting on the open space before the house. The office of the *administrador*, which was one of the lower apartments, opened by an outward door immediately upon this space, and before it a succession of carts were arriving and departing — the great, unwieldy carts of Mexico, with their high wooden wheels, into the composition of which no particle of iron enters, and their long teams of loosely-harnessed mules. Ingraham fetched his sketch-book and found some interest in making several graphic sketches of the picturesque groups formed by these carts, mules, and attendant men; but the sense of suppressed irritation, of longing to be doing something else, and of wasted time and energy, never left him, so that it was with an exclamation of unfeigned pleasure that, as the clatter of a horse's hoofs striking on the pavement under the arch caused him to look up, he saw Don Luis smiling from the saddle down upon him.

"Ah, Señor Ingraham, you find something in the *carretas* to make a picture!" he said.

"They are very strange, our *carretas*, to your eyes, is it not so?"

"Very picturesque — *carretas*, mules, and men," replied Ingraham, comprehensively, thinking again, as he spoke, what a subject for a painter his host made, in his riding-dress of embroidered buckskin, high boots, and long gloves, the broad sombrero shading his face, with its finely-cut features and clear, dark tints, while the richly-adorned saddle, from the high pommel of which the coiled *reata*, or lasso, hung, and heavy stirrups of stamped leather, set off the beauty of the horse, in which, as in most Mexican horses, the strain of Arabian blood was strikingly evident. Horse and rider, framed by the great arch, made a picture that at another time Ingraham would have eagerly begged permission to transfer to his sketch-book or his canvas. But just now he was too impatient of delay to be drawn into prolonging it even by a subject so tempting.

"But I am a little surprised," Don Luis went on, as he dismounted and gave his horse to a *mozo* who came forward, "that you find the *carretas* more interesting than the picture you were so

anxious on yesterday to paint. Or — I forget — it is the canvas from Morelia for which, no doubt, you wait? "

"No, se ñor," Ingraham replied, glad of so speedy an opening for his grievance; "I am not waiting for the canvas from Morelia. I had fully intended to make a preliminary study of the head of Do ña C ámen this morning; but the se ñora your mother told me, to my great disappointment, that it was impossible to spare her from her occupations, for the purpose."

Don Luis frowned slightly. Dutiful and affectionate son as, like most of his countrymen, he was, that frown said distinctly that he was also master in his own house, and that he did not like his mother's interference with his distinctly expressed wishes. "I was not aware," he remarked, "that C ámen had occupations so important that they need interfere with the fulfilment of my promise to you. There is some misunderstanding. Come with me, and I will arrange the matter so that you shall not again be interfered with."

"I am afraid that I shall win, out of all this, the hearty dislike of Do ña Antonia," thought Ingraham, as he closed his sketch-book with alacrity and followed the stately figure that, with ringing spurs, strode before him to the great stone staircase.

All the wide galleries surrounding the quadrangle above were empty and silent, save for the gliding form of a servant or two in the distance, when they emerged upon them. Don Luis gave a quick glance around, and then walked with decision down the echoing lengths of two sides of the court and up to a closed door at which he knocked with the head of his riding-whip. A voice, barely audible through the thick wood, gave permission to enter, and on the opening of the door a scene for which Ingraham was not prepared was revealed.

In the midst of a large, lofty room, scantily furnished with the simplicity which characterized most of the other apartments of the house, C ámen sat, occupied in sewing, an overflowing work-basket beside her, while the presence of the children with books and slates, and the fact that the oldest girl was reading aloud in a high, sing-song voice, sufficiently indicated that she combined the duties of seamstress and teacher. As the door opened, she lifted her head from the work over which it was bent, and the expression of extreme amazement visible on her face as her eyes fell upon the figure of Don Luis standing upon the threshold was sufficient proof that such an apparition had never stood there before.

"It is papa!" cried the children, in tones of mingled astonishment and delight, as, throwing down their books, they ran toward him.

But he lifted his hand with a deterring gesture. "Be quiet, my children," he said. "I have come to speak not to you, but to Carmencita. Why is it," he asked, addressing the girl, "that you are engaged in this manner, after having promised our friend the Se ñor Ingraham that he should have the pleasure of painting you?"

As if for the first time aware of the presence of the person thus spoken of, C ámen turned her eyes toward him as she answered, "I have not seen or heard any thing of the se ñor this morning. I supposed that when he wished for me I should be informed. Meanwhile, there was no reason why I should neglect my daily duties."

"It seems to me," said Don Luis, again frowning slightly, "that your duties are excessive. It is enough that you should undertake to teach these children a little, without burdening yourself further with such work as that." And he pointed to the pile of garments beside her.

"It is what I have always done," said the girl, quietly. "Why should I find it more excessive to-day than yesterday? But if I am wanted by the Se ñor Ingraham, I must first speak to Do ña Antonia, for she will expect this work to be finished."

"I will speak to her," said Don Luis, in a tone of brief decision; and, turning, he walked away, leaving Ingraham standing, at a loss whether to go or to stay, on the threshold of the invaded work-room and school-room in one.

But it was impossible to resist the temptation to linger long enough to let his eyes rest with pleasure on the details of C ámen's beauty as she sat with the strong light of the radiant sky pouring through a wide-open window full upon her, bringing out all the pearly fairness and

exquisite delicacy of her skin, and the dazzling gold of her hair. Besides these details, there was little at this moment to attract attention toward her. Seated on a chair as lowly as her apparent lot in life, with head bent over her homely task, a stranger seeing her for the first time might have said, "What a pretty sewing-girl!" but would assuredly have beheld nothing to suggest resemblance to the splendid court beauty smiling from the canvas of Velasquez. Even to Ingraham's keen glance the likeness seemed for the moment to have escaped like a volatile essence. Where had it vanished? He was asking himself the question with a puzzled sense of something altogether strange and elusive, when C ármén suddenly lifted her eyes from the seam on which they had fallen, and met his gaze. As she did so she smiled.

"You are wondering what has become of the Marquesa, are you not, se ñor?" she asked, with something slightly mocking in her tone. "*Mire!* She has gone — she is lying quietly in her grave — and you have here only C ármén, who passes her days in sewing children's frocks and hearing their lessons."

"And has C ármén, while she sews the frocks and hears the lessons, no recollections of the Marquesa, no longings for a different life?" asked Ingraham, more and more interested in the singular personality of the girl.

She shook her head slowly. "When C ármén is wise, se ñor, she thinks of nothing besides the frocks and lessons," she answered. "And indeed," lapsing suddenly into the first person, "what else do I know? All else are but dreams. This," resuming her needle, "is the existence to which I was born."

"When the Marquesa comes to life in you again, you will think differently, se ñorita."

She looked up at him, this time with a strange gravity on her face. "I am more than ever sure, se ñor, that it is not well the Marquesa should come to life again," she said. "And for that reason is it asking too much of you to beg you to abandon the idea of painting my portrait? I should be very grateful if you would do so."

"Se ñorita! it is impossible that I hear you aright," Ingraham cried, confounded by this request. "You have promised, and I must hold you to the fulfilment of your promise. How can I forego such a great pleasure and privilege? You do not know what you ask. It would be inexcusable to fail to perpetuate anything so wonderful as your resemblance to that picture! And is it possible that you have forgotten all that you said to me yesterday? "

"It would be well if I forgot it and you also, se ñor," she answered, with grave earnestness. "I talked like a fool. I almost think that I was under the influence of some spell; for why else should the mere putting on of that old dress have had such an effect upon me? I have been ashamed to remember the folly of my words ever since. It was true, as I told you, that I had known before some vague feelings of the kind, which made me shrink from any association with the picture; but I was like a creature transformed, I was not myself, while I talked to you in the *sala*."

"It was a most interesting transformation," said Ingraham, "and one which I would not have missed for anything. I wish I could make you understand half how interesting it was, and you would see the — the cruelty of your request. Of course I can not insist on painting you against your will. But why, in the name of all that is reasonable, should you object to the development of your nature along its natural lines, if the painting assists in that development? I don't myself comprehend why it should do so; but the whole thing is so strange that, granting it does, why should you object? "

"Why should I object to having developed in me the nature, the longings, the tastes, of the Marquesa?" she asked, regarding him with almost startling energy. She turned with an unconsciously dramatic gesture and indicated her surroundings, the bare, work-strewn chamber, the children standing around in silent wonder, with well-thumbed books in hand. "Look at the setting of my life, se ñor, and answer that question yourself."



"But this need not always be the setting of your life," returned Ingraham, earnestly. "You are — pardon my frankness — far too beautiful to spend your days in such drudgery as this. It is an impossibility."

"On the contrary, when one is poor, very poor, it is a certainty," she replied, in a tone of deliberate conviction which surprised him. "As for my beauty, not one of those who have known me all my life had ever seen it until they looked at me with your eyes. When they have no longer your eyes through which to look, they will forget it again, and I shall be only Carmencita, too little and obscure for notice. Let it be so, se ñor. It is best. Do not paint the picture, I implore you!"

What could Ingraham reply? To insist upon painting the portrait of one who thus earnestly, and almost with passion, implored him not to do so, seemed a positively brutal thing. And yet to resign this unparalleled opportunity, to miss the exquisite pleasure of such an artistic experiment, and to leave untouched a subject that would have tempted and delighted Velasquez himself, was more than he could bring himself to do. He stood silent, conscious of the dark eyes fastened upon him in an entreaty compelling as a command, unable to refuse their request, yet overwhelmed by the mere idea of the renunciation demanded of him.

It was in the midst of the pause while he so stood and C ármén so waited, each absorbed in the decision which hung trembling in the balance, that Don Luis suddenly broke in upon their preoccupation by appearing again beside Ingraham.

"The matter is arranged, se ñor," he said. "Carmencita, my mother awaits you in her chamber. When you have changed your dress, she will accompany you to the room which Se ñor Ingraham has selected for his studio."

There was a moment's silence. Then, with Carmen's compelling gaze upon him, Ingraham forced himself to speak. "You are very kind, se ñor," he said, addressing Don Luis, "but I find — I think — that is," gathering himself together with an effort, "I believe that the sittings necessary for such a picture will prove very fatiguing to the se ñorita, as well as a great interruption to her occupations, and therefore I feel bound not to press a matter which will prove disagreeable to her. With your permission, therefore, I shall abandon the intention of painting her portrait."

"This is a very sudden resolution, se ñor," said Don Luis, regarding the speaker with excusable surprise. "Half an hour ago you were as eager to begin the painting as I am to see the result of your attempt. And for myself I can not consent to be disappointed without some better reason than a fear, which I am sure is unfounded, of fatiguing C ármén by the sittings. Can you not reassure the se ñor on this point?" he asked, turning to the girl.

She coloured deeply at the appeal. "There is no fear that the sittings will fatigue me," she replied, in a low voice, "but Se ñor Ingraham has kindly recognised that I — I have a reluctance to the painting "

"But this is folly," interrupted Don Luis, as shortly and peremptorily as he would have spoken to one of the children. "Your father has promised for you, this gentleman has remained here for the sole purpose of painting this picture, and I can not allow you to disappoint him for a childish caprice. Go, go! Let us hear no more of this reluctance. It is not gracious to the se ñor, who is paying you a high compliment."

"I had no intention of being ungracious to the se ñor," said C ármén, as submissively as she had spoken the day before to her father. There was no sign left of the passionate energy with which she had addressed Ingraham, as with down-dropped eyes and the obedience of a child she folded away her work and rose. "If the se ñor will excuse my folly," she added, as she approached the two men still standing in the door, "I will not trouble him again with my objections, and I shall come to his studio as soon as I have changed my dress."

## IX.

C ámen kept her word. Ingraham heard no more of her objections to the picture, and when, at the first opportunity, he began to express in a half-hearted manner his regret that she should be forced to do what was disagreeable to her, she stopped him with what to himself he called her Marquesa air.

"Do not trouble yourself, señor," she said. "It was not you or I who decided the matter. It was fate. One is foolish to struggle against that. I am sorry to have seemed so inconsistent — giving my consent one day and withdrawing it the next. But my objections are all over now. Do not imagine that I have any further reluctance to your painting." And of the sincerity, as well as the composure, of her words, there could be no doubt. Day by day it seemed to Ingraham that he could perceive more clearly the growth and development in her of all that her appearance indicated when she would come to him in the shining splendour of the old court dress, holding her head with the proud grace of the dead beauty, the sense of power, born of conscious loveliness, shining in her eyes and curving her lips. Day by day her resemblance deepened to the picture before which she stood, until, glancing from one to the other, Ingraham sometimes drew his breath, overcome by amazement, asking himself if concentration of ideas had not bewitched his sight and made him fancy such an identity not only of feature, but of manner and expression, between the portrait and the living girl. But that it was not an illusion born of his own imagination, he was convinced by the fact that its effect was as apparent on Don Luis as on himself. He too looked with astonishment at the transformation, and he too perceived, like Ingraham, that as time went on the resemblance to the Marquesa ceased to disappear when C ámen changed her dress and became again the familiar presence, half child, half humble dependant, of every day. At first she laid aside the manner and bearing of the great lady with her rich robes; but as she became, as it were, more and more completely saturated with the influence of the portrait, the very being of which she seemed to assume for so many hours of each day, she began to look, in her humble attire, like one who is masquerading, rather than the novice-like maiden who had glided unobtrusively as a shadow about the corridors of Las Cruces when Ingraham first saw her. Even Doña Antonia at length observed the change. More than once her eye rested with disapproval on the girl, as with her golden head held high, in the very pose of the Marquesa, she entered or left the dining-room. Finally the comment came.

"I was afraid of the effect of this painting upon C ámen," she remarked to her son one day, as they sat on the corridor together, and the girl passed with her strangely altered step and bearing across their view. "I thought that the result of arraying her in a manner so unfitting her station in life, and having her portrait painted, as if she were a beauty or a person of distinction, would be to develop a dangerous vanity. I see that my fears were well founded. The girl is totally spoiled. Her resemblance to the picture of the Marquesa has turned her head. She has lost all her modesty of appearance and manner, and walks about the house with the air of a great lady. When I look at her I can hardly believe that it is C ámen."

"Nor I," said Don Luis, as his gaze still rested on the place where the graceful figure had disappeared. "It is an extraordinary case of what looks almost like a transformed personality. The C ámen whom we have known as a child seems to have vanished. But I do not think with you that it is a result of vanity. I believe that her change of manner is as unconscious as her change of appearance when she assumes the Marquesa's dress."

"Conscious or unconscious, it is the result of vanity, as I knew well that it would be," said Doña Antonia. "*Madre de Dios!* do I not know girls? As long as they are kept secluded and in ignorance, they are content and humble and all is well; but once let men begin to look at them and pay them foolish compliments, and all is over. Their heads are turned, they peacock themselves if one but glances at them, and there is nothing to do but to marry them offhand, if one wishes to avoid trouble and mischief. As soon as possible I shall return C ámen to her mother with that

recommendation. And meanwhile I trust that this painter may not completely spoil her by his flattery. Her father and yourself have much to answer for. She was a good child, gentle, obedient, retiring, until this folly began."

"I do not think that Señor Ingraham flatters her," said Don Luis, quietly. "I have been present during many of the sittings, and he says little to her, or indeed to any one. He appears to be completely absorbed, and paints like a man possessed by a frenzy. The picture is growing under his hand marvellously like the work of Velasquez."

"Why not, since he has the Velasquez before him to copy?" asked Doña Antonia, serenely unaware of any technical difficulties in transferring to a modern canvas the matchless colouring of the great Spanish realist. "I am glad that you have sometimes been able to be present," she went on. "It is a protection for Cármen. For me to sacrifice my time is impossible. I have too much to occupy me to be able to spend hours in watching the daughter of Josefa Valdez. I placed old Maraquita in the room; it was all I could do. But she does not understand English. For that matter, neither do I; but they would not speak English if I were present."

"They do not speak very much of either English or Spanish," said Don Luis. "I think that you may tranquillize your mind on that point. Señor Ingraham is thinking more of his painting than of Cármen." "And more of my Velasquez than of both together," he was on the point of adding, but forbore in time; since he had no intention of speaking to Doña Antonia of Ingraham's offer for the picture until he had decided whether or not to accept it.

He was, however, mistaken in this opinion. Ingraham had, indeed, increased his offer, as he had promised Don Gilberto he would do; but, having done that, the question of making the Velasquez his own might almost have been said to have passed from his mind, so absorbed was he in the most fascinating and ambitious work he had ever attempted. Don Luis was right in saying that he painted like one possessed by frenzy. It was indeed the frenzy of the artist who sees within his reach the effect, the perfection at which he aims, and who, with an intense concentration, puts forth every effort to attain it. To him, at this time, all things became a dream except the attempt, in which all his faculties were strung to highest tension, to place worthily on his canvas the girl who day after day stood before him in all the glory of her beauty — the fairness of her skin, the splendour of her hair, and the dark lustre of her eyes challenging him to paint them, as Velasquez had painted the Marquesa, for generations yet unborn to gaze upon with wondering admiration.

But in the midst of this feverish exaltation the reflux came, when, flinging down palette and brushes one day, he cried out, in a tone of despair, "It is impossible! I am a presumptuous fool ever to have attempted it. What insanity to dream that I could succeed! Velasquez must come back from the dead to paint you, señorita, as he painted you before."

Cármen did not answer for a moment. She was accustomed to his fanciful language on this point, and it made little impression upon her. But she quietly stepped forward and stood before the picture on his easel. As she regarded it, the colour deepened on her cheek, a light kindled in her eyes, and she lifted her head with the proud gesture now become familiar to her. It was plain that the perception of her own loveliness, painted in such glowing tints, thrilled her with mingled pleasure and pride. Presently she glanced at the portrait of the Marquesa, and then turned to Ingraham, who was watching her curiously.

"Why is it that you are discouraged, Señor?" she asked. "It seems to me that your work is as beautiful as this. It is as if Velasquez had come back from the dead, the two paintings are so much alike."

"Then my picture is but a servile copy," said Ingraham, who was in a mood in which encouragement became difficult. "I did not intend it to be that. I meant that it should have some original life — even as you are yourself and not the Marquesa, however wonderful your resemblance to her may be."

Cármen again looked at the portrait of the Marquesa, encountering the gaze of its almost living eyes with her full glance. To Ingraham, still watching her, it seemed that, in the triumphant

consciousness of her beauty, she felt at this moment upon a plane of equality with the woman whose splendid image had so long dominated her imagination.

"Yes, there is no doubt that I am myself — another person altogether," she said at length, slowly. "Yet it is no fancy to believe that I think and feel as she thought and felt, that I long for the things which she possessed, and that I could do the things she did."

Remembering the story of the Marquesa, Ingraham felt a slight shiver pass over him at the last words, and as he gazed at the girl, with her strange resemblance to the woman whose fascination seemed to live in spite of time and death, deepening even as she spoke, he felt now, as more than once before, that if he had not been, as she declared, a mere instrument of fate, the time might come when he would hardly be able to forgive himself for the part he had played in her awakening.

"No," he said, quickly, "you could not do the things of which this woman was capable; and you dream when you fancy it is so. Some mental and spiritual likeness there must be where the physical likeness is so strong, for Nature's signs are never without meaning; but remember what different strains of blood enter into your being from those which entered into hers. Half of your ancestry is Anglo-Saxon. That alone makes a difference greater than you can readily understand."

Still gazing at the picture. C ámen shook her head. "It does not matter about that," she said. "I belong to her as much as if no other strain of blood were in my veins. I have felt it all my life — ever since, when first brought here a little child, I crept into the *sala* and stood spellbound before her. That moment was like a second birth to me, for in that moment I knew what beauty was, and even my childish soul understood what power, triumph, pleasure might be." She turned and looked at him, her eyes dilating as he had not seen them since that first day when she came to him in the *sala* and told him of the influence of the portrait upon her. "Do you believe in possession, *se ñor*?" she asked. "Sometimes I have dreamed that from her long and bitter exile spent within these walls the Marquesa left something — I know not what — a power, a spell behind her, which I have felt more than others because I am moulded in her likeness. Do you think it possible that such a thing might be?"

"Who knows?" replied Ingraham, vaguely, although the suggestion appealed at once to his own responsive; imagination. He was not likely to forget the deep impression the Marquesa's story made upon his fancy, even before he had seen her picture, and how for him the fortress-like court, the wide corridors, and the vast rooms had seemed pervaded by a presence whose beauty was full of the mournfulness of a tragic fate. Had the proud spirit of the woman suffering perhaps an unmerited punishment, in its long stress of agony, indeed left behind, in this which had been her prison, an influence specially to be felt by one who was like a vessel fitted by nature to receive it? He, too, looked up at the portrait. "Living or dead," he thought, "all things are possible to her." And then his eyes turned again to the girl who was her image. "Such a thing might be," he said, aloud. "We do not know: mysteries surround us on every side, and there is none deeper than that of our own nature. But why strive to probe into that which we can never know? There is a natural reason for all that you feel, in the fact that you are fashioned in this woman's very likeness."

"And this likeness — what does it mean?" she asked, with a note of passion vibrating in her voice such as he had not heard from her before. "That I am to spend my life as an unpaid servant, in menial toil, with her proud spirit and her fiery heart within me, unrecognised? If that must be the end — and I have known always that there is no other possible for me — do you wonder that I shrank from this" — turning quickly, she pointed to his painting — "from putting on her very being for a time, only to fall back more hopelessly into my own?"

What a picture she made at this moment, as she stood in the rich robe of shining brocade, one white arm extended in a gesture full at once of energy and grace, her head thrown back on the slender column of her rounded throat, her eyes shining, with a glow that made their splendour almost overpowering, and the intense light from the wide, unshuttered window smiting the red

gold of her piled-up tresses! It was no wonder that Ingraham caught his breath, or that the old woman quietly sewing at the farther end of the room, over whose bent head their conversation passed unheeded, looked up in amazement, asking herself if her eyes were bewitched, or if this were indeed C ámen.

There was an instant's pause, no more, yet that instant was filled for Ingraham with a revelation that had the force of a shock, sending the blood leaping madly through his veins. Up to this time the artist only had been alive in him: absorbed in the most ambitious attempt of his life, he had looked at the girl only as an "artist looks, intent upon wresting from Nature the secret of her rare tints and tones. But now, in this moment of artistic depression, the strong hold of absorption relaxed, and, like one rousing from a dream, he beheld her for the first time with the eyes of a man, and felt her beauty strike upon his senses with the potent touch of passion. And not her beauty alone. That cry of pain wrung from her — that protest against the crushing narrowness and bitterness of her fate — stirred his nature to its depths. Under any circumstances it would have moved him to profoundest pity, but now it opened all the flood-gates of love, passing beyond passion into the higher realm of tenderness which yearns to bless and protect. When she asked if the end of her awakening was to sink back more hopelessly into a life of unpaid servitude, not his heart alone but every faculty of his being seemed to answer. No. At this moment every other consciousness was merged in the overwhelming knowledge that he loved her, and in the exquisite thought that he had the power to make her life all that her nature demanded it should be. He moved toward her, a light altogether new shining in his eyes.

"C ámen, have no fear!" he cried quickly, in English. "That which you dread shall not be the end. I, who have wakened this new life within you, promise that you shall not fall back into the narrowness and subjection you have known. Your future shall be my care, your nature shall have its scope, if. C ámen, if—"

He paused abruptly, for a step suddenly rang on the tiled floor behind him, and, turning, he saw Don Luis entering the room.

## X.

C ámen's glance fell on the new-comer at the same instant, and she was quick to read the meaning of the involuntary pause which he made just within the doorway, as his eye rested on the two figures, with their unconsciously dramatic pose, standing in the midst of the chamber. The passionate words which had just been spoken seemed still to vibrate on the air and make an atmosphere different from the usual quiet of the studio. She read the perception of this in that sudden pause, and without a moment's hesitation spoke.

"Enter, Don Luis," she said, with an accent of gracious permission, such as the Marquesa might have addressed to some gentleman of the court while Velasquez was painting her beauty in imperishable tints upon his canvas. "Enter, and tell the Se ñor that his work is not a failure, as he seems to think."

"How is it possible for him to think that?" asked Don Luis, advancing into the room and halting before the picture. "*Caramba!*" he said, after a moment, in a low, deep tone. "It is a marvel! Where are your eyes," he added, turning to Ingraham, "that you can look at this and think it a failure?"

It was indeed a strange moment that the painter had chosen to throw down his brushes in discouragement; and the sudden despondency that had overtaken him could only be comprehended by one who knew something of the moods which now and again overwhelm every worker in the realm of art, making all that he has accomplished seem worthless in his own eyes. This revulsion of feeling had come upon Ingraham more violently for the state of exaltation in which he had hitherto worked, and it had come, as it is more than likely to do, at a moment when

he had touched a culminating point beyond which, for the time at least, he could not advance. The picture was by no means finished in detail, but the impression which it gave as a whole was of a force, a brilliant and daring vigour of treatment and depth of colouring, in which it was scarcely surpassed by the noble work of Velasquez placed beside it. And yet it was not, as Ingraham in his bitterness had said, a servile copy. The manner of the great Spanish painter was there, but only as a disciple imitates the greater art of a master; and the picture, which might readily have become a mere copy of the portrait of the Marquesa, was in reality full of original life. It was, after all, C á rmen and not the Marquesa who looked forth from the canvas — C á rmen, with all her marvellous likeness to the dead beauty, with every line of her features and tint of her colouring, but with a different spirit informing the fair body. By some touch of inspiration Ingraham brought out the fact that, similar as every trick of bearing might be, it was a girl of nun-like innocence who masqueraded in the robes of a by-gone court, and whose lustrous eyes looked forth with the fearlessness of a child, rather than with the depth of meaning which lay in the glance of the woman whose misdeeds, real or imputed, had brought her to die in lonely exile. "By painting her portrait I will show how great the likeness is," he had said. And lo! by painting the portrait he made manifest how great also was, of necessity, the difference.

"I am glad that you find the picture good, se ñor," he said, in reply to the question of Don Luis, "but for me it is a failure because I have not succeeded in producing the effects for which I strove. That is an old story in art, but it is ever new in its effect upon the artist. One works with feverish energy to embody some conception that seems so clear, so possible to the imagination, and suddenly one wakes and finds that one has failed. It may not appear as a failure to others; but no one can tell what was in the artist's mind save the artist himself."

"In this case, however," said Don Luis, "others are better able to judge of your success than yourself, since you have not been working on an ideal conception, but on the portrait of a living person. To me your success seems most wonderful. You have produced not a copy of Velasquez, but an original work full of a life that is startling; and while you have shown C á rmen's astonishing likeness to the Marquesa, you have also individualized and painted her as herself. I, who am no artist, nevertheless know that to do this was most difficult."

"Have I done it?" asked Ingraham, half incredulously. A dulness of perception had fallen upon him. The picture seemed to him at this moment a tame and lifeless thing. He turned from it impatiently, to let his gaze rest again on the living subject, on the loveliness so deep and glowing which struck to his inmost being with a thrill like that which the portrait of the Marquesa had wakened in him when he first stood before it. Had he been mad, not to know what that thrill portended, what power it was which seized him even then in its strong grasp? Trifler with fancies more or less potent as he had been, like others of his generation, his class, and his race, he felt now the overwhelming force of elemental passion — that passion common with simpler natures and races, but which in its fiery strength was altogether new to the man of complex modern emotions.

It is, however, a thing well known to the race of which came the man beside him. And when Don Luis — turning to utter a remark that died on his lips — caught the expression of the other's face, he knew at once what influence had laid its hold upon him. For emotion, however deep, may be disguised, but no disguise is possible for passion in its primitive strength. The dark eyes of the Mexican flashed, and his lips closed suddenly and sternly, as if suppressing words that sprang to them. He glanced quickly at C á rmen, and, meeting her gaze, regarded her with searching intentness. There was an instant's pause, while old Maraquita sewed on steadily with bent head, and the light from the open window poured upon the little group, and upon the two pictures in which the same figure appeared — there in the mellow tones of age, here in the freshness of colours just laid on — while, as if by some strange miracle, this figure seemed to have stepped from the canvases on which its impress still remained, in order to stand, in all the glory of life and youth, between the two men whose glances were each fastened upon it.

If Cármen's wild fancies had some ground in fact, and the spirit of the Marquesa, inherited or otherwise, existed within her, it was possible to understand why she bore these glances with a proud composure, as of one who breathed an atmosphere at once natural and exhilarating, why her bearing grew more assured, her colour deeper, and her eyes more brilliant, under an observation which might readily have discomposed a girl so young and so unused to admiration. It was she who broke the silence at length by speaking, looking from Don Luis to Ingraham as she did so.

"If the se ñor has no further need for me at present, I will go," she said. "Perhaps to-morrow he will not think so poorly of his work."

"It is possible," answered Ingraham, with a start. Words trembled on his lips — words of entreaty that she would stay; but to what end? With Don Luis present, further speech was out of the question, and painting was at this moment impossible to him. It was best that she should go, and later—

"Yes," he said, gathering himself together with an effort, "I have done all that I can to-day, and need not detain you longer. To-morrow I shall expect you as usual."

"To-morrow," she repeated, and, with a bend of the head, regal and gracious as her manner had habitually become, passed from the chamber.

There was another pause between the two men left behind, and then Don Luis spoke in his usual tone:

"What is the remedy, se ñor, for the discouragement which has so strangely fallen upon you with regard to your painting?"

"There is none," answered Ingraham, "except to leave the work for a time. Then I may return to it with revived perceptions and powers. This afternoon I shall take my sketch-book and go out among the hills. I have long desired to make such an excursion, but this picture has absorbed me. Now I must put the thought of it away from me, and there is nothing so powerful as the influence of Nature to distract and revive. If I should not return until after nightfall, do not be surprised."

"You will take a guide with you?" said Don Luis, regarding him keenly. "Our hills are dangerous for a stranger."

"They will not prove so to me," replied Ingraham. "I am familiar with mountains, and I shall not go far. I do not desire a companion, because solitude is what I seek."

"I understand," said Don Luis. And in his tone was a meaning which Ingraham on his part was far from understanding.

He understood it less because there was no such thought in his mind as the other imagined. He was sincere in saying that what he desired was a few hours of such deep and complete solitude as the lover of Nature can secure only in Nature's wildest haunts. He wished to look in the face this strange new passion which had seized him; perhaps, after the manner of his kind, to analyze it, and certainly to decide what his course of practical action should be. He had not the least idea of any such meeting with Cármen as Don Luis not only suspected, but entertained no doubt had already been arranged, and when, after the mid-day meal, he set forth, it was with no other intention than he had expressed.

But chance brought Cármen across his way as he was leaving the house. It was in the lower court, just at the foot of the stairs — she about to mount upward, as he came downward — that he encountered her. To refrain from pausing was impossible, especially since they were sheltered from intrusive eyes either above or below. His heart stirred wildly as her dark, lustrous glance met his own, and in that instant he determined to secure an interview in which he could utter all that was in his heart, could speak without fear of listener or interruption.

"Cármen," he said, quickly, "I must speak to you — alone. I must tell you what I was about to say when Don Luis came in upon us; and you must answer me. Your whole life depends on it. Tell me in what place you can meet me this afternoon. I have said that I shall be out until nightfall among the hills. Wherever you can be, I will await you. Do not fear to come."

Even in this moment it struck him that she must have been expecting such words, so quick was her apprehension, so ready her decision.

"I can not leave the house," she replied, "until the evening rosary. After that is over I will linger in the church until all are gone, and then I will meet you in the *huerta*."

She paused only long enough to speak these words in a low, quick, but unhurried tone, and then passed on, leaving him alone.

## XI.

Ever since Ingraham's arrival at Las Cruces, he had promised himself a day among the wild and beautiful hills that rose in the neighbourhood of the house; but so immediate and so intense had been his absorption in the picture that the present was the first occasion on which he had set forth to fulfil his original intension. And now he found himself in no mood to fulfil it, no mood for study of the natural loveliness which surrounded him. With unseeing eyes, with thoughts turned inward, he walked through the picturesque village formed by the houses of the labourers on the estate. Straw-thatched and palm-embowered, these dwellings lined one side of a winding road; on the other a stream came tumbling down from the hills, filling the air with the music of its flowing water, its banks, green with richest verdure, presenting at every turn a picture which at another time would have stayed Ingraham's steps continually. But he walked steadily onward, seeing yet scarcely heeding the beauty around him, until he had left the village behind and found himself climbing the hills, still following the stream upward along its course, although the musical sound of its waters was now almost lost in the depth of the *arroyo* where they flowed. A bit of steep climbing — more difficult in the thin air of this high region than on a lower level — and he at length reached the Cerro de las Cruces, a height which derived its name from the remains of three ancient crosses that crowned its summit, tokens of some tragedy so long past as to be forgotten even in the traditions of the people.

Here he flung himself down and for a brief time forgot even the dominating thought which absorbed him in the enchanting scene that spread before his vision. A great sense of wide space, of magical freshness, encompassed him. The free movement of the air, the strong sunshine beating on the shoulders of the giant hills and striving to pierce their sombre ravines, the infinite deeps of over-canopying sky, burning with the blue intensity of a jewel, the hurrying wind that came from leagues of shining water afar, the green valley stretching into remote distance, bounded by dream-like lake and more dream-like mountains, and the great chain of tossed and broken sierras, with their noble majesty of form and changeful loveliness of tint, all stimulated and exhilarated him, so that he drew a deep breath of absolute rapture. Never before had he felt so near to the heart of Nature; never had his inmost being so responded to the primitive, elemental forces of life. It was as if, lover of Nature as he had ever been, he had to-day gained a new sense, as if every rushing air that came to him, every ray of sunshine and falling cloud-shadow, had a message and meaning for his awakened soul. The wild, vigorous character of the scenery, the savage grandeur of the hills, the vast idyllic stretch of plain, filled him with a sense of existence wild, free, and untrammelled by the artificial barriers of life. His spirit thrilled with an exulting consciousness of power, as his glance, returning from its wide sweep afar, rested on that spot below, where the fortress-like walls of Las Cruces rose amid its gardens and encircling village. Within those walls *Cármen* dwelt, prisoned by fate and poverty as hopelessly as the Marquesa had been by the arbitrary will of a man, but, happier than the Marquesa, to her fate had sent a deliverer, one not only able to deliver, but to make life for her all, and more than all, of which she had ever dreamed. Never had he been so grateful for the possession of wealth as in this moment, never so keenly felt the value of the golden key which would enable him to open for her the door of a rich and varied existence. Not an instant's doubt occurred to him of his ability to do so. He



felt supreme master of his own fate and of hers, as he breathed, like an elixir of vitality, the clear pure air of his high altitude and looked down upon the spot where in a little while he would meet her. It was part of the exaltation of his mood that he did not ask himself how much he knew of this girl who had so suddenly laid upon his being this hold of fascination. To considerations which at another time would at once have occurred to him — considerations of character and antecedents — he now gave not a thought. She was C ámen, and his whole nature claimed her as his own: that was enough.

And so, rapt in what was little less than ecstasy, into which the great rejoicing face of Nature seemed to enter and make a part, he lay on the mountain-summit, beneath the shadow of the ancient crosses, during the long golden hours of the afternoon. The sun was sinking behind the western sierras, and the valley at his feet lay in shadow, when, mounting upward through the thin, clear, air, came the sound of the chapel bell ringing the first call for the evening rosary. From his high eyrie he could see women, like pygmy figures, casting *rebosos* over their heads as they went toward the chapel. He did not stir until the third and last bell had rung, when, rising, he took his way down the mountain.

The interval between sunset and dark is not long in these regions, and a colour-flushed twilight had begun to reign when he entered the *huerta*, or garden, where C ámen had said that she would meet him. It was a beautiful place, the like of which every Mexican country-house possesses, devoted to the culture of trees chiefly useful for their fruits. Of these there was every variety, a very paradise of tropical verdure, through which ran broad alleys, forming vistas of enchanting shade, and converging toward a central space where a great old stone basin brimmed with crystal water, drawn from the mountain- stream for the use of both house and garden. Stone seats gray with age were placed here, and the air was filled with the rich fragrance of orange-blossoms from the boughs which bent over them. Ingraham knew the spot well, for he had often lingered there in the siesta hours of the day, and he sat down on one of the benches, feeling that C ámen had chosen the time and place well. At this hour they would be secure alike from observation and interruption. The end of the house overlooking the garden contained the chapel, from which now came the shrill sweetness of boys' voices, singing between the decades of the rosary, and, when the exercises were over and the people gone, nothing could be easier than for the girl to pass into the garden while still supposed (if any one thought of her) to be lingering at her devotions. Assured of her coming, he felt no impatience in the time which elapsed before she appeared, but his eyes never left the momentarily darkening path down which she would come.

And at length he saw her figure moving toward him, with a grace of bearing such as, he said to himself, he had never known any other woman to possess. She was advancing swiftly yet without apparent haste, as one who had perfect control of herself and whose vivid energy of life was restrained by a dignity almost superb. The drapery of the *reboso* shrouded her head and shoulders, even as when he had seen her first, but there was no impression now of anything novice-like or immature. When she emerged into the open space of the fountain, and the dying light fell fully on her face, he saw that her eyes were shining with the brilliance which only strong emotion waked in them, while she looked at him not with the shyness of a girl who came to keep tryst with a yet undeclared lover, but with the composure of a woman certain of herself and her command of the situation. As she approached he rose to his feet and advanced eagerly to meet her, but it was she who spoke first, pausing and regarding him with her brilliant glance.

"I have come, as I promised," she said. "What is it that you wish to tell me?"

The quiet imperiousness of her words, instead of checking his ardour, acted upon it like a challenge. He looked at her with a glance as direct as hers, and full of deeper fire, while the force of passion within him found utterance in words as simple and strong as itself. "I love you," he said. "That is what I wished to tell you. My heart, my life, my whole being, are yours. And, so loving you, I wish to set you free from all the irksome conditions of your life. You belong to me, C ámen, for I have found you and wakened in you the knowledge of what you are. Having done so, do you think that I will leave you to the narrow and bitter fate which threatens you? No: you

must trust me and come with me! I can give you all that your nature demands, and love, such love as words are too feeble to express. C ármén, have you no love for me?"

It was the very appeal of love itself — of love overmastering and poignant — which filled his voice in the last words. A supplication, an entreaty, it was also a command, under which one who loved could not have remained silent. But C ármén hesitated before she spoke, and then her tone had in it an aloofness that struck upon his spirit as a chill.

"Se ñor," she said, "I know not how to answer you. I have not thought of love. Until you came, I lived the life of a child. Since then I have dreamed of power and admiration and the love which men might feel for me; but that *I* should love, *I* — no, Se ñor, I have not dreamed of that. And yet—"

She paused, and through the deepening dusk her eyes flashed their splendid fire into his, as if sudden emotion leaped within her like a flame.

"And yet," she went on, with a quick indrawing of the breath, "to love is to live, is it not so? Then I shall love you when I have had time to think, to feel; for life rises within me like a fountain, and your words find an echo in my heart. And it is natural that I should love you, who have brought such change and awakening into my life, who look at me and speak to me as no one else has looked or spoken. No one else has thought the poor C ármén worth a glance, but you—"

"I find her worth all that a man can give and do and dare!" he said, taking her hand and kissing it, as they stood together in the orange-scented twilight. "Ah, C ármén, only love me, only let your heart speak for me, and what happiness is before us! If I could but inspire you with the confidence I feel that we are meant for each other, that my coming here was no mere chance, that I was sent to release you, my princess, from the cruel enchantment of your lot! In the old fairy-tales, which are but fables of life, the princess always belonged to him who rescued her, is it not so? And you, my Carmencita, belong to me by every right known to romance — by right of finding, by right of wakening, by right of passionate love and passionate desire to make your life all that Nature, when she fashioned you, intended it should be. I, who know the world and have seen its fairest women, lay my heart and my life at your feet as I have never laid them at the feet of any other. I would give all that I possess, fortune, friends, country, for your love, if by no other means could I gain and possess it. C ármén, there is a light in your eyes which seems to say that you are mine; but speak to me, tell me in your own sweet tongue that you love me, that you trust me, that you will come with me!"

She bent toward him as a stately flower sways on its stem, and the eyes of which he spoke seemed in their luminous splendour searching his own.

"Se ñor — Don Rafael," she murmured, "it is as you say. Every right is yours. And if I give all that you ask — for it will be easy to love you, and when one loves one trusts, is it not so? — will you take me away, into the world?"

"Can you doubt it?" he asked, drawing her with a quick motion into his arms. "I shall not lose a day in seeking your father and asking your hand. He will not refuse me: of that be sure. All shall be done openly and with honour, and, that it may be so, I will at once tell your friends and guardians here my purpose toward you."

"That is well resolved, Se ñor Ingraham," said a quiet voice near by, and, before either could move or speak, Don Luis stepped from one of the deep clumps of surrounding shade into the open space beside them.

## XII.

Ingraham turned sharply — not with a guilty start, but with the manner of a man who feels in every fibre a hot flush of rage and indignation.

"Don Luis!" he exclaimed, adding, with fiery disdain, "Do Mexican gentlemen, then, act as eaves-droppers?"

"C ármén," said Don Luis, addressing the girl, who had recoiled and now stood with one hand pressed upon her heart, "do me the favour to go into the house. Later I will speak to you. But now I wish to speak to Señor Ingraham alone."

Obediently as a child, C ármén turned and without a word moved away, along the path by which she had come. Ingraham was conscious of an impulse to detain her, to deny the right of Don Luis to send her away; but swift reflection showed him that this would be folly. It was better that she should go than remain to hear the words which trembled on his lips, to witness in what fashion he would deal with one who first played the spy and then arrogated to himself a right of interference which he did not possess. Trembling with anger, he was about to speak again, when Don Luis anticipated him.

"I do not understand English very well, señor," he said, gravely, "and therefore I did not comprehend the word which you applied to me a moment ago. But that is immaterial. I understand what you meant—"

"If you are in any doubt," Ingraham interposed, "I will tell you what I meant. I do not know the Spanish equivalent for the word which I used, but it means one who listens dishonourably to what is not intended for him to hear — a spy, in short!"

He hurled the word with scornful emphasis at the other, and, knowing well the quickness of his race to resent insult, waited with the fierce longing for a quarrel — for any excuse to take another by the throat — which few men are so well disciplined as not to have known once or twice in life.

But it seemed that he was not to be gratified. With perfect self-control Don Luis replied, "It was unnecessary to have made your meaning more offensive. I have already said that I understood what you meant. Gentlemen do not deal in epithets, else I should ask if your own conduct has been very honourable. In Mexico we would not think so. Our maidens are sacred with us, and the man who enticed one into meeting him secretly and alone would be held to have either a very bad motive or a very defective knowledge of what is proper and honourable. He would, also, be held sternly to account. But I have heard that there is a different custom in your country, and, therefore, even when I suspected that you had made such an appointment I did not wish to judge you rashly. I was willing to believe that your motive was not as dishonourable as it would have appeared in a Mexican who had acted in the same manner. But none the less was I bound to guard C ármén, who is like a child of my house and committed by her parents to my mother's care, against harm and danger. I knew nothing, but I suspected much — for faces are eloquent sometimes — and I easily arranged that she could not leave the house this afternoon without my knowledge—"

"You speak of honour," interrupted Ingraham, bitterly. "Would it not have been more honourable to tell her frankly that she was a prisoner?"

"I think not," answered the other, with unmoved dignity. "To tell her that would have been to insult, to wound her, if she had no such intention as I suspected. It was better to be sure, and do no one injustice — neither her nor you. I was in the sacristy of the chapel during the exercises; I saw her linger until she thought herself alone, and when she went out I followed her. According to your code, that was dishonourable; according to mine, it was not only honourable, but my plain and imperative duty. I need hardly remind you, señor, that you are a stranger to me, and, as I have already said, in our ideas the man who would violate the hospitality of the roof that sheltered him by leading a young girl to meet him in secret might readily prove himself a villain."

These quiet, incisive words were like arrows that struck through Ingraham's anger to a deep, underlying sense of reason and justice which with him could never long be dormant. He suddenly saw himself and his own action from the stand-point of Don Luis, and he felt the hot blood surge again to his face — this time from a keen emotion of shame. He lifted his hand with a quick gesture.

"Enough, se ñor! " he said. "I see — I acknowledge that you are right and I am wrong. But, believe me, the thought of violating your hospitality was as far from my intention as the thought of wronging by a word the girl whom I asked to meet me only that, secure from interruption, I might tell her what was in my heart and obtain her permission to offer myself to her father as a suitor for her hand."

"Of that your words to her have already assured me," said Don Luis, with grave courtesy, "else I should not be speaking to you here. I recognise that, acting no doubt according to the customs of your country, you forgot how different are the customs of ours."

"To speak the exact truth," said Ingraham, "I think that I forgot everything except — C ármén."

"Ah, C ármén!" said Don Luis. He was silent for a moment, and then, producing his cigarette-case, he held it out, in token of renewed amity. There followed the little ceremony of lighting, after which the two men seated themselves on one of the stone benches placed under the flowering orange boughs. To Ingraham's mind there was nothing left to say, but evidently this was not the opinion of Don Luis.

It was in accordance with his wishes, expressed by a movement of the hand, that they had seated themselves. Yet for some minutes he did not speak. Both sat smoking silently, the odour of their cigarettes mingling with the perfume of the blossoms above them. Ingraham's thoughts returned and dwelt with passionate intensity on his meeting with C ármén, on the brief, too brief, moment of ecstasy when she had drooped toward him like a flower laden with its own sweetness, and he had taken her into his arms. Absorbed in this recollection, he had well-nigh forgotten the presence of Don Luis when the latter finally spoke:

"I think I understood you to say, se ñor, that you intend to address yourself at once to C ármén's father?"

"At once," Ingraham replied, with decision. "I must, therefore, ask you to add to your hospitable kindness by sending me to Patzcuaro tomorrow."

"It will be unnecessary," was the quiet response. "To-morrow Don Gilberto will be at Las Cruces."

"To-morrow — here!" repeated Ingraham, with astonishment. "May I ask how long you have known this?"

"Since I sent a telegraphic message to-day requesting his presence," Don Luis replied. "I felt it right to do this as soon as I became aware how matters stood with C ármén and yourself."

"It appears to me," said Ingraham, coldly, after a moment's pause in which he subdued a rising impulse to anger, "that you leaped to a conclusion for which you had at that time no foundation. It would be interesting to know how you arrived at it."

"I have already remarked that faces are sometimes eloquent," answered Don Luis. "Your face this morning told me what you felt; and when men feel certain emotions, expression is as sure to follow as flame to leap from fire. As for C ármén" — he lifted his shoulders in a gesture which the obscurity did not hide — "she is a child, a woman. I had no doubt that she would listen to you, and how far flattered vanity and the first stirring of nature might carry her I did not know. Consequently, I sent for her father."

Again Ingraham repressed an inclination to state in words more emphatic than polite his opinion of this interference. Yet, annoying as it was to be placed more or less in the position of a culprit, when he had meant to go to Don Gilberto as a very lordly suitor, he could not but feel that it would be better to have the matter settled at once without the necessity of leaving Las Cruces. Unconsciously Don Luis had done him a service, although it was one for which he did not feel grateful. Something of this he would have expressed, had not the other, after a short pause, gone on speaking:

"I had, besides, another reason for summoning Don Gilberto. It is a reason which I am not in any way bound to mention to you, but I prefer to do so, since you might else think that I

had not dealt frankly and honourably with you. I determined to-day that I would myself ask his daughter in marriage."

"You!" cried Ingraham. It was an absolute gasp of astonishment; and for a moment he could say no more. Then he turned fiercely. "But now," he said, "you know that it is useless to do so — that she has given herself to me."

"Pardon me," returned Don Luis, quietly, "but again I must remind you of our Mexican ideas and customs. A girl of Cármen's age can not give herself without the consent of her parents. And, moreover, unless I am greatly mistaken, what she granted to you was no more than a hope that she would return your love, and this because she was moved by the unaccustomed incense of passion and the promise of freedom and pleasure. That her heart is yours at present, I do not think it possible for you to believe."

"But I do believe it!" Ingraham asserted, with a vehemence which perhaps was due to some inward conviction of the truth of these unpalatable words. "I will not speak again of the manner in which I regard your having listened to a conversation such as ours," he went on, his voice thrilling with the same accent of fiery disdain that had been in it when he first addressed the man who interrupted his love-scene at its culminating moment. "But I utterly deny the inference you have drawn, that Cármen is still open to be won. She is mine! — mine by her own deliberate choice, and mine also by the right of discovery. You have known her all her life: did you ever think of her, or even look at her, until I showed you what she is? You know that you never did, you know that she had been a mere menial in your house until I roused her from the apathy of obscurity and neglect, until I made you see your proud ancestress reproduced line for line and tint for tint, until, looking at her with my eyes, you perceived that she was fit to grace a court and formed to rouse a man's deepest adoration." He had risen from his seat as he spoke, and stood in the soft mingling of dusk and star-shine, a tall, dark figure, instinct in every line with passionate energy. "You may think," he added, "that because her father is in a sense your creature you have but to speak and she will be yours. I tell you, no! I am not so powerless as I seem, and I — to whom she belongs — I will fight for her to the death!"

"Señor Ingraham," said the Mexican, preserving now as throughout the interview his self-control and courtesy unmoved, "sit down, and let us speak calmly. It is not necessary that we should fight, nor yet that we should forget that we are gentlemen, because our desires are set upon the same woman. It is true, what you have said. But for you I should probably never have seen Cármen as she is, never have recognised her beauty and her natural fitness for a high position. She was disguised by her youth and her obscurity from my observation. But you came, your artist glance detected the unnoticed likeness to the Marquesa, you made us see it, you developed it by painting her portrait, and then, as was natural, you fell in love with the beauty which you felt that you in a manner had created. All of this I understand. But none of it gives you the right to declare that Cármen belongs to you."

"Her own words have given me that right," said Ingraham, who had not acceded to the request to sit down, but still stood erect.

"Permit me to again question that," said Don Luis. "At least I think you will admit that she has not bound herself to you in such fashion as to preclude her possibility and right of choice should another suitor present himself. To say otherwise would be to prove that, notwithstanding your positive assertions, you would fear the result."

"I should not fear it in the least," Ingraham declared, "if I were sure that she was permitted to make a free and unbiased choice. But I am not sure of that."

"Señor," said Don Luis, rising in his turn and speaking with a stateliness of manner which sat well upon him, "allow me to assure you that I am a man of honour. If I desired or intended to deal unfairly with you in this matter, what would have been easier for me than to hold my peace, to influence Don Gilberto in secret against you — which, frankly, I could very readily do — to induce him to withhold his consent, without which you could not marry Cármen, and, when you were safely sent away, to marry her myself? But, instead of this, I have dealt openly with you, I

have told you my wishes before they are known to any one else, I have even allowed you to have the great advantage of first pleading your cause, which I could with ease have prevented; and I now tell you that I pledge my word, I, Luis Fernandez del Valle, that Cármen's choice shall be absolutely free, that I will not permit her father to influence her should he desire to do so; and with this assurance I have the honour to bid you good-night."

He bowed, and was turning away, when Ingraham stopped him.

"Stay, señor," he said, "at least long enough to let me apologize for my rudeness. You will pardon me when you consider what I have at stake and how great are your advantages over me. But I accept your rebuke. I have no fear that you will not act with honour, and I can ask no more than that Cármen's choice shall be free."

"I repeat my promise that it shall be so," said Don Luis; "and, this being assured, I think we shall need no lesson to teach us each to abide by it."

In mute assent Ingraham held out his hand, and then, without another word, they left the garden together.

### XIII.

Ingraham had been sincere in saying to Don Luis that his advantages over him were great, at least on this his native heath; but he might have added that they were not such as caused him to despair. At Las Cruces rivalry seemed indeed vain and presumptuous between the lord of the soil and a wandering foreign painter, supposed to be lord of nothing. But the latter knew well that this difference, which was only apparent, would vanish at a word from himself. And that word it would be necessary to speak to Don Gilberto, for an instinct warned him that matters far more practical than his daughter's possible inclination would alone weigh with that gentleman in deciding between the two suitors. At first, of course, he would incline to the suit of Don Luis; but Ingraham had not the faintest doubt that he could bring considerations of such a solid and tangible nature to bear as would finally insure his consent for himself. Yet even while deciding on this — on plainly and openly buying the father — he determined that these considerations should not be brought to bear upon the daughter. A little while before, had it occurred to him to do so, he would have told her without hesitation, and without attaching importance to the revelation, that, while it had pleased Nature to make him an artist, it had also pleased Fortune to make him a millionaire. But now, confronted by the rivalry of a man who was in all respects the greatest in her world — the head of the house of which she was a barely acknowledged offshoot — and stung by that man's assertions that she had not given him her heart, he resolved to put the matter to the test, and win her, if she were to be won, against the heavy odds of the other's higher station and comparative wealth. It was a romantic device which he had always scorned when he encountered it in fiction, because it implied so low a standard of belief in the high-mindedness of others. To entertain the suspicion that any one whom he found worthy of love and the respect that must accompany love could be swayed by mercenary considerations, he had always felt to be an impossibility, implying, as it did, absolute lack of confidence in his own power of judging character, and a sordid doubt of another which to a noble mind could seem nothing less than an insult. It followed, therefore, that the test on which he had resolved was in no sense meant for Cármen, but only to prove triumphantly to Don Luis that she had given him her love. For of this he had himself no doubt. The ardour of his own passion seemed to him to call for return as imperatively as one great attraction of the earth answers to another, as the resistless force of gravity draws objects downward, or the tides yearn upward toward the moon. What he had said to her, that they were meant for each other, that it was no mere chance which had brought him to Las Cruces, he believed with an intensity that left no room in his mind for question. She was his by every possible claim — his, as he had declared, not only by right of discovery, but by right of

awakening to knowledge of herself. And when was it ever heard that the bold adventurer who rescues and awakens the sleeping princess yielded her to another?

Supported, then, by confidence which rested on a double basis — belief in C á rmen's love, and consciousness of the power to purchase Don Gilberto's consent — he waited with patience during the long hours of the next day for the arrival of the latter. Since their parting in the garden he had not seen C á rmen, nor had he even looked at the picture, which in his present mood he could not touch. The morning he spent in the *huerta*, wandering through its shade-lined alleys and pausing for long intervals at the fountain, where he dreamed over again the moments of that interview which Don Luis had so ruthlessly ended. In the afternoon he again ascended the Cerro de las Cruces, longing, in the restless tumult of his feelings, for the great solitude of Nature, for the ineffable sense of exaltation and wide freedom which he had experienced there the day before.

He found it all, as it were, awaiting him, when he reached the summit of the height, and, throwing himself down upon the ground, took off his hat that he might feel on his brow the cooling touch of the breeze that swept over the Sierras, and while his gaze dwelt upon the vast expanse of aerial distance, of enchanting light and colour spread afar, his spirit steeped itself in the most exquisite dreams. Again there came to him a sense of mastery over fate which made it seem of small importance how soon he met Don Gilberto. All the future belonged to him and to C á rmen, and any effort to take her from him — him, her discoverer — was, in his rapt consciousness, so absolutely predestined to failure that it appeared unworthy of consideration, far less concern.

In this mood he saw the arrival of Don Gilberto, as the mountains were casting their long shadows over the luxuriant valley, and the freshness of evening already began to draw forth a thousand resinous odours from the forests which clothed the slopes and gorges of the hills. He had identified the group of horsemen when they first came into his range of vision afar, apparently creeping along the winding road through the broad hacienda lands, and there had been time enough for him to have descended and met Don Gilberto when he reached the *casa grande*. But he said to himself that there was no need to do this. In the assurance of success which possessed his spirit, impatience had died away. Let Don Luis have his say: what difference did it make? All would be the same in the end. He held in his hand the means to purchase the consent of Don Gilberto, let what would be arrayed against him.

So, surrounded by all the peaceful influences of Nature, an hour went by and he had not stirred. Yet lower had sunk the sun toward the faint blue masses of mountains far in the west, yet longer had grown the shadows in the valley, yet fresher the breeze and more delicious the wild odours which it brought, when he was suddenly roused from his state of quiescence by the sound of a step ascending the mountain. The solitude around him had up to this time been so absolutely unbroken that he raised himself with a sense of surprise, which was greatly increased when Don Gilberto suddenly emerged upon the summit beside him.

"Ah, Mr. Ingraham, here you are!" said that gentleman, panting a little from the steep ascent, although he was lean and light as a greyhound. "They told me in the village that you had gone this way, and I fancied I should find you here. A splendid lookout, eh? I do not wonder you like it. But I should not care to climb up here very often, even for the sake of enjoying it."

"I am sorry that you should have taken the trouble to make the ascent at the present time in order to find me," Ingraham replied. "I intended to descend very shortly, and should have met you at the house."

"Yes, I had no doubt of that," said the other, easily, "but I preferred to come here. A mountain-top is the best place that I know for a confidential conversation. One has no fear of listeners in a spot like this."

"For my part," said Ingraham, "I have nothing to say that any one disposed to listen is not welcome to hear."

"One does not always know what may arise in a discussion," observed Don Gilberto, with an air of wisdom. "In this, as in other things, there is nothing like being on the safe side." He

seated himself as he spoke, and then, turning to his companion, added quickly, "And so, Mr. Ingraham, despite your promise to me when we parted, you have been making love to my daughter."

The form of the remark, as well as the manner of the speaker, was excessively distasteful to Ingraham, and his distaste displayed itself in a haughtiness that changed the entire expression of his face. Only those who had seen this change were aware how his features lent themselves to it, and how cold and distant the glance of his gray eyes could become. Those eyes now met Don Gilberto's very fully and directly.

"Pardon me," he said, "you have fallen into a mistake. I have not made love to your daughter in the sense in which you use the term. I have had the honour to offer myself to her, with the intention should she accept me — which, I am happy to say, she has done — of referring my suit at once to yourself. Had I not learned that you were expected at Las Cruces to-day, I should now be on my way to Morelia to inform you of what has occurred, and ask your consent to our marriage."

"The deuce you would!" said Don Gilberto. The coolness and entire absence of anything like apology in this speech surprised and impressed him. His own manner became more respectful, and his next words were in a degree apologetic.

"I had no intention of saying anything offensive," he remarked. "I am aware that your love-making to my daughter has been of an honourable character, and not the idle flattery and flirtation against which I took the liberty of cautioning you when we parted. That you should wish to marry her is an honour which I fully appreciate, but, with every sentiment of regard for yourself, I am compelled to decline your offer. C ármén, although a beautiful woman, as you have been the first to perceive, would not prove a suitable wife for you. She is in all respects a Mexican, and it is best that she should marry one of her own people."

"Don Luis, in short," said Ingraham, calmly. "I expected this, since he told me last night of his intention to offer himself as a suitor for her hand."

"It is a match such as I could never have dreamed of for her!" cried Don Gilberto, with a flash of exultation in his eyes. "And I feel, Mr. Ingraham, that I owe it to you. But for your showing us — blind bats that we had been — her likeness to the Marquesa, but for your proving and developing this likeness by painting her portrait, Don Luis, as he frankly acknowledges, would never have thought of such a thing. One of those girls down there" — he pointed to the village below them — "was as much within the sphere of his possible choice as C ármén when you came. Judge, then, if I wish to be in any respect offensive to you, if I do not feel for your disappointment, and if I do not thank you from my heart for the honour you do my child, and the elevation you have made possible for her."

There was no doubting the sincerity of the feeling which filled this speech, and Ingraham could not but smile at the gratitude so profusely tendered him for making his own rival possible. There was an instant's pause before he spoke, with a quietness which contrasted strongly with Don Gilberto's effusiveness:

"May I ask if you have consulted your daughter in a matter which so closely concerns her? Are you aware that she has promised herself to me?"

"The act of a child!" said Don Gilberto, with a careless gesture, but a somewhat uneasy expression. "What she has promised counts for nothing. She will do as she is told. And it is better for you, Mr. Ingraham, much better, believe me. This little romance will soon be forgotten, and you will marry some woman of the world who can enter into your life as my C ármén would never be able to do. She—"

"Pardon me," said Ingraham again with politeness, "but I do not think that I have asked your opinion upon the kind of wife who would suit me. I have simply asked your consent to marrying your daughter. The rest is my affair. I understand you to refuse your consent on the ground that Don Luis is a better match than I am. Judging from appearances, you are right in thinking so. But appearances are very often deceptive, as a man so well versed in knowledge of



the world as yourself must be aware. I am not a Mexican *hacendado*, bearing an old Spanish name, and with a Marquesa painted by Velasquez for an ancestress; but I venture to assert nevertheless that I am a better match for your daughter than Don Luis. Because I paint pictures you have naturally supposed that I am an artist by profession. But this is not so. I should probably paint better pictures — at least my friends think so — if I were dependent upon those pictures for support. But as a matter of fact I am a very rich man, having inherited a large fortune. If you desire confirmation of my statements you can readily obtain it. I will give you the names of a dozen people, including the American minister in Mexico, to whom you can write. But it will meantime save time and trouble if you believe me, and so make it possible for us to enter into practical arrangements."

"You are a man of fortune — of large fortune!" said Don Gilberto, with the manner of one who takes in a totally new idea. "Then the Velasquez—"

"I intended, and still intend if possible, to purchase for myself. The profit promised you I should also have paid myself. I failed to mention this fact, not from love of mystery, but because a man naturally increases his price for an article when he finds that it is wanted by a millionaire."

"You are a millionaire," said Don Gilberto, in a tone of awed astonishment, "and you wish to marry my daughter!"

"So much that I am prepared to make it very practically to your advantage to consent that I shall do so. Remember the great power of money, Don Gilberto — money, which you told me yourself that Don Luis lacks — and acknowledge that it will be to your interest that your daughter shall marry me."

"Let me think!" said Don Gilberto, hoarsely. He sprang to his feet, and, walking away a short distance, paced to and fro, with arms folded and head bent, evidently reflecting deeply. The perception of his indecision had no effect upon Ingraham's conviction of ultimate success. He was sure that he had taken accurately the measure of this man, whom from their first meeting he had regarded as belonging unmistakably to the genus adventurer, and that such a man could resist the golden bait he held out he did not for a moment believe. His own outward calmness was perfect, but his intense inward excitement was betrayed by the shaking of his hand as he lighted a cigarette. He smiled slightly as he marked this. He did not need such a sign to tell him how strongly and quickly his pulses were beating; but his apparent composure did not change, not even as the minutes lengthened and Don Gilberto still paced to and fro. "The matter is very simple: what can he find in it to demand so much reflection?" Ingraham asked himself, and even as the thought was passing through his mind, Don Gilberto returned to his side.

He was looking pale, and his face was set as it had not been before. "Mr. Ingraham," he said, "I have weighed everything, and while the temptation you offer is, I confess, great, my decision remains unchanged. It is best that my daughter shall marry Don Luis."

The tone of these words — the tone of a decision fixed and unalterable — produced in Ingraham's mind for a moment a sense of dismay, the effect of a surprise so great as to be startling. But, though surprised and even dismayed, he had no thought of accepting such a decision. He only said to himself that the struggle would be more difficult than he had anticipated; but of final victory he had still no doubt.

"Let me remind you," he said, quietly, "that you have not had an opportunity to weigh the advantages which I am prepared to offer. I have only spoken in general terms so far. With your permission, I will now be more particular."

"It is useless," replied Don Gilberto, quickly. "You can tempt me, as I have confessed, but you can not change my resolution. My daughter must marry Don Luis."

"Have you forgotten," demanded Ingraham, in a low, incisive tone, "that your daughter has accepted me?"

"I have already told you," was the cool reply, "that whatever she may have said on such a subject counts for nothing. In Mexico we do not allow the fancies of boys and girls to settle the most important affair of life. My daughter will obey me."

"Do not be too sure of that," said Ingraham, his restrained excitement suddenly bursting into flame. "She will not obey you, if I have any influence over her. And you are not, perhaps, aware that Don Luis has pledged himself that she shall have perfect freedom of choice. In other words, he is not ready to take her as an unwilling bride from your hand. He will join me in demanding that she shall be left at liberty to choose between us."

Don Gilberto was again silent for a moment. Then, regarding his companion steadily, he said, "I perceive that to avoid trouble, to all concerned it is necessary for me to be frank with you, Mr. Ingraham. I should have been glad to avoid this, if possible, but well, fortunately we are on a mountain-top, secure from listeners, and I must ask your word of honour to hold absolutely secret what I am about to reveal to you."

"I could not think of divulging anything which you desired to be held secret," Ingraham replied, conscious of a sense of apprehension inspired more by the manner than by the words of the other. "But I should be sorry if you were forced to disclose anything painful or disagreeable to yourself."

"I can not pretend that what I am about to disclose is not both painful and disagreeable to me," Don Gilberto answered. "I must speak of matters which I have long endeavoured to forget, in order to convince you that it is better to abide by my decision and think no more of Cármen. Once again, will you not believe that I have reasons stronger than you are aware of for refusing your proposals, and accept my resolution as unalterable?"

"Certainly not," returned Ingraham, with emphasis. "I have told you that I will accept nothing but her own decision."

Don Gilberto shrugged his shoulders. "I might have known the obstinacy of a man in love," he said. "To the point, then! You tell me that you are a man of wealth; I have myself recognised from the day of our first meeting that you are a gentleman; and these things, taken together, mean that you are at home a man of high social position. Now, such a man can not afford to marry the daughter of one who, if he returned to his native country, would be tried and convicted of offences against the law."

Ingraham gave a great start. To himself he said that he had suspected this, yet the suspicion had been so vague that the shock was overwhelming. He was incapable of speech, had opportunity for it been afforded him. But Don Gilberto quietly went on:

"It all happened a long time ago — so long that men have had time to forget me and my offences. Yet I fancy that you could find many still to recall the name of Gilbert Rose Fenton: in fact, I perceive by your face that you have heard it yourself."

"Yes, I have heard it," Ingraham answered, distinctly, although he felt as if he were speaking in a horrible dream. "When I was very young I heard your — defalcations spoken of. My father was, I think, a sufferer to some extent. But I also heard that you had committed suicide."

"I arranged matters so that it might be supposed that I had drowned myself," said the other, calmly. "I saw no good to be gained by spending my life in prison. It would not have restored the lost money, for the misuse of which I was not wholly nor even chiefly accountable, though I was the scapegoat to bear all the blame. One thing I assure you: I carried none of it away with me. I left the country with empty hands, and came to Mexico. In those days this was a *terra incognita*; no railroad had yet entered it, and I took care to go far from places where I would have been likely to meet any of the few Americans who then wandered here. A little while, however, made me so much a Mexican that I would have defied any one to detect me as a foreigner had I chosen not to be detected. Then I married, merged the identity of Fenton still more thoroughly in that of Rosa, lived altogether among Mexicans as one of themselves, and have, as a rule, avoided forming the acquaintance of my former countrymen, not so much from the fear of any awkward disclosure as from dislike to the associations which they awakened. I violated this rule when I made your acquaintance, and am now forced to regret it. At least, if you persist in giving me

trouble about C ármén, I shall regret it. But I hope that no further words on my part are necessary to demonstrate to you that it is out of the question for you to marry her."

"I do not see that," said Ingraham, facing him with eyes full of pain but also full of resolution. "What you have told me does not alter C ármén, nor yet my love for her. That you have been honourable enough to tell me your story makes me respect you as I have not respected you before. But now we will forget it. And for the rest, you need have no fear that it will cast any shade over your daughter's life. If she marries me, no one need know, no one will ever ask, more than that she is a Mexican."

"And so you are still determined to persevere in your suit!" said Don Gilberto, regarding him with a scrutiny both keen and curious. "I admire your disinterestedness, although I know human nature too well not to be aware how certainly you will live to repent it. No, Mr. Ingraham, just as I saw clearly that the risk was too great to allow you to marry C ármén in ignorance of my identity, so I tell you that I can not expose her to such a risk as you propose. I will take for granted that you are one man in a million, that you would neither regret the step should you take it, nor allow her to perceive that you regretted it. But there would still remain all the chances of discovery which lie in wait for every human secret, generally when least apprehended. I do not wish my daughter either to learn who and what I am, nor yet to be hopelessly separated from me by living in a country which I can never enter. Long ago I endeavoured to forget that it had ever been my country, long ago I identified myself with Mexico and Mexicans, and now that I have the opportunity for an alliance which will be of the greatest benefit to me here, where all my interests lie, do you think that I shall resign it for the sake of any inducement that you can offer? No, Mr. Ingraham, millionaire though you may be, I tell you once for all — No!"

He spoke with an energy which it was impossible to doubt or mistake. The two looked at each other in silence for a moment, each reading inflexible resolution in the other's face. Then said Ingraham, sternly —

"Your decision is based on ruthless selfishness. Your daughter's happiness does not enter into your consideration at all."

"My daughter's happiness does enter into my consideration," returned Don Gilberto. "Apart from what I have told you, and the dangers with which it would menace her life, she will be much happier with one of her own people than with a foreigner. I, who know her, know this."

"And I am determined that she shall decide that for herself," said Ingraham. "I go at once to demand of Don Luis the fulfilment of the promise which he gave me last night."

"Stay!" said Don Gilberto, as the speaker turned sharply away. "It is unnecessary to go to Don Luis. He has already spoken of such a pledge to me. But I did not hold myself bound by what he had promised, and I sought you, hoping that I had it in my power to induce you to hear reason and withdraw your suit. If you persist in pressing it despite my opposition, I have no alternative but to respect the wishes of Don Luis and let my daughter herself assure you whether or not she is an obedient child."

"You will not attempt to influence her by telling her what you have told me?" demanded Ingraham, with sudden apprehension.

"No," replied the other, coldly. "I shall simply tell her of the suit of Don Luis and of my wishes. That should be enough. Unless I am greatly mistaken in her, it will be enough."

"I do not think that you know very much about her," said Ingraham, remembering the transformation in the girl since her father had seen her last, the revelations of her inner, unsuspected self which she had made to him and him alone. "But let me ask a favour," he added, abruptly. "Tell her nothing of my wealth. I have no fear that such a consideration would weigh with her, but, as a proof to others of what I do not doubt, I should prefer for her to remain in ignorance of it until she has given her decision."

A quick flash as of unexpected gratification appeared in the eyes of Don Gilberto; but he replied, briefly, "It shall be as you wish. And now we had better descend."

#### XIV.

It was not until they had descended to the foot of the mountain and were entering on the road through the village that the silence which had lasted between the two men since they left the Cerro de las Cruces was broken. Then Ingraham suddenly turned to Don Gilberto.

"Have you seen your daughter since your arrival?" he asked.

"No," was the reply. "I saw only Don Luis. Afterward I went in search of you. Before meeting my daughter, I wished to decide what I should tell her."

"And after you have told her what you desire, how soon can I hope to see her?" Ingraham inquired.

"That depends upon herself," the other responded, adding, with a slightly sarcastic intonation, "She may require a little time to consider such an unprecedented event in her life as two proposals at once."

To this remark Ingraham made no reply, and silence lasted again until they were entering under the great archway of the *casa grande*, when, pausing for an instant, he said, ceremoniously, "I rely upon your kindness to let me know at what time Doña Cármen will see me," and then passed quickly on.

Don Gilberto made no effort to detain or overtake him. Probably he was glad to be relieved of the society of the man to whom he had felt forced to reveal himself. He lingered in the doorway to exchange a greeting with the *administrador*, who rose from one of the benches and had apparently not seen him before. Ingraham left them patting each other on the back, and took his way alone up the wide stairway to the second story.

As his foot touched the corridor above, a sudden longing seized him to see his picture. It was the first time that he had felt the faintest inclination to approach or look upon it since he had thrown down his brushes in the fit of disgust which had overtaken him the day before. But now, not only did the impulse of the artist rise and draw him powerfully toward it, but the passion of the lover drew him more powerfully still. It was Cármen — Cármen herself, Cármen as he alone had possessed insight enough to see her — whom he had placed on that canvas, and, failing the living Cármen, even the shadow of her would be like wine to his heart. So, without an instant's delay he went to the painting-room, which, as has already been said, was on a second court. When he reached the door, he found, to his surprise, that it was slightly ajar. It yielded noiselessly to his touch, and, entering, he beheld a sight which stayed him motionless on the threshold.

He had come to see the shadow of Cármen, and, instead, the reality was before him — the living Cármen as he had seen her when she came to him first in the *sala*, and as he had painted her day after day, while her loveliness, unknown to himself, sank into his heart and took possession of his being. Even as on that first never-to-be-forgotten day, a rich sunset radiance, thrown upon some clouds in the east, which had caught and reflected the dying splendour of the sun, filled the room, fell over the Velasquez so that the wonderful figure upon it seemed glowing with more than the tints of life, and enveloped in a golden atmosphere the same figure, transformed to breathing existence before it. For, strange to say, Cármen was arrayed in the rich robes which heretofore she had worn only for her sittings, and as she stood in front of the portrait of the Marquesa, in the same attitude, wearing the same expression of superb pride, and meeting the pictured eyes with a gaze which seemed to say, "Behold me!" the likeness between the two was more startling and more exact than Ingraham had ever before beheld it. He did not know how long he stood spellbound by the singular scene, for he could not resist the impression that some mysterious influence was passing between the picture and the girl, but when he advanced the first sound of his step roused Cármen, and she turned. As her eyes, full of brilliant light, met his, a thrill passed through him; he quickened his steps, and the next moment would, without other greeting, have taken her into his arms — had she not spoken.

But her words stopped him — her words, and an expression on her face which told him that she was absorbed in some feeling which he did not share. "Do you think me mad?" she asked, with a smile. "It is strange that I should be here alone, and in this dress. But no other seemed fitting in which to come to her with my news. I felt that I could only wear this when I came to tell her that it has come to pass that I am to fill her place."

A cold chill struck to Ingraham's heart. He put out his hand and unconsciously grasped for support the easel on which his own picture stood. And yet — so quick is thought — he had time to say to himself that it must be that he mistook her meaning, in the scarcely appreciable interval before he said —

"To fill her place! You mean—"

"Ah, I forget! It is not likely that you would know what I mean," she answered, quickly, as he paused. "You would never think of it as possible, but it is nevertheless true that Don Luis wishes me to marry him."

"C ármén!" It was a cry, half stern, half anguished, that seemed wrung from the very depths of the man's nature. "Are you indeed mad? What are Don Luis and his offer to you? Last night — can it be that you have forgotten that last night you promised to marry me?"

A change came over her face; the absorbed look passed away, and she seemed suddenly to wake to a recollection that had almost vanished. Yet the proud aspect — the very aspect of the Marquesa — did not leave her, and it was with the air and manner of a great lady, rather than of C ármén Rosa, that she spoke.

"Se ñor," she said, gravely, "you must forgive me. I had indeed forgotten. Last night seems very far away; and yet I now recall that when you spoke to me of love I promised to try and love you. I thought then that it might be that you, who have done so much for me, were destined to do more, to open the door for me into life. But I have learned since that I was mistaken. It has all had a different meaning. I was wakened, I was made to assume her very being and nature" — she looked toward the portrait — "in order that I might be fitted to take her place. And there, se ñor, is where I belong."

The simplicity and dignity of these words — the utter unconsciousness of any claim on his part, or any faithlessness toward him — rendered Ingraham for a moment speechless. To a woman who had deceived him, who had practised any guile of coquetry, above all to one who, in modern parlance, "threw him over" for a better match, he would have known well what to say. But he recognised, by an instinct too fine to mislead, that this woman was innocent of any of these things — so absolutely innocent that it did not even occur to her to defend or excuse herself. She stated the case as it appeared to her inner consciousness, and there left it with proud composure. A terrible conviction of the uselessness of protest seemed borne to him in every tone of her voice, yet to restrain appeal was impossible.

"C ármén," he cried, "how is such a change as this credible? Last night you came to me, last night you owned that it was true that you belonged to me by claims and rights which have not altered, last night you promised to love me, to go with me into the world! And now — what spell has been cast upon you, that you coolly tell me you have forgotten all this, and that you will marry Don Luis? Can it be that you love him?"

Her glance continued to meet his own, with no faltering or drooping of lids, as she answered, without an instant's hesitation —

"Last night, se ñor, I told you that I had neither thought nor known anything of what you call love. But the same feeling which makes me sure that I shall marry Don Luis makes me also sure that I shall love him."

Then Ingraham threw back his head and laughed aloud. It was not a pleasant sound as it woke the echoes of the great empty chamber, that laugh; it was, rather, a sound so harsh and mirthless as to cause a shudder. Then, turning abruptly, he walked away.

The tumult of his feelings was indescribable. The scene with Don Luis, the interview with Don Gilberto, rose before his mental vision, and he could have laughed again, in the

bitterness of his soul, at the certainty of success which had possessed him, and which he had displayed on both occasions. He had been sure that his passion held a power to rouse response — nay, that it had already roused it — and that he, and no other, was the knight who, having found and wakened, should bear away the enchanted princess. Now it appeared that his part had only been to find and waken her for the benefit of another man — which was a novel ending of the fairy-tale, that at another time might have excited a grim sense of amusement. But the sense of amusement was dormant within him at this moment. Torn by love, anger, and disappointment, he suddenly turned again and looked at Cármen from the other side of the room. The brief sunset glow was fading, but all of the radiance which remained seemed to centre and linger upon her figure — the figure which he now saw upon his own canvas not less perfectly reproduced than upon that of Velasquez — and the sight of it, of the surpassing beauty, majesty, and grace which were not to be his, although he alone had discovered them, wrung from him another passionate cry.

"Cármen," he said, as he advanced once more toward her, "you are mine! No one else has any right to you. Look at that picture by your side, the picture which is the work of my hand: must I remind you again that you are almost as much the work of my hand as it is? But for that picture, would you be standing there, regal as the Marquesa herself in your beauty, wearing her robes? Would the man who never thought of you but as a poor dependant, a drudge in his house, ever have looked at you, or recognised what you are, had I not painted it there so that even his blindness saw? And yet you would forsake me for him! Cármen, it is impossible! I will never permit it! "

"I think, se ñor," she said, with the same air of proud calmness, "that you will not be able to prevent it, for, though it is true, all that you have said of your picture, and though I am sorry to grieve you, neither of these things can change what must be. You will think me fanciful and superstitious, perhaps, but to you alone have I ever spoken of the strange influence which she" — her eyes again sought the portrait of the Marquesa — "has always exerted over me, so it may be that you will understand when I tell you that I am sure she has willed this thing, and that you have been but an instrument in bringing it about."

It is not too much to say that at this moment Ingraham would have liked nothing better than to be able to tear the priceless Velasquez from its frame and cut it into a hundred fragments. His exasperation, his sense of being baffled by an influence intangible and absurd, yet against which he could not hope to prevail, rendered him for a brief space silent. Fool that he had been, he said to himself, to forget the picture and the spell it had always thrown over the girl's fancy — a spell which he had in countless ways encouraged because it aided in developing the remarkable likeness between the dead ancestress and the living descendant. Now, like many another experimenter, he found his own experiment turned against him. The influence of the picture was now opposed to his own, and the picture triumphed. He looked at the brilliant changeless face as if it had been that of a living enemy, and, like a living enemy, it seemed with its air of disdain to mock what he suffered. "All that you have accomplished has been to deepen my hold upon the girl," it appeared to say. "Nothing that you can do will have power to loosen it." These fancies were indeed but the expression of his sense of despair. Against Don Luis alone, taken simply as a man, he might have been able to fight; but against Don Luis as the lord of Las Cruces, the one person in the world who had power to put Cármen in the place of the woman who had so long dominated her imagination, he felt that he had no arms which could avail. And yet once more he strove to produce an impression upon her.

"It is impossible," he said, "that you can be in earnest in thinking that this — this bit of canvas and paint can exercise any influence over you or your destiny! You must know that such a belief is wildest superstition. You must feel that its sole influence has lain in your own imagination, which, loving all things that your nature calls for, and finding none of them in your narrow, colourless life, dwelt persistently upon the life of this woman who, before she forfeited, possessed them all. Her story has been to you like a drama — the only one you have ever known

— and she has been the heroine of all your dreams. I, fool that I was, have deepened this feeling by painting you in her guise, by keeping her image continually before you, so that imaginations about her have wrought more deeply into your consciousness. But, for God's sake, put aside this fancy, which borders on madness, and believe that your own will, not that of a woman long dead, can make or mar your life! C ámen, I am pleading for you as well as for myself ! But for this accursed picture, and the ideas with which it has filled your mind, you would never dream of marrying Don Luis. He is old enough to be your father; he does not give you, as I do, the first passionate love of a heart which is all yours. Nor can he give you the things of the world as I can give them. I did not mean to tell you, but wealth, great wealth, is mine. Have you no idea of all that wealth can do? I speak of this, not to tempt you with mercenary considerations, but to implore you to reflect before you ignorantly close upon yourself the door of a wider life, more rich, more free, than you can even imagine. Ah!" — it was a very cry of impotent passion — "if I could but make you understand what I offer you! Above all, if you could know what depth of love — love which has stood a test greater than I ever dreamed possible — is in my heart, you would throw behind you forever your dreams of the Marquesa, and come again to my arms — as you came last night!"

With a faint, wild hope he held them out, but they sank down as he saw that he had not moved her in the least. The superb composure, which seemed to belong to her as naturally as the rich dress she wore, did not change. She still stood before him, like a beautiful picture — like the beautiful picture which he now felt he hated with all his heart — while the last rays of the dying sunset kindled her hair to brightest gold. But in her eyes gathered a softness such as they had not known before, and when she spoke her voice was very sweet as well as grave:

"For that love, se ñor, and for all else that you offer me, I thank you from my heart. I am sorry if I have disappointed, if you think that I have deceived, you. But last night I did not know. I meant all that I said to you — forgive me if I do not remember clearly what it was — but I do not think that I understood. When Don Luis came and spoke, however, ah, then I understood. Then I knew that I had been born for this — to take her place, to rule as mistress where she lived a prisoner, to be loved and trusted where she was cruelly judged. And when I speak in this manner it is not from foolish superstition. I know well that the picture is, as you say, a thing of canvas and paint. So is mine, which you have painted here; but when you look at it in the time to come, you will feel as if C ámen were before you, and it will have power to take your thoughts away from your surroundings and lead them back to this old Mexican house. And if one picture has such life, why not another? Why I should think certain thoughts and feel certain feelings when I look at that portrait, I do not know; but I could sooner doubt my existence than doubt that it is so. And besides, se ñor, the life which I have chosen is a life I understand: the knowledge of it is born in me, like the blood in my veins. But your life I should not understand. I should be with you like a plant torn from its native soil. So it is well that you go away to your own people and forget me. As for me, I shall never forget the service which you have done me, and I will remember you in my prayers when I am old, and think how different my life might have been had you not come to Las Cruces and painted my picture. But for the rest, I shall marry Don Luis. And so — *adios*, se ñor!"

"Well, Mr. Ingraham, are you satisfied?" It was the voice of Don Gilberto from the doorway out of which C ámen had passed — how long before, Ingraham did not know. He made no reply, and the speaker advanced into the room, now filled with the dusk of twilight, to discover what was the meaning of this silence and of a singular continuous sound behind the easel where Ingraham stood. When he reached the spot he uttered a great exclamation.

The picture of C ámen hung in shreds from its frame.

## PART II.

### XV.

The through train from the northern border was steadily rushing along the great plateau of Mexico, and, having left Leon behind, had entered upon the wide plain which extends southward for many a league, when one of two travellers who were seated together in the smoking-room of the Pullman remarked, as he glanced over a newspaper in his hand —

"It seems that we shall find Mexico very much *en fête* when we reach there to-morrow."

The speaker, a tall blond young man, in his clothes of London cut might by a careless glance have been taken for an Englishman, but closer observation would have perceived, beneath a superficial resemblance, certain differences — especially a greater alertness of eye and manner — which mark the American type of the transplanted Anglo-Saxon. Education and long residence abroad had, however, approximated Leslie Brooke, without any conscious attempt at imitation, very closely to that English model which it is the exceedingly conscious effort of a number of his countrymen to imitate, besides giving him a certain cosmopolitan habit of mind which was agreeably reflected in his ease of manner.

The man whom he addressed belonged evidently to a different race. Dark, slender, graceful, he would, to one unacquainted with the minor differences of national type, have passed for a native of any country of Latin Europe, but he was in fact a Mexican of Spanish blood and high social rank. Having been for some time attached to the Mexican legation in Washington, he spoke English fluently, and at once responded to the remark of his companion —

"Oh, very much so indeed. It is the inauguration of the President; and since we have seldom had the pleasure, thus far in our history, of inaugurating a President peaceably, the occasion seems to call for some brilliancy of celebration. You are fortunate in reaching Mexico just at this time."

"I am not sure of that," observed Brooke, doubtfully. "Occasions of public celebration are not always the best times for reaching a strange city. One is likely, for example, to have difficulty in securing good quarters."

"I think not," said the young Mexican. "You must not imagine that this is like the inaugurations in Washington, when a vast crowd from the provinces flock to the capital. There will be no such rush of people to Mexico. A few notables from the different States will come — a few governors and generals — but no one else. The people are indifferent, for you must remember that the election of a President with us does not, as with you, represent the triumph of a party after a heated popular contest, but rather the result of a triumph that was won years ago on the battle-field, and which is therefore regarded as entirely a foregone conclusion."

"A diplomatic way of stating that as a popular election it is a farce," said the American, smiling.

"But, one is inclined to ask, why the farce? Why should not General Diaz declare himself dictator for life, and so dispense with a recurring form of election that means nothing?"

"Because forms are useful," replied the other, sententiously. "If General Diaz proclaimed himself dictator, he would at once have a revolution on his hands. The people might not care, but his rivals for power would, and he is not likely to be guilty of the folly of putting a weapon into their hands. But instead of discussing the political system of our country, let me ask if your friend and yourself would not like to attend the ball which will be given in honour of the President to-morrow night. I have hastened my journey in order to reach Mexico in time for it, and I can easily obtain cards for you if you care to attend."

"Thanks, you are very kind," responded Brooke, who was still young enough to find the suggestion of a ball attractive. "I shall be delighted to do so, but I can't answer for my friend, who



is rather *blas é* with regard to balls, as in fact to most matters. But here he comes to answer for himself."

At the door of the smoking-room there indeed appeared at this moment a man of very quiet and unassuming aspect, but in whom a person of fine perception would have detected unmistakable signs of distinction. A certain repose of manner, without the faintest shade of self-assertion, spoke of the confidence of assured position and the habit of receiving from others a consideration which it was not necessary to claim, while his face possessed in striking degree the charm of refinement and intelligence, and the clear gray eyes had the penetrating regard of one who was an artist, a thinker, and perhaps somewhat of a dreamer besides. There had been a time when, despite the fact that Fortune had made him so rich a man that he was deprived of the most common and potent of all incentives to exertion, Ralph Ingraham had seemed to take as much interest in the pursuit of art as if his prospect of daily bread hung upon the success of his labours. But this ardour — as was only to be expected, people said — had completely died out. He, who once appeared to like nothing better than to see life with the eyes of a painter and to wander through strange lands with his easel and white umbrella as unpretendingly as any vagrant son of the Bohemia he loved, had suddenly thrown art aside, as if it were but a toy of fancy instead of a noble and lasting reality, and if he had touched brush or pencil for several years past no one was aware of the fact. At present he had just returned to America from a long sojourn in Europe, and it was owing to the eager solicitation of his friend Leslie Brooke — for friends they were, although on a basis of mutual toleration rather than mutual sympathy — that he had consented to accompany the latter to Mexico. At least he told Brooke, and perhaps himself, that this was the case. But deep in his inner consciousness he knew that there were other causes drawing him back to this land, which possessed associations for him the lasting strength and reality of which he had a passionate desire to test.

Catching Brooke's last words above the rattle of the train, he looked at that gentleman inquiringly as he dropped into a seat. "What is it that I have come in time to answer?" he asked.

"Whether you care to attend a ball to be given in Mexico to-morrow night in honour of the inauguration of President Diaz," Brooke replied. "Se ñor Rivera offers to procure invitations for us."

"Se ñor Rivera is most kind," said Ingraham with a ceremonious inclination toward the young Mexican. "Since you have a strong desire to see something of social life in Mexico, I presume that you have accepted his offer without hesitation."

"For myself, yes," Brooke returned. "But I was remarking as you entered that I could not answer for you, as you have developed a great capacity of being bored by social functions."

"Generally speaking, true," Ingraham assented. "But in this instance I think it possible that I might not be bored, since my acquaintances in Mexico are few, and I should only be a looker-on, pleasing my eyes by a brilliant spectacle as long as it amused me, and at liberty to retire when it ceased to do so."

"There would be no necessity, apart from your inclination, why you should be only a looker-on," observed Se ñor Rivera, with a greater deference of manner than he had exhibited in talking to Brooke. "It would give me great pleasure to present you to the best people of Mexico. In offering cards of invitation to Mr. Brooke, I had no intention of limiting my services merely to that."

Again Ingraham bowed. "You recall to me, se ñor," he said, "the many acts of courtesy which I experienced in my former visit to your country. I perceive that it is only necessary to re-enter Mexico in order to experience the same courtesy again. It would be churlish to decline your kindness. We shall be happy to accept the friendly services which I am aware that you are so well qualified to render."

"I have certainly the pleasure of knowing everybody in Mexico worth knowing," said the young *attach é* twisting the upward-curling ends of his carefully tended moustache with a slight

air of coxcombrity. "It is true that I have been out of the country for several years, but society with us changes little. The families which hold social supremacy are always the same."

"When I was in Mexico several years ago," said Ingraham, in a reminiscent manner, "I chanced to meet the representative of one of your old families — Don Luis Fernandez del Valle, of Michoacan. Do you know him?"

"Every one knows the Fernandez del Valle," replied Rivera. "They are one of the oldest families in the country. But they suffered great losses in the revolutions, and Don Luis has buried himself for years on his hacienda in Michoacan."

"It was at his hacienda that I met him," said Ingraham. "He proved himself a very gracious host as well as fine gentleman. At that time I heard that he had political aspirations, had been to Mexico and, it was understood, offered his support to the ruling powers. I fancied he would have held some official position before this."

"Now that you speak of it," said the other, knitting his dark, slender brows with an effort of recollection, "I recall having heard something of the same kind; but these things come to one's ears vaguely when one is far from home. Ah!" — he made a sudden exclamation — "how could I forget! Don Luis Fernandez del Valle is at this time Senator from Michoacan. I now remember perfectly the announcement."

"He is then in Mexico at the present time?"

"Most probably; I should think Certainly."

"Ah!" said Ingraham. His interest in the subject seemed to end at this point. He turned his head and gazed meditatively through the window beside him, appearing to become absorbed in contemplation of the scene without.

It was a scene which might well have absorbed the attention of any one. Upon the altar of the west a gorgeous sunset flamed like a sacrificial fire — a bed of deepest crimson, flecked and dashed with burning gold — from which a great radiance flowed over the wide plain, bounded on each side by mountains that in the transfiguring glow became as dream-like heights of carven amethyst. The vast stretch of verdant land, the feathery trees, the glimpses here and there of shining water, and the groups passing along the white, level roads — sandalled, *zarape*-draped men, veiled women riding *burros*, great wooden carts drawn by oxen, horsemen who looked as if they had ridden booted and spurred out of a romance — all were bathed in a flood of light which pervaded the whole atmosphere and lent to the picture an almost unearthly charm. It was a typical Mexican scene, and while Ingraham gazed he felt as if all intervening memories rolled away, and as if it had been but yesterday that his eyes rested on these vast plains which suggest all the primitive drama of human history, where the harvests of the world might be reaped, or the armies of the world marshalled, on these majestic sierras, so heavenly in the beauty of their distant tints, so rugged and full of awe when approached, on these walled towns with their towers of slender grace and Oriental domes, standing against an exquisite background of violet hills, on these idyllic stretches of field and pasture, and the figures full of picturesque colour which move across them. All these things appeared to him as they must appear to every one who, having seen them once, returns after long absence to this land, which is unchanging as the changeless East, like things familiar as the memories of infancy — familiar, too, not from personal observation alone, but because they touch subtle chords of association with all that we have unconsciously dreamed of the history and poetry of the past.

The associations that dwelt for Ingraham in every line of the scene were, however, stronger even than this. For what he saw was not so much the sunset-steeped plain and purple mountains that lay before his actual vision, as the fortress-like walls of an ancient house, its courts, corridors, rooms — a sudden flood of radiance upon a picture every line and tint of which rose before him as if burned into his memory, and a girl in an antique costume, yet fresh in her beauty as an opening rose, standing before the portrait, as if its original had been restored to life after long centuries of death. It is impossible to conceive any reality of the present more vivid than this recollection of the past was to him, as he looked out over the Mexican hills and plains.

And yet he had dreamed that this memory had lost its keenness with the lapse of time, and that the episode in his life which it recalled, overlaid by later interests, had grown dim! But, whether "desperately wicked" or not, there is surely nothing on earth more deceitful than the human heart. Who has not fondly imagined that he had forgotten or lived down some past pain, until, roused by a chance touch into vivid life again, it has proved as powerful to wound as in the first dark hour of agony? So it was with Ingraham now. The edifice of forgetfulness in which he had fancied himself secure, dropped around him like a shattered house of cards, and the awakened past seized upon him again with a force which startled and dismayed him. "My God!" he said to himself, as one who is face to face with a reality which can not be evaded, "have I forgotten nothing? Is that folly never to be lived down? Then it is well that I have come back. When memory is so persistent, there is but one heroic cure — to bring it in contact with reality. Only so can one learn how much of what assumes to be memory is but imagination. For I might believe that there was some infernal magic in that picture, so strong is the spell that, through it, has been cast upon me, if I did not know that the chief spell is in my own fancy. But I am aware of the tricks my fancy can play, and I have long been sure that it was tricking me then, as it is tricking me now in this insane folly of remembrance. I must prove this to myself beyond a possibility of doubt, and there is only one way of proving it — to see again, at any cost, the woman who has bewitched me. When I see her, when I learn, as I surely shall learn, of what commonplace material is formed the creature who seemed to me so wonderful, the phantom of my imagination will drop down dead and trouble me no more. It is a remedy which has never failed; and I am confident that it will not fail me now."

## XVI.

"Upon my word," said Leslie Brooke, in a tone of mingled surprise and admiration, "this is very brilliant! One might fancy one's self at a state ball in Europe. How well these people seem to understand doing this sort of thing!"

"And how well these fine old Mexican buildings lend themselves to decoration!" said Ingraham, as he glanced around the stately ball-room into which the great court of the ancient custom-house had been transformed, and which, with its draperies, paintings, and masses of tropical plants, its floods of light and perfume and flowers, made an effective setting for the brilliant throng that filled it — an exceedingly well-dressed and well-mannered throng, as Brooke did not fail to observe with his quick and socially practised eye. The hour was late, the Presidential party had arrived, and the dancing was well under way, while the air seemed pulsating with the floods of music that rose and fell unceasingly from the two orchestras that played alternately.

Pausing near one of the massive columns which, emblazoned with the names of the battles won by General Diaz, surrounded the apartment, the two strangers stood for some time watching the gay scene with an interest which for Brooke at least was quickened by its novelty, when their late travelling companion suddenly appeared beside them.

"At last!" he cried. "I have been looking for you for an hour. But the crowd is so great it is difficult to find any one. You wish to dance, of course. I shall be happy to introduce you to partners. I have already obtained permission from several ladies to introduce to them two distinguished Americans."

"One distinguished American will be happy to profit by your kindness, I am sure," said Ingraham. "But I must beg you to excuse me. I seldom dance, and never in a crowd. I am sufficiently amused in looking on."

"But if you do not desire to dance you will wish to meet some of our noted people," said the friendly *attaché*. "This is an excellent opportunity to do so. I will present you to any one

whom you care to know — the President, the ministers, any of our distinguished generals, or any of the beautiful women, of whom there are many present."

"My eyes assure me of that fact," replied Ingraham, gallantly; "but, for the present at least, I am satisfied with admiring both beauty and valour from a distance. Later, perhaps—"

He paused abruptly, and so sudden and great a change came over his face that his two companions could only regard him for a moment with surprise, while he stood motionless as if transfixed, staring before him with the intent gaze of one who is struck by the appearance of some object equally unexpected and startling. Both men instinctively followed the direction of his eyes with their own, and both forgot him at once, as their glance fell upon the person who had evidently produced so strong an effect upon him.

It was a woman of the most striking beauty, who, leaning upon the arm of a tall and stately man, was crossing at that moment the open space in the centre of the floor. The crowd seemed to fall away on each side, as if voluntarily yielding such homage as is paid to royalty to one so royal of aspect, and so royal, too, in manner; for, except among those who from infancy have been accustomed to be centres of observation whenever and wherever they appear, it would be difficult to find such superb composure of bearing as distinguished this woman who now walked like an empress across the crowded room. Those who were able to turn their attention from the beauty of her face, with its large dark eyes and crown of golden hair, were struck by the fashion of her dress, which, even in a day of revived antiquities, was strikingly picturesque, as well as magnificent, and had either been designed by a consummate artist in costume or copied closely from some ancient picture, with only such modifications as later fashion demanded. The rich brocade, the rare old lace and shining jewels of which it was composed, made an incomparable frame for a loveliness that seemed also a revival of the past in its distinction and perfection. A low, irrepressible murmur of admiration and inquiry was heard on all sides. "Who is she?" those who did not know asked wonderingly of others. Brooke, turning to Rivera, repeated the same question.

"What an astonishingly beautiful woman!" he exclaimed. "Who is she?"

It was a moment before Rivera, gazing in curiously compounded surprise and admiration, replied. Then, "I have no idea," he said. "I never saw her before, but that is General Herrera she is with. She must be a stranger; some foreigner of rank, perhaps. She can not be a Mexican of any position, and of such appearance, and I not know her."

"She is, however, a Mexican," said Ingraham, speaking very quietly. "She is the wife of Don Luis Fernández del Valle."

"Ah!" ejaculated the young man, drawing in his breath with a quick sound as if of a suddenly enlightened intelligence. "That explains it. I have heard that Don Luis married some one obscure and unknown, but of marvellous beauty. And it is true. She is of a most marvellous beauty."

"She is like a Titian or Velasquez picture," said Brooke. "There is nothing modern about her. She has not only the general features and colouring, but she has 'the grand air' — that air which all those portraits possess, and which I have never seen in equal degree in a living woman."

"It is the setting of the head upon the neck, the grace and loveliness of the lines of the shoulders, that give such a majesty of bearing," said Rivera, critically. "And her costume — which is one of the most beautiful in the room — produces in a degree the effect of which you speak."

"No," said Brooke. "Her costume accords perfectly with her appearance, but does not produce it. I have never seen a more striking instance of the revival of a type. Here is Ingraham, who is an artist. Ask him if I am not right."

"Perfectly right," replied Ingraham, with a calmness which gave little insight into the tumult of his thoughts.

And that they should have been in tumult was not strange, for he had not only seen again with startling unexpectedness the woman whose hold upon his imagination had never relaxed

since the old days at Las Cruces, but he had also seen, not the C á rmen whom he had then painted, but the Marquesa of the Velasquez portrait — the Marquesa more wonderfully revived into new and vivid life than ever he had imagined to be possible. Striking as the resemblance between the two had been in the past, there had also been an unlikeness which he was successful enough to bring out upon his canvas — the unlikeness of a girl whose deeper experiences of life were yet to come and a woman who had sounded the depths of all that life could give, and in whose eyes there dwelt a great and imperious disdain for the power which had wearied and the passion which had betrayed. The man whose keen glance first perceived both the likeness and the unlikeness now saw as clearly that the unlikeness had diminished and the likeness grown closer and deeper since he looked his last upon the girl standing in the sunset light, clad in the dead woman's dress, before her portrait. It was not C á rmen but the portrait which he beheld now, not only, as then, line for line and tint for tint of physical resemblance, but with the deeper spiritual likeness so much developed that its effect was almost to appall him. For as he gazed there returned to him the old thrill of superstition, of something that touched upon the borders of mystery too deep for even conjecture to pierce. He recalled C á rmen's wild, persistent fancy that some influence projected from the portrait or bequeathed by the original fashioned and moulded her, whether she would or no, and he remembered also how the same influence had seemed to fall upon himself when he first looked upon that picture of which the living copy now passed before him.

He was roused from these thoughts by Rivera, who was observing him rather curiously. "Since Mr. Ingraham knows Don Luis Fern á ndez del Valle," he said, "I infer that he is also acquainted with this lady."

"I had the pleasure of knowing her before she became the wife of Don Luis," Ingraham replied. "But since her marriage I have never seen her until to-night."

"But you will of course lose no time in renewing your acquaintance with her," suggested Brooke, "and in asking permission to present a friend — Se ñ or Rivera will probably not object if I say two friends?"

"On the contrary, I shall be deeply indebted if Mr. Ingraham will be good enough to present me," Rivera answered.

But Ingraham did not evince any disposition to make himself of service to his friends in the manner thus frankly indicated. To approach here, in this garish ball-room filled with strains of music and tread of dancers, the woman with whom he had parted in the deepening twilight of Las Cruces with words of despairing appeal, was, he felt, an impossibility, a jarring discordance too great to be encountered. With a shade of stiffness, he said —

"I have no intention of recalling myself to the recollection of this lady. I knew her under very different circumstances, and it is possible that she might not desire to recognise me, now that she is transformed into a *grande dame*."

"You must have played a very modest role in your acquaintance with her, if she could possibly fancy herself too much elevated to recognise you," said Rivera, smiling; "although it is true that sudden elevations have very often the effect of turning the heads of those who experience them."

"You misunderstand me," said Ingraham, a little haughtily. "Do ñ a C á rmen, I am sure, suffers from no such intoxication. When I knew her she was a young, unformed girl, in an obscure social position— although, as you are probably aware, she is connected by blood with the Fernandez del Valle — but even then one who was not blind could plainly perceive that Nature had fitted her for a different part in life. She only knew me, however, as a wandering painter, and might readily think me presumptuous in claiming her acquaintance."

"Then the sooner she is undeceived and learns who Mr. Ingraham is, the better," observed Rivera. "And, as it chances, here comes Don Luis Fernandez del Valle himself: I think I understood you to say that you know him quite well?"

It seemed fate that took the matter out of Ingraham's hands. It was indeed Don Luis, handsome and distinguished as of old, who advanced directly toward them, at the moment.

Seeing that to avoid the meeting was impossible, Ingraham, calling to his aid the self-command that at a critical juncture rarely failed him, stepped forward and greeted his former host.

There was not an instant's hesitation or constraint on the part of the Mexican. He looked surprised but sincerely pleased, and returned the greeting with the utmost cordiality.

"Se ñor Ingraham!" he exclaimed. "This is an unexpected pleasure! I was not aware that you were in Mexico."

"I have only arrived to-day," Ingraham replied. "It is my first return to the country since my visit to Las Cruces. After several years in Europe, I have come back to see if Mexico has lost any of its charm by comparison with the older lands."

"Since you have so recently arrived, it is too early to ask whether or not you find the charm diminished," said Don Luis. "You will at least discover little change."

"It is possible change that one has most to fear in Mexico," said Ingraham. "And that holds true in all lands of one's friends when one returns after long absence. Your family, se ñor, I hope, that they are well?"

"A thousand thanks, they are all very well. My mother, with the older children, is at Las Cruces; but I am at present residing in Mexico, with my wife — you are aware that I am married to Do ña C ármén Rosa?"

If that ancient rivalry which ended in victory so complete for Don Luis found any expression in these words, the finest observation could not have detected it. Nor was the least trace of such recollection apparent in the composure of Ingraham's reply:

"I hope that it is not too late to offer my congratulations. I had the pleasure of seeing Do ña C ármén a moment ago, as she passed across the room. But permit me, Se ñor, to present to you my friend Mr. Brooke, who has accompanied me to Mexico. Se ñor Rivera, who is attached to your legation at Washington, you probably already know."

"For myself personally," said Rivera, bowing, "I can not claim recognition from Se ñor Fernandez del Valle, but my father and brothers are, I believe, known to him."

"You are Don Alfredo," said Don Luis, extending his hand. "Your family are well known to me, and yourself by name. Mr. Brooke, I am happy to make your acquaintance, and trust that you may like our country as well as your friend Se ñor Ingraham likes it. And now" — addressing the latter — "will you not come and renew your acquaintance with my wife, who will be pleased to see one whom we have so much reason to hold in remembrance and regard?"

If Ingraham smiled with the old, familiar sense of somewhat grim amusement at these words and the recollection of a peculiar indebtedness to himself which they implied, no one perceived the slight play of his lips as he replied that nothing would give him more pleasure than to pay his respects to Do ña C ármén.

## XVII.

It was as one in a dream that Ingraham found himself approaching C ármén. He had so long endeavoured to reason himself into a belief that the strange witchery which had taken possession of him during his sojourn at Las Cruces had been in great if not in chief degree the effect of his own imagination, that it was nothing less than a shock to behold absolute proof of the reality of all he had seen and felt during that unforgettable episode. One sight of C ármén had been enough to convince him that his imagination, great as he knew its power to be, had not played him any trick. It had not exaggerated her singular beauty, its wonderful resemblance to the Velasquez portrait, nor its power over himself. Of the last especially he had immediate evidence in the remembered thrill which he had first known when standing before the portrait of the Marquesa in the sola at Las Cruces.

Was it part of the old spell, or only due to the new perception of her deepened likeness to the portrait, that he felt as if he were approaching the Marquesa rather than C ámen, as he crossed the ball-room by the side of Don Luis, with Brooke and Rivera following, toward the spot where, like a queen holding her court, stood the beautiful woman whose appearance was the sensation of the evening, surrounded by a group of men of the highest social and political rank?

The group fell back a little as Don Luis drew near and, addressing his wife, said, "Carmencita, I bring you an old friend."

There was no need to say more, nor, in truth, so much, for no sooner had her eyes fallen upon Ingraham than there came into them a great light of pleasure and kindness — the kindness, absolutely unfeignable, of friendly recollection. She made a quick movement forward, and Ingraham forgot the Marquesa in the charm which emanated from herself — such a gracious and noble charm of manner and speech as only a few women possess.

"Don Rafael!" she cried, using the old name with an inflection of delight in her voice. "*Que felicidad!* It gladdens me much to see you, Se ñor. We did not know you were in Mexico."

"It is but to-day that I am arrived, se ñora," Ingraham repeated, bowing over her hand, with a consciousness of relief. It was more than he had expected to be so frankly and cordially met and placed at once upon the unquestioned footing of an old friend, for it had not been merely an excuse when he said to Rivera that she might not care to meet again one who had known her in former obscurity, and, he might have added, to whom she owed her changed position. It is, unfortunately, not necessary to be a misanthrope in order to be aware that the last persons whom prosperity generally desires to see are the witnesses of past adversity; and this Ingraham felt might be peculiarly so in his case, since there was no claim of ancient acquaintance or friendship to lessen the remembrance of his association with the transformation period of her life. That any self-reproach for the part she had acted might add to this possible reluctance to meet him, he did not, however, for a moment imagine. He too thoroughly appreciated the fact that no such sentiment had ever entered or could possibly enter her mind. She had never comprehended that she stood in any attitude toward him that called for excuse or self-reproach. This he knew well, and, knowing it, entertained no sense of injury for what he had long since clearly recognised as an inevitable result. But whether C ámen, wife of Don Luis, lady of Las Cruces, and reigning beauty, would care to meet the painter who had first seen beneath her humble *rebozo* the likeness which made her what she now was, he had conceived to be very doubtful, until the spontaneous warmth of her welcome set all doubts at rest. No; there was no petty desire to forget and ignore the past here, no turning away from the sense of obligation, but rather a quick acknowledgment which spoke eloquently of a nature at once noble and sweet.

These were the thoughts passing through his mind and justifying him in his past judgment of this woman, while he said a few words in explanation of his presence in Mexico, and then drew back that Brooke and Rivera might be presented by Don Luis. And, watching C ámen as she received them, he was forcibly struck by her manner, which could have been no more full of fine self-possession, of a stateliness a little grave perhaps for one so young, but perfect nevertheless, had she been indeed that Marquesa whom Velasquez painted, and who bore in her veins some of the proudest blood in Spain. A sudden recollection of Don Gilberto crossed Ingraham's mind, just as a young lady flushed by dancing into singularly animated loveliness came up on her partner's arm.

"Ah, In écita," said Don Luis, turning to her, "there is no need to ask if you are enjoying the evening. But you come in time to meet one of whom you have often heard us speak. This is Se ñor Ingraham — or Don Rafael, as we knew him at Las Cruces — with whom thy father is well acquainted. And this, Se ñor Ingraham, is my sister-in-law, the Se ñorita Do ña Ines Rosa."

As Ingraham bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction, he said to himself that it was no wonder the thought of Don Gilberto had come into his mind even before he was conscious that his eyes had fallen upon this girl who was so much like him. But the likeness did not prevent the Se ñorita from being enchantingly pretty. It was a prettiness that contained no trace of

resemblance to her sister's splendid beauty, but which possessed a quality of seductiveness peculiar to itself, and a picturesqueness as great as that of a gypsy. Her slightly parted lips of vivid scarlet showed pearl-white teeth, the flush on her cheeks was like the tint of the pomegranate, her dark eyes were shining with pleasure under their sweeping lashes and beneath the perfectly pencilled brows, while her dark, clustering, curling hair gave her small head the look of a Psyche. In fact, there was something Psyche-like about her altogether, a childlike joyousness, an air of absolute irrepressibility, which made Ingraham, whose perceptions and instincts often surprised himself by their keenness, think, "Here is a creature the sole end and aim of whose life is pleasure, and who to secure what she desires at the moment would without hesitation, although also without malice, sacrifice her best friend."

Such natures, however, possess an attraction which graver and more serious characters, weighted with the moral sense in which they are deficient, often lack, and Ingraham could not fail to perceive this charm, this indefinable seductiveness, in Ines, as she lifted her eyes, brimming with light, to his.

"I have often heard of you, *se ñor*," she said. "Carmencita and my papa have both talked much of you. I am very glad to see you at last."

"I reciprocate the sentiment, *Se ñorita*," replied Ingraham, smiling. "But there is the difference that while your satisfaction in seeing me is, I fear, only a question of gratified curiosity, it could never be other than a pleasure under any circumstances to see you."

"You surprise me, *se ñor*!" she cried, lifting her dark, perfect brows. "I did not imagine that *los Americanos* ever said things like that — pleasant, graceful things that one likes to hear whether they are exactly true or not. My papa is an *Americano*, as you are aware, and I have always understood from him that his countrymen are — how is it you say? — very literal, very exact, ready to swear to every word they utter."

"Your papa, *se ñorita*, is too complimentary to his countrymen," answered Ingraham. "Some of them are, I regret to say, by no means so scrupulously exact in their sentiments. But how is my old friend Don Gilberto?"

"Very well, *se ñor*, *muchas gracias*. After your going," she continued, lowering her voice a little, "we had much good luck. Besides Carmencita's marriage, papa sold the mine of La Luz, of which no doubt you heard him talk, for a great deal of money. He has often said that it was you who brought him the good fortune."

"That was very kind of him," said Ingraham, a little dryly, "and somewhat unlike the usual way of the world, which is to quickly forget the bringers of good fortune; although I can not flatter myself that I had in reality anything to do with Don Gilberto's luck. But I have a friend here, another truth-telling *Americano*, who I perceive desires much to be presented to you, if you will allow me—"

Brooke was indeed making telegraphic signals to that effect. Cármen's attention being just then absorbed by Rivera, and the appearance of Ines having at once attracted the young man's appreciative eye. That young lady according gracious permission, the introduction was duly made, the usual request for a dance was followed by some consultation of a ball-book, and then the two figures vanished in the throng, leaving Ingraham to turn again toward Cármen.

The movement proved to be favourable. Rivera was in the act of bowing himself away, in order to fulfil an engagement, the other members of the group lately surrounding her had for the present disappeared, and Ingraham, seeing his opportunity, grasped it with promptitude. Glancing around, he perceived in a recess at a little distance a vacant seat, partially sheltered by broad-leaved plants, and, offering his arm, begged permission to conduct her to it.

"For I think," he said, with a composure which surprised himself, "that I may claim the privilege of an old friend to inquire somewhat at leisure how life has gone with you since we parted."

She took his arm without hesitation. "It will give me pleasure to tell you anything you wish to know," she answered, with the same air of fully recognising his claim upon her friendship



with which she had greeted him. "A few minutes of quiet will be pleasant, and this place is not so secluded that Ines can not find me."

"The appearance of your sister surprised me," he said, as they sat down. "I don't know why it should, except that, having never seen any of your family, I have always thought of you as a being apart from such ties."

"As simply a re-embodiment of the Marquesa?" she asked, with a quickly flashing smile. But, although she smiled, it was evident that the words were not altogether a jest with her. "We were many at home," she added: "that was why you found me at Las Cruces. And Ines was the favourite of mamma — she was so bright and pretty, and I so quiet always."

"The sisters of Cinderella are not the only persons in human history who have occasionally been surprised by the recognition of modest merit," observed Ingraham, with a certain sense of amusement in the thought of what the surprise of Doña Josefa Valdez must have been when the child she had fancied only fit to be drudge and dependant at Las Cruces achieved such unexpected elevation.

"Tell me," he continued, suddenly, yielding to an irresistible impulse to use this opportunity to satisfy in some degree at least the curiosity which tormented him concerning her, "has your life since your marriage been happy? I am not speaking of Don Luis, nor with reference to him, but of others. It was a hard position: have you conquered it?"

She looked at him, and he could not but think that in the depths of her splendid eyes there dwelt a power to conquer anything.

"I understand what you mean," she replied, quietly, "but I had no difficulty: all was easy. No doubt you think this strange, and I suppose it was strange that those who had known me as little more than a servant — merely Carmencita, so insignificant and so humble — should have yielded me respect and submitted to my authority when I was made the mistress of Las Cruces. I can only tell you that it was so."

"I think I comprehend why it was so," said Ingraham. "There are others besides those who sit on thrones born to rule by right divine. You were born with a fitness so peculiar for the position into which you stepped, that no one could fail to recognise it. It has not needed what I have seen to-night to tell me that others besides those at Las Cruces have recognised that the homage and power you once instinctively craved, and the longing for which was an impulse and demand of your nature that you could not stifle, are yours in fullest degree. Have they satisfied you?"

"What is it to be satisfied, señor?" she inquired, in turn, with the same calmness she had already displayed. "I have not asked myself the question. These things of which you speak — homage, consideration, flattery — have come to me as natural consequences of my position. They have seemed as much a part of my life as the air I breathe, and I give them no more thought. But if they were withdrawn I can not doubt that I should miss them; for it is impossible to deny that homage pleases, and that the sense of power is sweet."

For a moment Ingraham did not reply, so much was he surprised by the candour of her speech, and the glimpse she so unhesitatingly afforded him of a nature which seemed to him hardly less interesting under these changed circumstances than it had seemed when first revealed to him in the old days at Las Cruces. An impulse to probe the depths of this character which retained in the midst of the world, as in the cloister-like seclusion of her youth, its singular unlikeness to others, stirred strongly within him, a desire to learn more of how the change in her outward life had affected that inner life which in the former time had been so unsuspected by those among whom she lived.

"It is more than I could have hoped," he said, at length, "that you would be so frank with me. Your kindness encourages me to ask yet another question."

"Ask what you will," she said, again. "Do you think I ever forget that but for you I should still be what you found me? Nothing that I could do would be too great to repay what I owe to

you. And why should I not speak to you frankly — you, who alone understand things which I would despair of making any one else comprehend?"

"It is of these things I wish to speak," replied Ingraham. "But let me say first that you owe me nothing for the part I played in the past. Was it merit of mine that I had eyes where others were blind? But because I possessed your confidence then, and because I do not think I am unworthy of it now, I venture to ask how much of your old feeling or fancy about the Marquesa still survives."

She looked at him for an instant in silence, not as if hesitating or doubtful, but only as if considering how to make her reply most clear. And again the startling likeness which she bore to the picture struck upon his senses with a perception so vivid that he was prepared for her answer when it came.

"Since you have asked the question, Señor," she said, "I will tell you all with absolute frankness. Since the day that I became the wife of Don Luis, it is as if Cármen Rosa died, and my thoughts and feelings have been those of the Marquesa rather than of myself. By which I mean — for I fear that I express myself obscurely — those which would be natural for the Marquesa instead of for the Cármen that you knew. There has no longer been any sense of struggle between what I appeared and what I felt. All has been natural and easy. And indeed how else is it possible to explain that I have never for a day or an hour been at fault in a position which might naturally have been supposed to be so strange to me? — that I have never failed to know instinctively how to act and what to say in any emergency of my new life?"

"It was because your nature — by what mystery of inheritance transmitted to you, God only knows — fitted you for your new life as for a thing in perfect harmony," Ingraham answered. "Who could look at you and wonder that you should not be at fault in it? You are—"

Here he paused. How could he speak of that deepened likeness to the portrait of the woman whose image, he perceived, still retained such power over Cármen's imagination — a likeness that had always seemed to him fraught with a suggestion of prophecy of misfortune? If no one else had perceived it — and it was not likely that any one else had — why should he, with his unerring artist eye, again call attention to what others had no power to see? He resolved that he would not do so; and it was in this brief pause — filled by the cadenced rise and fall of the music, and accented by the swaying, circling forms of the dancing throng before them — that he was conscious of a sensation as if he had been brought over land and sea to take up again the broken thread of the story which he had fancied dropped forever in the twilight at Las Cruces. This, he said to himself afterward, was no doubt because their conversation had reverted to the old topic, so full of mystery and fascination; for what part could he have yet to play in the existence of this woman who so explicitly declared that all her longings and desires were rounded into complete harmony with her life? But it was easier to ask this question afterward than to resist the strong impression borne to him as he sat by her side — for the moment as much alone in the brilliant ball-room as in the quiet garden of Las Cruces — the impression which made him say what his cooler sense later condemned as melodramatic and absurd.

"You spoke a moment ago," he said, hurriedly — for he caught a glimpse of Brooke's tall head above the crowd, and feared he was seeking them — "of owing me a debt of gratitude because from my visit to Las Cruces, from my seeing what those around you were too blind to perceive, the great change in your destiny has resulted. I repeat again that for this you owe me nothing, since in all the matter I was but an instrument of fate; and I hope that your life may be too happy for you ever to regret the change which, nevertheless, but for me might never have been wrought. Yet if a time should come when you should regret this change and need — who knows! — a friend or defender, then remember that you have a right to call upon one who, however unwittingly, altered the whole course of your life — to ask of me any service which a man may render. Will you remember this? "

She regarded him now with wonder, untouched, however, by any shade of displeasure, as if she, too, felt that the strange past gave him a right to speak so of the unknown future.

"Se ñor," she said, gravely, " I will remember it if you desire, as a proof of your kindness and readiness to serve me. But I can think of nothing less likely than that I shall ever call upon you. While my husband lives I have no need of other friend or defender."

"That may be so," he answered, "and God grant it! But should any need in which another man may have power to serve you spring out of the great change wrought through me, then remember that it is my right to be that man. Now forgive me for having startled you by speaking of these things — and here comes your sister."

## XVIII.

It was as they sat over their late breakfast the next morning, discussing the events of the ball, that Brooke expressed himself enthusiastically with regard to Inés.

"Not to be mentioned in comparison with her sister!" he said, repeating Ingraham's somewhat scornful words. "Perhaps not. But it is the grand style, that of the sister — stately, superb, marvellously beautiful, a picture stepped into life, a great lady of the past revived, a princess, if you will, made to be worshipped from afar, while that of Doña Inés is enchanting, sparkling, seductive. The mingling of blood — for she tells me that her father is an American — is very evident in her. She has all the alluring charm of the Mexican beauty, with the quick intelligence and frankness of manner of an American girl, which makes a delightful combination."

"H'm!" said Ingraham. "However delightful it may be, I am not sure of the desirableness of the combination. Doña Ines will soon be regarded very much askance if she displays any American frankness of manner in Mexico."

"So she says. She told me that her liking for American manners, and her disposition to practise them, had already brought disagreeable criticism upon her. She admires the freedom which women enjoy in our country, and declares that her dream is some day to go and live in the States."

"She has been very confidential, it appears," said Ingraham. "My dear fellow; it would be absurd for me to assume the *rôle* of Mentor, but you must allow me to observe that the woman who chafes against social restraints in one country would hardly find any country in which they were lax enough to satisfy her — not even the most socially primitive regions of our highly favoured land."

"But, by Jove! it *is* hard on a girl with any ideas of liberty to be bound hand and foot as they are here!" exclaimed Brooke, feelingly. "I never thought of it until Doña Ines was talking."

"And then you were fired with the spirit of a knight-errant to rescue the imprisoned damsel! Bah! Don't you understand that, with the unfailing instinct of a coquette, Doña Inés was talking simply with a view to arouse your interest? I doubt if she has ever thought of chafing against the social restraints which she has known since she was born, and which here, as in Europe, are relaxed only among the lower orders. The last thing she would really desire would be to sink to the level of those for whom such restraints are not considered necessary; and the daughters of Don Gilberto Rosa, in time past at least, have been near enough to that level to cling eagerly and tenaciously to the restraints imposed on those of higher social rank. Therefore, with due regard to her charming seductiveness, I find the complaints of Doña Inés somewhat insincere."

"But who is this father of hers?" asked Brooke, curiously. "'Don Gilberto Rosa' does not sound very like an American name."

"Are you not aware that foreigners residing in this country generally use the Spanish form for a part at least of their names? John Jones, for example, ceases to be John and becomes Juan Jones, familiarly and picturesquely known as Don Juan. So Gilberto Rosa stands for Gilbert Rose, in plain English."

"Gilbert Rose! That means nothing," said Brooke, while Ingraham reflected how very much it did mean. "Who is the man? An adventurer?"

"As an American, somewhat on that order, I imagine," replied Ingraham, carelessly. "But as a Mexican he has made a position for himself as a clever man of affairs, and, being now closely connected with Don Luis Fernandez del Valle, he has no doubt a successful career within his reach. A person of very shrewd wits is Don Gilberto, and not likely to let any chance of fortune escape him."

"I fancy I know the kind of man," said Brooke. "But it is rather a singular type to have produced such an imperial creature as the beautiful wife of your Don Luis."

"If I told you what I not only believe but know of Cármen Rosa, of how she is the strange revival in every possible point of an ancestress dead two hundred years ago," said Ingraham, quietly, "you would probably believe me to be the victim of a delusion. But it is nevertheless true. There is in the old hacienda of Las Cruces a portrait painted by Velásquez of a certain Marquesa de Fernandez del Valle which would readily pass for a portrait of Doña Cármen as she now appears. When I saw her first the likeness was so far undeveloped that I was the first to discover it; but now the blindest person would perceive it."

"I have no difficulty in believing it," said Brooke, "for I perceived at once that she is in singular degree the revival of a type which one seldom sees except in such portraits. It is an interesting question, which I suppose you have no power of answering, how far her inward character corresponds to her outward appearance and is also a revival of the dead ancestress."

The question was as natural as it was lightly asked; but even the speaker saw that Ingraham shrank from it.

"How can one tell? Who could answer that?" he said, somewhat sharply. "Such speculation is absurd. But to return to the point from which we wandered, this strange re-embodiment in a degree accounts for the fact that such a creature can be the daughter of Don Gilberto. But there is no explanation necessary for the second daughter. She is thoroughly in harmony with her immediate surroundings. There is no mystery of distant inheritance about her. She is what one would naturally look for in the child of such a marriage — that of a Mexican woman possessing no doubt the beauty of her Latin-Indian race, and an American of sharp wits and some pretension to good blood. But it is not a very elevated type."

"I fail to perceive that," replied Brooke, somewhat obstinately. "You let your imagination carry you too far, Ingraham. It is impossible to declare exactly what people may be from a study of their progenitors, either near or remote."

"Perhaps not," Ingraham agreed, "yet I have seldom found myself mistaken in these impressions. I can not, however, blame you for distrusting my unlucky imagination, which I have been distrusting myself for some time past — only to find at last that it has not been in fault. Now," as they rose from table, "where shall we go? Have you any plan for this morning?"

"None, except an appointment with Rivera, who proposes to introduce me at his club. For the rest — you are familiar with Mexican social customs; is there any reason why we should not call at the Fernandez del Valle, to ask how the ladies are after the ball, you know?"

"So far from there being any reason why we should not," Ingraham replied, "it is a duty incumbent upon me at least, who am indebted to Don Luis for hospitality in time past. I must call this afternoon, and you can accompany me if you like."

"I have received more cordial invitations," returned Brooke, lightly, "but, since I accept on the ground of my own inclination rather than your cordiality, you may count upon me."

"This is a habitation worthy of your revived Marquesa, Ingraham," Brooke exclaimed when they found themselves a few hours later before the immense carved doorway of the Fernandez del Valle house. "In Spain or in Italy it would be called a palace."

"It is very fine," Ingraham agreed, as, stepping within the open door, where the porter rose from his seat to receive them, he cast a rapid glance over the stately spaciousness of the noble building. It was plainly one of the great old houses of the Colonial period, of which many

still remain in the city of Mexico, and which seem built to defy time, as they stand with their massive walls, their vast courts, and their rich carvings in stone, while the wrought iron and quaint tile-work with which they are adorned make them objects to delight an artist's heart. A perfect example of such an ancient magnificent house is that once owned by the Condes de Santiago near the Hospital de Jesús, and such another was this of the Fernandez del Valle. Long unoccupied by the family during their reverses of fortune, a little work in the interior had nevertheless been all that was necessary to remove the disfiguring traces of time, and a little modern furnishing to convert the mediaeval abode into a dwelling fit for the occupation of a prince.

To an inquiry if the se ñor and se ñora were at home, the porter replied in the affirmative, and, advancing to the foot of a staircase which mounted upward in superb flight, pulled a bell-cord, and then, with a courteous gesture, invited the visitors to ascend. Mounting the wide marble steps, they were met at the head by a servant, who, receiving their cards, ushered them along a tile-paved corridor lined with beautiful plants into a reception-room, from which opened by large double doors a vast and lofty *sala*.

Had anything besides his presence in Mexico been necessary to assure Ingraham that a great change had taken place in the circumstances of Don Luis, the appearance of the apartment which they now entered would have so assured him. It was furnished with a modern luxury as bright and attractive as the Paris of which it breathed, that was strangely in contrast with the ancient massive dwelling.

"This is charming!" said Brooke, casting an appreciative glance over the satin couches, the light, gilded chairs, the whole aspect of delicate luxuriousness. "I fancied that within such venerable walls we should find nothing of later date than the sixteenth century. But this is very effective — a *fin-de-si ècle* boudoir in a mediaeval palace."

Ingraham frowned slightly. The modern touch which pleased the other offended him. He thought of the *sala* of Las Cruces, with its old Spanish leather and inlaid wood and the picture worthy of a king's palace. There all was harmonious, with an antique charm like the breath of another world. But here — the contrast might be effective, yet it jarred upon his imaginations of C ármén, all of which had for their setting the ancient picturesqueness and almost monastic simplicity of the surroundings amid which he had seen her first.

He had, however, no opportunity to express this dissatisfaction, for scarcely had the servant left the room when Don Luis entered, with that cordial air of hospitality which a Mexican seldom fails to display beneath his own roof.

"It gladdens me much to see you, mi amigo," he said, patting Ingraham lightly on the back. "And your friend, Se ñor Brooke — I am delighted to welcome you into my house, se ñor, and beg that you will consider it your own."

"We have done ourselves the honour of calling to pay our respects and inquire if the ladies have entirely recovered from the fatigue of the ball last night," said Ingraham. "It was a very brilliant affair, but the crowd was excessive."

"Ah, what will you?" said Don Luis, lifting his shoulders. "Official balls must of necessity be crowded and in a degree indiscriminate. I was present only as a matter of courtesy; but my wife and her sister, I think, enjoyed it. Here they are, however, to answer for themselves."

They entered as he spoke — C ármén in advance, with the unconscious majesty of bearing which distinguished her, and which made Ingraham think of a queen attended by her maid of honour, as his glance fell upon In é following her. For, notwithstanding a family resemblance between the sisters in the height of their figures and certain similar lines and movements, it would be difficult to conceive anything more unlike than the lofty beauty of the one, with its stamp of noble simplicity, and the seductive prettiness of the other, pervaded by a coquetry which spoke in every glance and gesture. C ármén seemed more than ever like the portrait as she moved forward with a grace so stately, a loveliness so surpassing; and the perception of this, which was strongly

in Ingraham's mind, must have been more evident on his face than he supposed, for no sooner were the salutations of greeting over than Don Luis addressed him.

"Taking for granted, señor, your recollection of the Velasquez portrait at Las Cruces," he said, "may I ask if you find the resemblance of Doña Cármen to it, which you once thought so wonderful, lessened or increased?"

The question surprised Ingraham too much for him to think of evasion. In fact, his resolution of the night before had escaped his recollection, so fanciful to the calmer sense of daylight appeared the need for the reticence he had determined to observe.

"It has increased," he replied, without an instant's hesitation, the artist uppermost in him for the moment, and his natural frankness asserting itself in the old artistic fashion. "If it was striking as I recognised it first, when the unlikeness was almost as great as the likeness, it is much more striking now, when, instead of an unformed girl, Doña Cármen has become a woman such as the Marquesa was when Velasquez painted her."

He spoke with the manner of one who utters his thoughts aloud, but an instant later he was startled into a sense of what he had done by perceiving the effect of his words upon Don Luis. The latter, turning, looked at his wife with the same expression of being waked to a new perception as that with which he had regarded the portrait when Ingraham first called his attention to the strange likeness that Cármen bore to it. As if roused to a new knowledge, great as that, he now gazed at her with a keen and piercing look — the look of one who perceives a fact hitherto concealed from observation, but clearly patent when once attention is roused. It was only for an instant that this look lasted. Then he said, slowly —

"It is singular, Señor, how your mission seems to be to open our eyes to things which we are too dull to see without your aid. You are right again. The likeness which Cármen bears to the portrait of the Marquesa has developed with her own development, until it is indeed much greater now than when you first discovered it at Las Cruces."

"Nothing could be more natural," replied Ingraham, anxious to retrieve the blunder he had committed. For how was it possible, he said to himself, that Don Luis should not think, even as he had thought, of the story of the Marquesa, should not shrink from the suggestions roused by Cármen's deepened likeness to that portrait, where the skill of the great painter had fixed so enduringly the potent spell of the original that he had himself been constrained to cry out, in words that recurred to him like a prophecy of ill, "It was no wonder that tragedy centred about her. Such a woman was born to make tragedies."

And such a woman, perfect in every point of reproduction, even to the lips lightly touched with disdain of the homage her beauty excited, and dark splendid eyes filled with depths of possible passion, was before them. Ingraham felt himself shiver a little, even as he had shivered on that by-gone day when he first saw the picture of Las Cruces. Yet it was in vehement contradiction of the thought that any such tragedy as that of the Marquesa could touch this noble lady, with her air of proud spotlessness, that he eagerly went on:

"It would not be natural that a likeness so strong should not increase with time, up to the point in life where the process of development in the Marquesa was fixed by Velasquez in the immortality of art upon his canvas. But beyond that point there will be a growing difference, as there was a lessening difference before."

"To the portrait, yes," said Don Luis, thoughtfully, "but not, we may suppose, to the original of the portrait."

"That," replied Ingraham, "it is, of course, impossible to determine."

"One may draw the inference," said the other. "Meanwhile, it is quite certain that up to this point the likeness has increased, and that Doña Cármen is in greater degree than when you last saw her a reproduction of the portrait."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Ingraham, with an inward reluctance which rendered the words difficult to utter.

But Don Luis looked at his wife with a smile. "Cármén, at least, will not find fault with you for declaring that her beauty has increased," he said. "For that, after all, is the result of the deepened resemblance."

"If Doña Cármén will pardon me," replied Ingraham, "I should say that, like the resemblance, such a result is so plain as to be undeniable."

Cármén met his gaze with no more trace of embarrassment than if she had been the portrait of which they talked. "If it be so, señor," she answered, "it is, no doubt, as you have said, a natural result."

Meanwhile Brooke was saying to Inés, "You know, of course, this odd portrait of which my friend has talked to me. Do you perceive the striking resemblance which your sister is supposed to bear to it?"

"Oh, yes," she replied. "It would not be possible not to recognise it. When one looks at the portrait and then at Carmencita, it is as if the Marquesa had come to life before one's eyes; every one is astonished by it; and yet no one had ever observed it before the Señor Ingraham went to Las Cruces."

"He did not tell me that," said Brooke. "But artists have keen eyes, you know, and often detect resemblances that other people fail to see. Ingraham is a true artist — there is not the least doubt of that; although he does not make a profession of his art."

"You mean that he does not paint pictures for money?" asked Inés. "So I have heard my papa say. Indeed, if that were the case, he could not afford to cut them up as soon as he had finished them."

"Is it a habit of his to do that? I was not aware of it," said Brooke, laughing. "It seems rather an unnecessary proceeding, from every point of view."

"A habit? I do not know if it is a habit with him," the young lady replied, arching her slender dark eyebrows and showing her pearly teeth in a laugh that echoed his own. "But he did it once. It was a portrait of Carmencita — and most wonderful, all who saw it say. But he cut it to pieces when he found she was to marry Don Luis. My papa told us that also. He said it was a great pity, and he was sorry that Señor Ingraham felt the matter so much, but of course there could be no doubt that Don Luis was the person for Carmencita to marry."

"Why of course?" asked Brooke, in a discreet tone. He found this frank young lady quite entertaining, and had no scruples of conscience in thus surprising Ingraham's secret. In fact, he rather enjoyed doing so, for in the light of this revelation everything became clear to him, and he felt that he touched one of those dramas of life which are so often enacted before our eyes without our being the wiser.

Inés opened her dark eyes wider and arched her brows again at the question; her play of countenance was perpetual, but never degenerated into grimacing. "Do you ask me, why of course?" she repeated. "It is strange that you do not see. To marry Don Luis was a great match for Carmencita, and it has helped us all — oh, more than you can understand! For we were quite obscure people before — papa being an Americano, you know — and very poor, although he was always expecting to be rich. But since Carmencita has married Don Luis everything has changed for us, and therefore I say it was better for Señor Ingraham to cut up his picture and go away."

"There is certainly no doubt how the matter appears from your point of view," said Brooke. "And the señora your sister — I may say Doña Carmen, may I not? — I suppose she also thought it best that Ingraham should cut up his picture and go away?"

Inés spread out her hands with a gesture which expressed much. "How was it possible for her to think anything else?" she asked. "If she had gone away with Señor Ingraham, and he is as rich as my papa says, it might have been well with *her* perhaps, but we should have been there in Morelia yet, poor and obscure. I like it better here in Mexico, with Don Luis as the Senator from Michoacán. And so does Carmencita, I am sure."

"What a selfish little wretch it is!" thought Brooke to himself, but in a spirit of more amusement than condemnation. The very candour of the selfishness disarmed criticism; the

assumption that Cármen owed it to her family to marry Don Luis, even if her own fancy had been drawn toward the lover whose passion expressed itself by cutting her picture into shreds, was, he knew, in social conditions such as existed here, the natural opinion, and he had lived too much in European countries to find the calmly mercenary tone of Inés regarding her sister's marriage — and it was to be supposed, regarding marriage in general — as revolting as an American of a more primitive type might have found it. But he thought it time to give the conversation a more personal tone.

"I perceive," he said, "that we poor *Americanos* have little chance to win your favour, se ñorita. You have no pity for my poor friend in his disappointment, and I fear you would have as little for any one of his countrymen who should be unlucky enough to follow his example and lose his heart to a pair of Mexican eyes."

The eyes in question — into which he boldly looked with a gaze of admiration — met his own with a swift, alluring challenge impossible to mistake, and then the silken-fringed lids drooped demurely over them.

"On the contrary, se ñor," she replied, "I have, as I told you last night, a very great partiality for *Americanos*. Is not my papa one of them? — and of all his children I am most like him. I like American customs, and I am sure I should like the American country, where I am told that girls are as free as widows; but what will you? — I am a Mexican, and since it is necessary for me to live among Mexicans I must be content to do as they do."

"Some gallant *Americano* will one day, perhaps, come and offer to rescue you and carry you off to the land of liberty to which you allude," said Brooke; "and then — will you then follow your sister's example, choose the Don Luis of the story, and leave the other to perform the equivalent of cutting up your picture?"

"Ah, Se ñor" — what boundless innocence of voice, and what a very devil of coquetry in the brilliant glance under the dark lashes! — "it is not possible for me to answer that until the *Americano* shall present himself. For there are many different kinds of *Americanos*. So much I know."

"What is it that you know, Inesita?" asked Don Luis, turning around to take part in the conversation. "Not much outside of the school-room, *carita*, fast as thy tongue goes."

"I was telling the se ñor what I know only because I have learned it from my papa," the girl answered, demurely, "that there are many different kinds of *Americanos*."

"The Se ñor hardly needs for you to tell him that," said Don Luis, with a smile, as he looked at Brooke. "There are many different kinds of people in all countries; but truly it seems to me, if I may be permitted to say so, se ñor, that there is no country where so wide a gulf seems to exist between the best and the — others, as in your own."

"The others, as you politely term them," said Brooke, laughing, "have, unfortunately, so largely represented their country in Mexico that I wonder you have discovered the existence of any other kind of Americans. But there are a few of us who must beg to be judged as individuals, and not as belonging to a class which has made itself so deservedly obnoxious to your countrymen."

"There can certainly be no doubt to what class Se ñor Brooke belongs," replied Don Luis, courteously.

It was during the opportunity thus afforded that Ingraham said in a low tone to Cármen, "I hope that you will pardon me for having forgotten so far as to fall into my old habit of personal remarks. For an instant I failed to remember that you are no longer the Cármen of Las Cruces."

"On the contrary, se ñor," she answered, with the proud yet gentle dignity which had so often surprised him in the girl and now sat so well upon the woman, "I am now more than ever in a true sense Cármen of Las Cruces. For Las Cruces is my home, where I have been very happy, where it seems to me that there is a something of justice — a righting of wrong, if I may so express myself — in the fact that I am honoured as mistress where the woman whom you tell me that I am so like died a misjudged and unhappy prisoner."



"Why should you believe that she was misjudged?" Ingraham could not refrain from asking. "You can not have had any new light upon the family tradition."

"Only the light of what is within myself," she answered, with great positiveness. "But this tells me that, however much appearances may have been against her — and one does not need to be very old or very wise, se ñor, to know how deceptive appearances can be — she was too proud and too lofty ever to have stooped to stain her dignity and her soul with the crime imputed to her. I would stake my own soul upon that."

"It may have been so," said Ingraham, deeply struck by her earnestness. "Who can tell? She may have been suspected and judged unjustly, and, if so, Heaven has raised up for her a champion such as never woman had before, a descendant who, centuries after her beauty has moulded into dust, declares her innocence from lips that are a reincarnation of her own."

She looked at him with the beautiful lips of which he spoke faintly smiling. "You are as fanciful as I am, se ñor," she said. "And there have been times when even you have thought me almost mad upon this point. Yet nothing will ever persuade me that I do not know that of which I speak. But now I see yonder my little Alfonso. You must let me call him and show him to you."

A child passing with his nurse along the corridor outside was summoned within — a bold, beautiful little fellow with large dark eyes and golden curls. After he had been noticed and admired, the two visitors rose to take leave, since an impatient stamp of horses' feet, recurring now and again, warned them that the carriage was no doubt waiting for the ladies to take their afternoon drive.

But as Ingraham left the great old house and walked away, two things remained with him: one was the picture which C ármén made with her beautiful boy in her arms, and the other the positiveness with which she had declared from her own inner consciousness and belief that the Marquesa had been unjustly judged.

## XIX.

"Inesita," said C ármén, "I do not think that it is well for you to encourage the young *Americano* who is the friend of Se ñor Ingraham to make love to you."

"And why not?" asked Ines, a little mockingly. "Why should he not 'play the bear' a little in his own fashion? It will not hurt him, and it amuses me. Perhaps it is because I am American, too, in right of our papa, that I find him more amusing than any Mexican whom I know."

"But it will not amuse him," said C ármén, gently, "when he learns that he has been fooled. It is a heartless game, Inesita, and one which you should not play."

"Is it more heartless than that which you played with the Se ñor Ingraham when through him you won Don Luis?" asked Inés, tossing her dark, graceful head. "Do you think I have not heard of that, and how he cut to pieces the picture he had painted of you?"

"You mistake what you have heard," replied C ármén, grown cold and stately of a sudden. "I never deceived Se ñor Ingraham — not for a moment — nor thought of winning Don Luis through him. Because — and I grieve to say it, Inesita — your own thoughts are low, you think that those of every one else must be so. But if good feeling will not restrain you, I warn you not to encourage this young American, because in that case I shall have to send you back to Morelia."

"And why?" asked Ines, defiantly. "What is this young American more than any one else, that you should consider him? Is it because you have a tenderness for all Americans?"

The girl's insolence fell unheeded on her sister's dignity and coldness. "It is," she answered, quietly, "because I promised papa that no entanglement with any American should follow your coming here. 'I will not permit anything of that kind,' he said. 'If Inesita shows the least disposition to encourage an American — of whom there are many to be met now, even in

society, in Mexico — tell her what I have said; and if she does not obey the warning, send her home at once.' I promised him that I would do so; and that promise, if you do not heed what I have said, I shall certainly keep."

Inés looked at the speaker for a moment as if almost doubting the evidence of her senses. Although the youngest, she had in their childhood reigned supreme over Cármen by right of her mother's partiality, her supposed greater beauty, and her faculty of self-assertion. The relative position had naturally changed since Cármen's marriage, but not enough to prepare her for this assumption of authority which could not be gainsaid. The time had come when she too felt, what the household of Las Cruces had long since learned, that if the Marquesa did not live again in Cármen, at least the Marquesa had possessed no more inherently than did Cármen, and as it were by right, the ability to rule those whom the fortunes of life placed under her control. It was the first time that Inés had come in conflict with that calm, superior will and felt the necessity of submission. For although it was easy enough to defy Cármen and refuse obedience with angry words, what then? Carmen had but to speak, and Inés would find herself back in Morelia, which she detested, since it was connected with the days of poverty and obscurity, since her associations there were with people whom she now scorned, and since it offered no such openings for her ambition as Mexico afforded. No, it would be too heavy a price to pay for the satisfaction of defiance, to be sent into such banishment. She recognised that instantly; but her anger was the greater for her impotence, and even as she determined that obedience should be only in outward seeming, she also resolved that she would find some means of revenging herself on the sister who ventured to assert the right to control her actions.

"I do not understand," she said, with outward coldness but inward rage, "why papa should have spoken to you on such a subject instead of to me. Of course I am bound to respect his wishes, strange as they seem. Yet why should he dislike his own countrymen so much?"

"I did not ask him," Cármen replied.

She said nothing more, and for several minutes there was silence. The conversation had taken place during their drive in the Paseo a few days after the visit of Ingraham and Brooke — a visit which the former had declined to repeat, but which the latter had found an excuse for repeating with Rivera. There had then been a meeting on Sunday in the Alameda, where the fashionable world displays itself in its gayest plumes, and this afternoon there had been enough coquetry in the manner in which Inés wafted toward him, as they passed in the drive, the pretty Mexican salutation of fluttering fingers, to call forth from Cármen the warning with which the conversation opened.

Nursing her wrath at what she considered a most unwarrantable interference with her private amusements, Inés, after the last words, leaned back in her corner of the carriage as they rolled smoothly along the wide roadway crowded with equipages, a line of mounted police in the centre dividing the two streams of vehicles and preserving perfect order. The sun had set; his last reflected glow vanished from the great snow-peaks in the east, and something of twilight began to reign in the foliaged spaces of the broad avenue, lined with gardens and villas. For it is the fashion in Mexico to prolong the afternoon drive until day is on the verge of melting into night, or has already so melted. Presently, like the rest of the world, they paused in the *glorieta*, a vast statue-adorned circle, where the band in its pavilion was playing the sweet Mexican airs which are so full of light grace and melody, and where a throng of carriages are always gathered. Dusk had now deepened, so that to recognise one's next neighbour was not very easy, and therefore, when a horseman drew up into the vacant space beside the carriage, only the person on the side where he appeared could readily determine his identity.

But it hardly needed the sound of Brooke's easy voice to make Inés quite sure who the new-comer was. "Shall one say *buenos dias* or *buenas noches*, señorita?" he asked. "It is a pretty custom, this of taking the Paseo at twilight: I always think of a carnival of fireflies, when I see the carriage-lamps gleaming all over the avenue; but mistakes are possible in the obscurity, and one might find one's self whispering one's secret in another ear than that for which it was intended."

"He who should be foolish enough to whisper any secret in the Paseo would deserve to find it public property, se ñor," replied the girl, with a melodious laugh. "There are other and safer places for the telling of secrets."

"No doubt," said Brooke — and he would have been deaf to the language of tones had he not understood the subtle intimation conveyed in those words — "but you must remember that a poor foreigner does not always know where such places are to be found. As far as I can perceive, one might have a secret to tell which burned within him for utterance, and yet find no opportunity whatever to tell it."

"There are always opportunities for him who knows how to take them, Se ñor," the low, significant tones replied. "It is only that, being a foreigner, as you have said, you do not know."

"But, since being a foreigner is my misfortune rather than my fault, have I not some claim upon your charity for instruction?" he asked, reining his horse closer to the side of the carriage. "I should be very grateful for a hint. I am not dull; no more than a hint would be necessary."

Inés gave a rapid glance around. The music was pealing its strains out upon the soft, colour-stained twilight, horses were stamping, carriages coming and going; no word of *this t âe-à-t âe* could possibly be heard, unless it were by C ármén. But C ármén, she perceived with satisfaction, had her attention engrossed by a horseman on the other side of the carriage — Brooke's companion, who, of course, was Ingraham. A quick, venomous light came into the girl's eyes, and her scarlet lips curled into a smile which was anything but pleasant. "It is for me only that Americans are forbidden," she said to herself. "Well, we shall see."

She turned back toward Brooke. The words which she uttered were not very many. But he, as he had said, was not dull. Even under ordinary circumstances a word was enough for him, and now his interest was kindled by the novelty of this flirtation, by the touch of difficulty which gave zest to it. He did not for a moment mistake Inés, or regard her as anything more than what she was, a consummate coquette, who, as far as lay in her power, would break a man's heart for pastime. But there was nothing deterring to him in this knowledge. He had not the least intention of allowing her to break his heart, nor yet to lead him into any folly of taking her or the situation seriously. He knew well that in thus meeting his advances she betrayed the character of the social surroundings which had moulded her youth, and proved herself no high-bred maiden, but the daughter of an adventurer and of a mother who, springing herself from an obscure class of society, had taken pride in her daughter's coquetries, even while keeping a very sharp eye on those flirtations through the window-bars which had perfected coquetry into an art. It was indeed well for C ármén that she had been left in the seclusion of Las Cruces and to Doña Antonia's somewhat severe rule, well that she had grown up in that stately if cold atmosphere, rather than that h Inés er mind and manners had been tarnished by the influences which had in great measure made Inés what she was. But, being what she was, she offered to Brooke an opportunity which he felt could not but prove extremely entertaining — a flirtation with all the accompaniments which render love-making in Spanish lands so alluring to the romantic fancy.

Meanwhile, Ingraham on the other side of the carriage was saying to C ármén, "I am sorry to have been out when Don Luis did me the honour to call yesterday. But I hope to have the pleasure of seeing him again before I leave Mexico."

"Many times, I hope, se ñor," she answered, with the gracious cordiality that is second nature to Mexican man or woman. "Why do you forget that our house is yours, and that it would give us great pleasure to see you in it? There are few evenings when we have not friends with us, and many of these — men in public life — it might interest you to meet."

"Your house could never be other than interesting to me while it contained yourself and Don Luis," replied Ingraham. "But, since you include me in the number of the friends who are permitted to visit you informally, I shall be happy to present myself some evening."

"Could you possibly doubt that we included you among the friends whom we would be glad to see at any time?" she asked, with a slight accent of reproach. "I fear you do not remember the past as well as we do, se ñor."

This was a little exasperating to one who remembered the past much too well for his own comfort, and before Ingraham paused to recollect himself the feeling found expression in speech.

"On the contrary, se ñora," he replied, "I think that it is I who best remember Las Cruces and all that occurred there. If I remembered less well, I should perhaps be more ready to take advantage of your kindness."

The words were hardly spoken before he regretted them, and the regret was increased by the startled glance of surprise which she turned upon him. Again he observed how absolutely she was without the faintest conception of his having any ground for a sense of injury with regard to her treatment of him; and, seeing this as a man of coarse perceptions would not have seen it, the sense of injury itself died away, and he felt ashamed of the *brusquerie* of his speech.

"Forgive me," he added, quickly, before she could speak. "I should not have said that. My memory of Las Cruces and of you contains nothing which I would wish to change. To find your kindness undiminished is more than I could have expected. I am very sensible of it, and I shall certainly do myself the honour of calling, as you permit, very soon."

"The sooner the better," she replied, with a smile and a graceful inclination of the head, as he, bowing, drew his horse back and ended the conversation.

He was glad that Brooke was unusually silent as they rode slowly toward the city along the darkening avenue, with its now lessening throng of carriages and gleaming lamps. It was owing to the fact that they had been out on a day-long excursion to the Desierto that they were on horseback — which is the custom for the morning rather than for the evening Paseo; but the chance had served each well. Brooke was still smiling over Inés's hint, while Ingraham, recalling the gentle cordiality of Cármen's manner, said to himself that the doubts and scruples which had kept him away from her were absurd. For was it not the cure he had appointed for his malady, and which had drawn him over land and sea in his return here, to see her in her new life, and so divest himself of the unreal fancies that still clung about her image in his mind? Was it not essential to this end that he should regard her, not as the heroine of a story that had enthralled his imagination, not as the revived personality of the Marquesa transferred to another age and time, but as the wife of Don Luis and the mother of his children? It was by seeing her in this commonplace role that his best hope lay that the wild fancies which had clustered about Cármen of Las Cruces would die, and that, like a man released from some spell of sorcery, he would arise and go forth free — free as he had not been since he first stood before the Velasquez portrait. Yet, overwhelmed, as it were, by recognition of the fact that his imagination had not deceived him in the depth of her likeness to that portrait, and oppressed by a fear that the strange spell of the past might revive and increase rather than lessen were he again subjected to her influence, he had, after their first necessary meetings, avoided her as if she had been a Circe of evil enchantment, rather than one whose eyes were full only of the light of ancient kindness, and before whose matchless dignity and purity any thought which did not do her honour would sink down abashed.

"Brooke," he said, abruptly, when, having left the Avenida, they were drawing near to their hotel, "should you like to pay a visit at the Fernandez del Valle to-night? Doña Cármen told me a few minutes ago that it is their custom to receive their friends in the evening, and I fancy they think we — or at least I — have rather neglected them."

"It is distinctly a case of 'I' not 'we,'" replied Brooke. "They certainly do not think that I have neglected them. But I shall be very happy to accompany you to-night. It seems a tempting of Providence not to take advantage of such a social opportunity."

"It may rather be a tempting of fate to take advantage of it," said Ingraham, as if to himself. "But we will go."

## XX.

Looking back afterward on this period of his stay in Mexico, it seemed to Ingraham as if for a time he had suffered all thoughts of the Velasquez picture and his forebodings connected with it, all memories of the Marquesa, all memories even of the Cármen he had known at Las Cruces, to pass away from him in his enjoyment of a social intercourse to which Cármen's words on the Paseo had been the introduction and key. When he went that evening with Brooke to the Fernandez del Valle house, they found what she had indicated — nothing of the nature of a formal reception, but a group of three or four persons assembled in the small *sala*, pleasantly illuminated by shaded lamplight, where during the course of the evening several others dropped in. Evidently his old friends had gathered with cordiality around Don Luis, who, Ingraham perceived from the prevailing tenor of the conversation, was developing the qualities of a political leader, and his house had come to be known as a pleasant place to meet. Probably the rare beauty and distinguished manners of its young mistress had something to do with this, although Ingraham also observed on the first evening, what struck him often afterward, that she made no effort whatever to claim or attract attention to herself.

Such efforts, however, were for such a woman unnecessary. To escape attention was for her impossible. Had she desired to do so, there would have been but one means of accomplishing it — to withdraw altogether from society. But while there was no effort to attract, there was also no effort to escape. As she had told him, she took homage, consideration, flattery, as a matter of course. No princess born in the purple could have had more the air of one to whom these things were natural as the air she breathed, and whose vanity was no more roused by them than her composure was disturbed. Sometimes, like a picture in a dream, Ingraham had a vision of the girl he had once seen seated at her lowly tasks in a room bare as the aspect of her life, and, contrasting that humble maiden with the queenly woman who received with a dignity so perfect the admiration amid which she moved, he asked himself if anything short of magic could explain the transformation.

It was a question which others besides himself had asked. For it is hardly to be supposed that to the friends and relatives of Don Luis his marriage had appeared as anything save an act of supreme folly. They had shaken their heads and prophesied only evil of a union so ill judged and, from every point of view, so unequal. When, they asked, did a man of mature age who married a girl young, beautiful, inexperienced, and humbly born, fail to repent of his folly? There was great compassion expressed for Don Luis, great regret for a weakness which would surely entail upon him such deplorable consequences. But no one had any compassion to bestow upon Cármen, for whom the marriage was also, in a certain sense, unequal, and who might be supposed to be running some grave risks likewise. The discriminating eye of the public saw only the extraordinary elevation which had come to the daughter of Doña Josefina and Don Gilberto. It was the story of King Cophetua over again, and who, in story or out of it, was ever known to entertain compassion for the beggar-maid?

But as time went on, it began to appear, even to these critics, as if their compassion had been wasted, as if the marriage, unequal though it seemed with respect to age and social position, was not so unequal in reality. People who had gone to Las Cruces filled with curiosity, expecting to see a girl without presence or manners, although with a pretty face no doubt, went away confounded with astonishment, having met a woman whose gracious stateliness might have become a court, and who, young as she was, impressed by her strange beauty and noble demeanour those to whom but a short time before she would have been too insignificant for notice.

And if this had been the case soon after her marriage, how much more was it so now, when the lapse of years had settled her in her position and given her the ease of one born to it! Ingraham was aware of this, but from a wide knowledge of the world he was also aware that the

women are rare in any rank or position of life who remain complete mistresses of themselves, who are neither tempted to folly nor swayed to frivolity, when to youth and, beauty are added the incense of admiration and the intoxicating consciousness of power. Would it be proved at last that, with all her grand self-possession, Cármen was in reality no stronger than others, and that the desires which she had expressed in the old days at Las Cruces were not only the expression of inherited nature, and implanted instinct derived from the past, over which she had no control, but also the longings of individual vanity? This was the question he found himself unable to answer, the problem which tormented him, as it seemed his fate to be tormented by one problem or another connected with the strangely fascinating personality of this woman.

Fascinating to others as well as to him it evidently proved; although he said to himself jealously that no one else could know her as he knew her, no one else could be what he had been, her discoverer, almost her creator. But there was about her a charm and spell — such a charm and such a spell as breathed from the woman upon the deathless canvas of Velasquez — which no one who approached her was so dull as not to feel in greater or less degree. The world in general began to call her "the sorceress," although it might have been said that no sorcery was needed beyond that with which Nature had so liberally endowed her in the splendour of her matchless beauty. But those who spoke of sorcery intended to convey no intimation of coquetry: it was impossible for the most envious or the most censorious to accuse her of using the weapons of her charms for purposes of conquest. Disdainful of admiration she was not, for disdain expresses too active a sentiment; but so superbly indifferent, so wrapped in a mantle of perfect dignity, that the world, in despair of explaining the spell which emanated from her without effort on her part, called it sorcery, even as Ingraham long since had so called the effect of the portrait of the Marquesa on himself.

Among those who seemed to feel this influence most strongly, or at least to exhibit it most unmistakably, was the young diplomatist Rivera, who was in truth not so young but that he had received his social training from several years' residence in Paris and Madrid. That he brought thence the belief that there is nothing in the fact of her having assumed the bonds of matrimony to prevent a young and beautiful woman from being the object of the most open admiration and gallantry, will not surprise any one who is at all familiar with those gay capitals. Nor was it surprising that on his return to Mexico he found nobody so worthy of what he felt to be the honour of his attentions as the regal beauty whom Don Luis Fernandez del Valle had astonished society by introducing as his wife. It is probable that had she been of far more ordinary attractions, Don Alfredo, as his friends called him in the familiar Spanish fashion, would still, in support of his character as a man of the world, have devoted himself to her; but, his perceptions having been sharpened in a society where the strange and the subtle outrank all other attractions, he was more conscious than any one else, save Ingraham, of Cármen's most strange and subtle charm.

"But it is a mystery, a wonder!" he said once to Ingraham, as they walked away together from an evening in the Fernandez del Valle house. "How to account for it I know not. Our Mexican women are charming— I, who know women in so many countries, assure you that there do not exist women more charming— but it is the exception when one finds among them women of the world, and then only among those of the highest rank, who have been brought up with peculiar advantages. But here is a woman who holds her own with matchless skill — who would hold it anywhere, since she holds it with me — and yet she was a nobody, without blood or training; a seamstress, servant. Heaven knows what, when Fernandez del Valle married her."

"Allow me to correct you," said Ingraham, keeping his anger in control, and speaking quite calmly. "It is a gross exaggeration which asserts that Doña Cármen occupied such a position as you indicate. I, who know exactly what that position was before Don Luis thought of marrying her, assure you that when I went to Las Cruces I found her there, her claim of kindred fully recognised, and herself the god-daughter and *protégée* of Doña Antonia; while if she performed some household tasks, it was as a child of the house might have performed them. As for blood, I

fancy she stands as nearly related to the Marquesa, from whom she derives her striking appearance, as Don Luis himself; the only difference being that he represents the direct line."

"There is, I imagine, a vast difference also in the character of the blood introduced into the original strain," said Rivera, "although one might be forgiven for swearing that only the purest *sangre azul* flows in the veins of Doña Cármen. It is, as I began by saying, a wonder and a mystery. Besides her rare beauty and her noble manners, there is a fascination connected with her which one can not resist, something strange and unusual, which, if she were a different woman, would bind a man, body and soul, as by a spell."

Ingraham was silent, while a slight shiver crept over him. Were not these almost identically the words he had himself used when, standing before the picture of the Marquesa, he had thanked God that she was dead? But even as he had then felt his thanksgiving premature, since Cármen was alive and inheritor of all her mysterious power, so here was another who recognised the fact that, if she so willed it, a man would have no alternative but to lay his heart down at her feet, that she might tread on it if she liked.

"I do not believe," he said, slowly, after a pause, "that Doña Cármen exerts with intention the power to fascinate which she possesses and which you are not alone in feeling."

Rivera lifted his shoulders and spread out one hand with a gesture signifying absolute perplexity. "I assure you," he replied, gravely, "that, with all my experience, I am unable to say whether she exerts it with intention, or whether she does not. I know only that I am conscious of her possessing it to a degree I have never known equalled."

To this Ingraham made no answer. What, indeed, could he say? He, too, was in doubt — doubt that grew daily — whether or not Cármen veiled with consummate skill the exercise of her power, or whether it was as unconscious as the dark splendour of her glance and the proud sweetness of her smile.

And there was another to whom this doubt had also come unbidden, and with whom it increased as things nourished in secret are likely to increase. It is possible that, in his pride in his wife's beauty and in her ability to conduct herself so as to compel the admiration of the most reluctant, Don Luis had never thought of drawing any inference of an injurious nature from that strange likeness to the Marquesa which was only a source of pride and justification of his choice, until the appearance of Ingraham. Then it was not so much recollection of their past rivalry, nor vulgar jealousy of the man who had loved Cármen with a passion such as men are not likely soon to forget, which made this reappearance coincident with certain awakened perceptions on his part. It was rather to be attributed to a profound confidence in Ingraham's power to read things hidden from his own observation. As the American had discovered the likeness never discerned before between the Velasquez portrait and the humble maiden of Las Cruces, so when he said that this likeness had grown and deepened with Cármen's development, the inference which he had himself shrunk from drawing became at once clear to Don Luis. If the likeness, why not then the qualities of which the likeness was but the outward and visible sign? As far as Cármen was concerned, Don Luis was prepared to believe any marvel which might spring out of the resemblance and transformation already so marvellous, and there seemed a fitness in the fact that Ingraham, who had first opened his eyes to the likeness which made him see his proud ancestress reproduced line for line and tint for tint in the girl who glided unnoticed as a shadow about his stately house, should now open his eyes further to all that this likeness meant and portended. Whoever knows men at all is aware that the most difficult of all beliefs to eradicate is that which has no basis in reason but rests upon some one of the deep superstitious instincts common to humanity, and from which the most enlightened are not always free. Such a basis the doubt of his wife, now roused in the mind of Don Luis, possessed. In her conduct there was no flaw, no point to hang suspicion upon; but fixed in his inner consciousness was the thought, "She is the living image of the Marquesa; she must, therefore, possess the Marquesa's nature, and sooner or later it will betray itself; sooner or later the story of the Marquesa will be told over again."

Evil seeds grow apace, and, as there is no seed more evil than suspicion, none other grows so fast in the mind and heart of man. Eyes which look through mists of suspicion are also not long in finding all that they seek; and hence it came to pass that Don Luis, observing his wife as he had never observed her before, began to ask himself the same question which was perplexing Ingraham — to wit, whether it was possible that a power of fascination so great that all who came within her influence felt it could be unconsciously exerted, Of manifest coquetry there was none. A queen upon her throne could not have preserved a more regal simplicity. But Don Luis was sufficiently a man of the world to know that there is no art so fine as the art which conceals art itself. Watching closely, he soon decided that among all those who surrounded C ámen there were two who, if not specially distinguished by her favour — for that could be said of no man — were distinguished by their attentions to her. These were Rivera, in whom the intention of gallantry was not masked by any undue regard to possible gossip, and Ingraham, in whom it was not possible to forget the former lover. Between these two the suspicion of Don Luis hesitated, but together with the passion he had all the deep reserve of his race, the power of holding a feeling under complete control until the moment of certainty and expression came, which has made certain shallow observers charge the Mexican with treachery of nature. Treacherous he is not; but, with passions like a lava-flood when once aroused, he unites the silence and tenacity of his Indian blood. So silent now, but so tenacious of the suspicion roused within him, was Don Luis, and only waiting a moment of certainty to unleash the demon of jealousy to which most of the tragedies of the country are owing.

## XXI.

It is hot to be supposed that during this time Ingraham was unobservant of the fact that Brooke was devoting himself to In é as far as it was possible to exhibit devotion toward a girl in Mexico.

But the perception gave him little concern. In the first place, he knew Brooke well enough to be aware that this was only another of the many flirtations which formed that young gentleman's favourite mode of acquiring a cosmopolitan knowledge of various countries; in the second place, his instinct told him that In é was not of the material to inspire a serious passion; and in the third place, he knew that had it been otherwise Don Gilberto could be trusted to peremptorily end the affair, since his objection to an American son-in-law had presumably not decreased since that objection was so frankly stated to Ingraham himself. Easy in mind, therefore, he had paid little attention to the proceedings of his friend, until one or two circumstances, attracting his attention, led him to fear that Brooke's ignorance of the conventionalities of the country, and In é's disregard of them, springing from the social surroundings of her early youth, might result in some scandal which would be exceedingly undesirable to the Fernandez del Valle and to himself.

It was in consequence of this apprehension that he decided to address a word of admonition to the younger man. "Look here, Leslie," he said, at last; "nothing is more disagreeable than to seem to play the part of a spy, however unconsciously, and see what is not meant for one's eyes, but I feel bound to tell you that I have lately observed some signs of a secret understanding between Do ña In é and yourself, and, since I know the country better than you do, I think it only right to warn you that if others perceive such a thing it will compromise the girl very seriously, and probably make anything like a good marriage impossible for her."

Brooke looked at him quietly. "I take your warning in such good part, my dear fellow," he said, "that I have not anything to say about the general expediency of minding one's own business. No doubt you are right, and if Do ña Inesita, as her friends call her, should be found out in her little flirtation — harmless though it really is — the social consequences would probably be



unpleasant. But don't you think it is fair to suppose that she is as well aware of that as I am? — or as you are, either, for that matter? And, this being so — I put it to you frankly — is it exactly my place to invoke the fear of Mrs. Grundy? It might be very chivalrous to do so, but I have not found that form of chivalry generally appreciated by women."

"To invoke the fear of Mrs. Grundy is not necessary in order to avoid tempting a woman to indiscretion," said Ingraham.

"And is that the role for which you have cast me?" returned Brooke, with some amusement. "I should not like to say that the tempting was on the other side; but at least I may be permitted to remark that in our little amusement Doña Inés has so far decidedly taken the initiative, and, since she is a young lady who does credit to her American blood in her quality of wide-awakeness, I see no reason why I should hold back when she beckons forward."

"There is the reason," answered Ingraham, a little sternly, "that while any scandal affecting this little *intrigante* — who has the soul of an adventuress, as I saw at once — would be a small matter as far as she is concerned, it would very disagreeably affect the Fernandez del Valle, and be a poor return on your part for their kindness and hospitality."

It was with an effort that Brooke retained his appearance of nonchalance under the other's seriousness, but, after pausing a moment to light a cigar, he said, carelessly, "Don't make a mountain out of a mole-hill: it is such unnecessary expenditure of energy. I have already told you that the fair Inés is as well qualified to take care of herself as any young person with whom I have ever had the honour to be acquainted, and I assure you I have not the least intention of playing the part of tempter which you so flatteringly assign me, and leading her into any indiscretion. We amuse ourselves, her vanity is gratified, and my knowledge of the different types of feminine nature is enlarged. *Voilà tout.*"

It was now Ingraham's turn to be silent for a moment. There was, he felt, no end to be gained by allowing his irritation to express itself. He made a turn across the room before he answered. Then, returning to where Brooke sat quietly smoking, he said, abruptly, "The best will be for us to leave Mexico. Have you any objections to doing?"

"The greatest possible," replied Brooke, imperturbably. "Mexico amuses me: why should I leave it? Now, with you" — he hesitated perceptibly — "the case is different. There may be reasons why you should think it best to leave. A flirtation with Doña Inés is a trifle, but a *grande passion* for her sister would be no trifle. There might be elements of tragedy in that."

"What do you mean?" demanded Ingraham, in a tone which startled himself. He was confounded by the audacity of the other, yet the words were like a lurid flash letting in light upon his own position. "Do you mean to insinuate that Doña Cármen —"

Brooke threw up his hands in protestation. "Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed. "I insinuate nothing of Doña Cármen. She is as far above insinuation as above suspicion. And I had no right to speak of the matter. Only, what is plain to me might possibly be equally plain to others."

"And what is that?" asked Ingraham, eyeing him steadily, his face white, the veins on his forehead swelling into cords.

"I have already said it," replied the other; "and since I said it with a good intention, there is no reason why you should be offended. Briefly, my friend, it is plain to me that you love this woman with a serious passion — such a passion as has worked the undoing of many a man; and, this being so, I put it to you if there is not danger of a greater and graver scandal affecting the Fernandez del Valle than through any light folly of mine with Doña Inés."

Silence followed this inquiry. In the midst of his anger Ingraham recognised that the speaker was so far right, that there was indeed no comparison between the gravity of any scandal, or shadow of scandal, touching Cármen, and one which should touch a person so insignificant as Inés Rosa. But although the light so abruptly cast revealed to him a fact which up to this time he had endeavoured in some degree at least to conceal from himself — namely, that his passion for her who stood always in his thoughts as Cármen of Las Cruces was more serious now, had more the depth and gravity of a great passion since it had been fed upon daily observation of the

manner in which she satisfied and fulfilled every ideal that her appearance inspired, than when he had left her in despair three years before — he nevertheless declared to himself that what he felt was his own affair and could not by any possibility reflect upon her. Yet, even while he reassured himself in this manner, the fallacy of such a conclusion struck him, as he remembered that characteristic of society — the same in all lands and under all skies — which leads it invariably to the most severe judgment in any case open to doubt. No: since it appeared that he was so poor in the power of self-control that he wore his heart upon his sleeve, and could not keep the light of passion out of his eyes when they looked upon her, he must not stay longer to expose her to the danger of that pitiless judgment. He turned to Brooke.

"I have no right to be offended at what I brought upon myself," he said, coldly. "And I so far acknowledge the justice of your warning that I repeat my proposal: let us both leave Mexico. Considerations of danger to ourselves would, I fancy, affect neither of us. But when it is a question of possible danger to others, however remote, we have no right to be indifferent. Let us start to-morrow for — anywhere you please."

Brooke hesitated. He was, as he had declared, very well entertained in Mexico; and the proposal to leave was exceedingly distasteful to him. But something in Ingraham's manner made him feel that the situation was not to be treated lightly. The thought flashed through his mind, "I will go, since he makes a point of it; and then, if my interest survives the test, I can easily find an excuse to return." So, after a moment, he said, "Not to-morrow. That is a little too abrupt, for I have several engagements. But if you really insist — although I see no need of such extreme haste — we will go the day following."

"Very well," replied Ingraham. "I shall make all arrangements, and expect you to keep your word."

A few details were then settled, and with this understanding they separated.

Brooke, as usual, went to the house of the Fernandez del Valle that evening, but Ingraham did not. He sternly resolved that he would not again trust himself in Cármen's presence, since, as he bitterly thought, he allowed all that he felt to write itself on his face for the world to read. A proud man always, and a man intensely reserved in whatever concerned his inner life, he determined to permit himself no further opportunity for such self-betrayal. Recognising clearly that the remedy from which he had hoped so much had failed him — that the Cármen of reality fell in no regard below the Cármen of his imagination — he recognised also that hope of cure there was none, save such as might lie in his own steadfast power of self-conquest. He would not, therefore, see her again; but so sharp was the pang, so acute the sense of loss caused by this resolution, that in order to escape from his thoughts, and also from that insistent desire for her presence, drawing him like a cord toward her, he finally went out into the city streets.

Usually there was infinite entertainment for him in the crowded thoroughfares of this most picturesque city of the New World, this city transported in every line of its architecture from Old Spain, touched with the brilliance of Paris, the glamour of the East, and the strange, wild charm of that primitive race which is in its history and its genius the most interesting of aboriginal peoples. But to-night he passed unheeding along the streets, one side of which lay in the white light of sublimated moonshine, the other in deep, sharply-cut shadow. Leaving the Hotel del Jardin — that hostelry formed of the cloisters and garden of the greatest and most ancient Franciscan monastery of New Spain — he made a short cut through the vast courts of the ponderous palace now known as the Hotel Iturbide, and came out through its sculptured portal on the Calle San Francisco, with its brilliant shops and ever-thronged pavements. To loiter here, either by night or day, was generally a very agreeable occupation to this man, with his painter's eye and his knowledge of many civilizations; but now the picturesque varieties of the passing crowd hardly attracted his glance; he turned his face toward the Avenida, and, walking like one who had an appointment to keep, very soon found himself crossing the Mirador de la Alameda and entering beneath the shades of that beautiful pleasure-ground. And if it is beautiful by day, what shall we call it by night, and by moonlight, this place of broad, mysterious avenues bordered

by forest-like glades and overreached by the spreading boughs of mighty trees, avenues that lead to balustraded circles in the centre of which fountains surrounded by Nile lilies sleep like mirrors of silver, and carved stone benches of classic form, under deeply drooping shades, seem waiting for the veiled lady and the plumed cavalier who will presently glide out of the shadowy vistas and meet, to tell the old story of passion and romance? For it is an enchanted spot, made for romance and poetry and all those fair and gracious things which the world embalms in its heart forever, even while the materialist laughs and the cynic sneers, this Alameda of Mexico, when night falls over its avenues and *glorietas*, its fountains and statues and depths of slumbering shade. And, to add to the charm, it is at such time almost entirely deserted. No band plays here in the evening to draw the people by its melody as flies are drawn by honey, nor is it brilliantly illuminated. Here and there lamps shine amid the deep foliage, and a policeman's lantern placed on the ground at some circle is a sign that the guardian of law and order is near — and let it be said, in passing, that no better policed city than Mexico exists— but for the most part the leafy alleys are all empty of loiterers, the benches hold no figures save such as the romantic imagination may place upon them, or, by chance, some pair of whispering lovers of low degree. The place is left to silence and mystery and shadow.

It had always charmed Ingraham at such times, but never more than to-night, when its deep quiet was like a soothing balm to his spirit; and, although he was perhaps unaware of the fact, its perfect picturesqueness, enchanting the eye at every turn, was a wholesome distraction to his thoughts.

Pausing now and then to contemplate some picture made up of silvery light and black shade, of masses of feathery foliage, of the white grace of marble and the gleam of still water, he paced slowly along the wide, tree-arched avenues, with occasional intervals of rest on some seat which commanded a view of the radiating vistas filled with mysterious shadows, for a length of time of which he took no heed until a church clock near by struck the hour of midnight. He was at that moment seated on a bench at the point where one of the avenues entered a wide *glorieta*, and as the mellow strokes fell on his ear he said to himself that the time of temptation was over, that it was now too late to go to the Fernandez del Valle house, that his last opportunity for seeing Cármen once more was past, and — this in deep depression and weariness of soul — that he would now go home, if such term might be applied to his hotel chamber.

But before he had put this resolution into practical effect, while he was still gazing, though with absent eyes, at the loveliness of the silver-bathed scene, something occurred which caught his attention. Along a wide, deserted avenue leading from the northeast corner of the Alameda, two figures came, silently, mysteriously as if evolved from the shadows to which they seemed akin — a man and a woman, moving slowly and talking earnestly in very low tones. They passed within a few feet of Ingraham without perceiving his still figure in the deep shade, and crossed the *glorieta*, pausing a moment by the central fountain to look at the still water mirroring the high-sailing moon and the sleeping lilies upon its breast, then moved onward and entered one of the opposite avenues.

It was not until they had passed out of his sight that Ingraham discovered that he was trembling — trembling as if with a violent ague — in every limb. For what had he seen? *Cármen!* It was impossible to doubt it. True, she was closely wrapped in the muffling folds of the *tapado*, a great black shawl, which, like the habit of a nun, makes all women look alike, and can be used effectually for purpose of concealment. But there is one thing which not even this disguising drapery can disguise, and that is the carriage of the head and shoulders. Now, Cármen's bearing was as distinctive and as full of charm as her beauty. The shawl, drawn far over the face of this woman and held firmly with one hand under the chin, clung closely about the head and shoulders and left their outlines clearly defined, especially in rear view. On these outlines Ingraham's gaze had fastened as she passed across the moonlight-flooded space and paused by the fountain. The pause had been but for a moment, yet that moment, which would have been long enough to imprint its likeness upon the sensitive plate of a camera, was more than long enough to leave it

with equal clearness fixed in the mind of the man who was not only lover but artist, who had dwelt upon those lines as he only dwells upon form and contour who is to transfer them, in the second birth of art, to canvas or marble. He did not even ask himself if he could be mistaken. He was perfectly sure. It was C ámen. He said so to himself in a tumult of amaze and horror. C ámen — from whom he had resolved to exile himself, lest the faintest breath of scandal should blow upon her through his devotion! C ámen, recklessly flinging her fair name into the dust by being here alone at night — with whom?

## XXII.

It was not until both figures had passed completely out of his sight amid the deep shadows that, with a start, he asked himself this question. Of the man he had not thought at all so long as that feminine figure, with its matchless bearing and those beautiful well-known lines of head and neck and shoulders, had filled his gaze; but now that they were gone he had time to think of the other unnoticed figure, and ask himself, with a sense of burning rage which turned him as hot as he had been cold the moment before, who it could be.

Suspicion at once leaped to Rivera. One brief, passing glance before his attention was riveted on the woman — a glance given when the pair had first come into view down the shadowy avenue — had told him that the man was a gentleman, for there is no twilight deep enough to render this fact doubtful to eyes accustomed to discriminate in social ranks and conditions; and not only a gentleman, but one with the nameless stamp of fashionable distinction upon him. Such was Ingraham's first, swiftly passing impression, the next instant forgotten as his glance fell on the woman clinging to the arm of her companion, walking with such light, easy majesty of step and air, her draped head turned toward him with an attention that rendered her unconscious of the statue-like figure in the corner of the bench over which the foliated boughs made a canopy so dense as to be impenetrable to the moonbeams. Following her with his eyes, how was it possible for him to think of anything else, even of that companion for whom she was perilling all and more than all that fate had so unexpectedly given her? But now — now that she was gone, wrapped in the mysterious shadow out of which she had come — he had time to ask himself who, if not Rivera, this man could be, and to spring to his feet with a fierce impulse to follow and take him by the throat.

But before he had traversed the *glorieta*, on which the marvellous Mexican moonlight lay so whitely, saner thoughts had come to him. Whether it was Rivera or not, what right had he to interfere if C ámen chose to walk with him in the Alameda at midnight, or to walk with him around the world? All right of his to interfere in anything which concerned her had ended, once and for all, in that sunset hour at Las Cruces when she had put him aside and passed over his heart

To the world made for her.

Remembering this, and remembering also all his presentiments and fears respecting her, from the hour that he had first recognised her wondrous likeness to the Velasquez portrait, he felt like one who sees before his eyes the fulfilment of tragic prophecy and tells himself that he has known always what the end would be. And yet — how could the C ámen whom he knew and loved, not the fanciful C ámen evolved from his imagination of what the Marquesa was, but the C ámen who looked, spoke, and smiled upon him with such gentle frankness, such sweet and perfect dignity, such proud consciousness of all that her position imposed — how could that C ámen be here and thus?

And then for the first time doubts of her identity assailed him. Was he mad to draw such positive assurance merely from the draped outlines of a head and shoulders? It was possible — not probable, certainly, but barely possible — that another woman might exist with those matchless, melting lines and that imperial carriage. They were no longer before his eyes, so he began to question thus, and, doubt having once entered his mind, he felt that he must go mad if he did not resolve it into certainty.

With a new intention, therefore, he proceeded on his way, leaving the fountain, by which he had paused as if hoping to read in it the secret of what face it had for an instant reflected, and entered the avenue down which the figures had vanished. In the obscurity formed by the interlacing shade above, he could at first see nothing of them; but after a minute or two of quick walking he perceived them in advance of him, pacing slowly still, as people well entertained with each other. Avoiding the middle of the avenue, where light was fullest, he kept in the deeper shadow of one side of the broad, straight way, so that no backward glance, unless very keen, could detect his presence, and so followed them with the quiet persistence of a sleuth-hound or an Indian. What he promised himself in this following were simply two things: first, to satisfy himself by some means if that shrouded figure was indeed Cármen, and, should it prove so, to learn who was the man for whom she thus cast away the jewel of her fair name.

When they reached the end of the avenue and had before them the broad white space where in the clear moonlight every object was distinct as day, beyond which lie the Calle de San Diego and the handsome houses on its farther side, he quickened his steps involuntarily, wondering what they would do, if they would go farther in this direction, or if, clinging to the shadows, they would turn, and so meet him face to face. They did neither. Passing quickly across the moonlit space, they entered the first verdurous avenue which presented itself, and so turned back in the direction they had come, but by a different way.

Ingraham did the same. It may be said for him that the thought that he was playing the spy upon people in whose affairs he had no right to interfere did not once occur to him, so absorbed was he in the vital necessity, as it seemed to him, of discovering if this was indeed Cármen who walked before him through the silver lights and shadows. Through the entire length of the deserted Alameda — growing more enchanted in its beauty with every hour, as the moon like a great white balloon sailed higher and higher in the hyacinth-blue sky — he followed them, perceiving soon that their course was directed to that northeast corner whence they had first appeared. Reaching this, they left the pleasure-ground, crossed the northern end of the Mirador de la Alameda, passed by the ancient and desecrated church of Santa Ysabel, and followed the street known by many different names which leads thence directly eastward. Lower and lower sank Ingraham's heart as he followed them, keeping himself at a discreet distance and as far as possible in the shadows sharply cast by the tall old houses, for they were holding their way directly for Cármen's home, which was in the neighbourhood of the Plazuela de Santo Domingo, that old quarter of palaces. Like all the great houses of the splendid colonial period, that of the Fernandez del Valle, besides its vast courts, had in the rear a beautiful garden, the tall trees of which showed above the high wall that enclosed the property from the street in its rear. And, after several turns, it was into this street that Ingraham finally saw the two whom he had so steadily kept in view enter. He could not follow at once, being too far behind; but in truth he hardly needed to do so. All was plain now — fearfully, damnably plain. The woman was Cármen, and, having taken this midnight promenade with her lover, she would now let herself into her husband's house by some rear entrance fit for intrigues like this. It was only from the grim determination to make no possible mistake, to leave no faintest thread of hope, and also to learn who was the man, that Ingraham kept on. He turned into the street — a narrow *callejon* lined chiefly by dead walls — which the two had entered, and, lo! what he anticipated had come to pass. There were two no longer. He saw a door in the wall of the Fernandez del Valle garden in the act of closing, and, walking rapidly away from that door, in the opposite direction, so that there was no hope of meeting him, the figure of the man — alone.

At that sight Ingraham's blood again stirred fiercely in his veins, a mist of passion rose to his brain, his hands clinched themselves, and he quickened his own pace. Again he forgot that he had no right to challenge Cármen's lover, to take him, as was his wild desire, by the throat and choke the soul out of his body. He was fury-blinded, for when the elemental savage that is in all men is roused in such a man as this — a man who has never even suspected its existence in him — its reign is brief indeed, but, while it lasts, of overwhelming power. Walking rapidly, intent only on overtaking that vanishing figure, he had gained the lately opened garden door, was abreast with and passed it.

But hardly had he made five steps beyond when he heard a harsh sound, as of a key sharply turned in a lock, and, wheeling quickly around, he saw the door again open. He paused, too much astonished to think how strange might seem his presence in this spot, and waited for a space of time which was no more than a heart-beat, but which seemed to him far longer, for who should issue. Would it be Cármen, expecting to find her lover lingering still and herself returning for some last word? He had time to think that he hoped so, in order that he, the man whose love she had first betrayed, might wither her with his scorn, when there stepped forth into the brilliant moonlight — Don Luis.

### XXIII.

The two men — the only two now in all the length of the short, narrow street — faced each other in silence for a moment. What swiftly contending thoughts and emotions filled that moment, especially on the part of Ingraham, surprised in a situation so false, and placed, as he at once perceived, in a position so awkward, it would be vain to attempt to say. There was a pause, in which they silently looked at each other, and then, just as Ingraham, gathering himself together, was about to speak, Don Luis broke the silence:

"So it is you, Se ñor Ingraham," he said, quietly. "My only doubt was whether it was you — or another. Be good enough to enter my garden. We have that to arrange for which the street is no place."

"Se ñor," replied Ingraham, "there is no need that I should enter your garden, for you and I have nothing to arrange. I have been walking, and chanced merely to be passing your gate just as you opened it."

"A very fortunate chance for me," said Don Luis, with the same air of courtesy, although his dark eyes were shining with an ominous fire. "It is a chance for which I have waited, and for which I would have given much. Enter, Se ñor" — this more sternly: "you are a gentleman: it is therefore not necessary that I shall insist."

"If I yield to your request and enter," answered Ingraham, "it is only that we may say whatever needs to be said between us — and that is little — in a place not so liable to interruption as this."

Don Luis bowed, and, drawing back with punctilious Mexican politeness, motioned the other to precede him through the door; then, following, he carefully closed and locked it.

The garden into which they entered was of a most fairy-like loveliness. Even in this moment of intense preoccupation its beauty could not but strike with a sense of charm on Ingraham's beauty-loving senses. Trees, tall and grand as those of the ancient Franciscan garden he knew so well, lifted their massive trunks and royal crowns of foliage higher than the stately house, the sculptured arches of which gleamed white at the farther end of this paradise of verdure. Underneath the kingly trees there was a luxuriant yet orderly wilderness of all those shrubs and flowers which make Mexico an enchanted Land of Bloom. Through their clustering depths ran alleys carefully kept, centring, according to the usual Mexican fashion, in a *glorieta* — a miniature compared with those of the Alameda, but following the model exactly — where a

fountain played in a stone basin, and carved stone benches were placed around the outside of the circle beneath the drooping shade of fragrantly flowering trees and shrubs.

Into this open, silver-flooded spot Don Luis led his unwilling guest, and then, turning again, faced him.

"You were right in saying that words between us need be few," he said. "It is enough that I saw my wife come in, and that I found you, her companion, at the gate where she left you. Words are idle after that. One of us—"

"Stop!" cried Ingraham, extending his hand in a gesture of overwhelming surprise and protest. In the agitation of his mind he had absolutely not thought of this — that he should be taken for the favoured man, the lover whom he had followed with such fury in his heart! At the worst he had anticipated only an embarrassing difficulty in accounting for his presence, or questions, perhaps, which he could not answer. But this! — For an instant he was speechless with astonishment, and then he saw, as by a lightning-flash, how hopeless of explanation his position was. He, and no other, had been in sight when Don Luis appeared, and how was it possible to give any sufficient reason for his presence in such a spot at such an hour? Yet for the sake of his own honour he must deny the charge. So, calling together all his powers of self-command, he went on calmly —

"Pardon me for interrupting you, *Señor*, but I can not leave you for a moment longer under what I perceive to be a total misapprehension. I have been strolling for an hour or two about the streets entirely alone. Chance led my steps into this neighbourhood, and it was altogether by accident that I was in the vicinity of your gate when you came out. As for *Doña Cármen*, I have not had the honour of seeing her this evening."

"I congratulate you upon the fact that you lie like a gentleman, *señor*," replied Don Luis, with an ironical bow. "We are both men of the world and familiar with the code of honour which requires that a man shall perjure himself if necessary to shield a woman. But you do not shield her. I saw *Doña Cármen*. That is enough. We will now waive further speech and proceed to the business which must be settled between us."

He turned as he spoke and took from the bench nearest him two swords, which he held out together to Ingraham. "Take one of these," he said, sternly, "I do not choose to kill an unarmed man."

Ingraham drew back a step and folded his arms. "Nor do I choose, either, to kill a man with whom I have no quarrel, nor yet to be killed under a mistake," he said, with equal sternness. "There is no question of perjuring myself in order to shield a woman. My word to that effect should be enough. I will not fight you, because I have never injured you, and I am sure that you will do me the justice to believe that had I done so I should be only too ready to give you satisfaction."

"I believe only that you are a coward as well as a liar!" replied the Mexican, hissing the words through his teeth. "But your cowardice shall not save you. Take one of these swords and defend yourself like a man, or I will kill you like a dog!"

Ingraham recognised that there was no more to be said. As well reason with a wild beast thirsting for blood as with this man in whom all that was most savage and fierce in his nature was roused by the supreme injury which in all lands and in all ages men have felt can be atoned for only by the most simple and primitive vengeance. It was hard to kill or be killed — he guiltless — because malicious fate had put him in the place of the man who, he could not but feel, had done him also a grievous wrong, in destroying forever his ideal of the woman he loved. But to expostulate or further affirm his innocence was useless, and to be murdered without defending himself impossible. He took, therefore, one of the swords, which appeared to be of equal length, and, saying merely, "Remember, *señor*, that I defend myself because you leave me no alternative but to do so, and not because there is the least reason for our hostile meeting," he placed himself in position.

It was fortunate for him that he was an accomplished swordsman, the result of assiduous practice in his younger days in the best fencing-school in Paris, for the man who opposed him now was not only expert in the use of his weapon, but filled with a deadly purpose. From the first instant in which their swords touched, Ingraham recognised his intention to kill him, and that as speedily as possible. He fenced, therefore, as a man fences who feels that his life depends upon the clearness of his head, the quickness of his eye, and the readiness of his hand. What he desired to do was to disarm his antagonist. But Don Luis was very nearly, if not quite, his equal in skill, and for a time fought warily. Then, growing more excited as he perceived the ability of the other to maintain his guard, he began to press more closely upon him with savage lunges which it required all of Ingraham's skill and science to parry.

They had been fighting for several minutes, the sharp clashing of their swords, as they crossed and re-crossed, alone breaking the moonlit stillness of the garden, and Ingraham was beginning to feel that if he could not succeed in his endeavour to disarm his fierce opponent the end must be that the shining blade he was so closely watching would finally pass his guard and run him through the body, when an interruption occurred.

Absorbed in their contest, with breath coming short and quick and the clashing and ringing of steel in their ears, both men had been unaware of flying steps coming along the garden paths toward them, and so were equally unprepared for the apparition which burst upon them when C ámen appeared in the circle and made a motion as if to place herself between them.

Instinctively both lowered their weapons and turned toward her. Anything more beautiful, anything more majestic, than her appearance at this moment it is impossible to imagine. Dressed in white — such a loose, *n églig é* robe as a lady assumes in her chamber — she had evidently not even waited to snatch up the mantle without which a Mexican woman seldom stirs, and her glorious hair hung in a shower of gold behind her far below her waist. Half angel, half queen, she seemed in her almost unearthly beauty, as she stood in the white lustre of the moonlight, her hand lifted more in a gesture of command than entreaty.

"*En el nombre de Dios!*" she cried, her voice ringing clear as the steel which had been lowered before her, "are you Christian men that strive to kill each other thus! Luis! — Se ñor Ingraham! — Mother of God! what madness has seized you!"

"Is it for you to ask, false and shameless woman?" cried her husband, turning upon her. "Be gone — until I am ready to deal with you!"

His countenance as well as his voice was so full of fury that Ingraham would not have been surprised had he lifted his sword and run it through her heart. Indeed, so much had he heard of the fearful lengths to which the passion of jealousy carries Mexicans, both men and women, that instinctively he made a step forward to interpose his own blade, if necessary, for her protection.

But it was not necessary. The sword was never forged that would not have fallen before her glance, as, instead of drawing back, she made a step nearer to the man who had thus addressed her.

"What is that you say to me?" she asked. "*I* false and shameless — *I*, C ámen! It must be, then, that you are mad."

"No, I am most sane — and restored to sanity by you," he replied, violently. "I was mad to take you, living likeness of a woman false and no doubt shameless as yourself, to be my wife and bear my name and honour. I have fared as might have been expected, fool and dupe that I was! But I can be duped no longer by your fair face, your noble seeming, and your matchless craft. I know you now for what you are, and later I will deal with you. Now go — that I may kill your lover first!"

"My lover!" she repeated, and it was as if one dead had spoken, so white and horror-struck had she become. But in her whiteness and her horror she was still majestic, still without sign of either shame or fear. With a superb movement she turned from the man who had thus justly charged or thus vilely insulted her, and looked at Ingraham.



"Se ñor," she said, with a dignity he had never seen matched, "have you no word to say of this most false and undeserved accusation? Am *I* growing mad, that I see you here, sword in hand, in deadly combat with my husband, as my lover?"

Even in that moment Ingraham asked himself if this could be the woman whom so short a time before he had followed through the avenues of the Alameda and along the silent streets. Was it possible, was it within the power of guilt, however matchless in craft, to simulate innocence in such manner as this? Looking at her, meeting the full challenge of her direct gaze, he felt that the evidence of his own senses was insufficient to make him believe her other than she appeared.

"Se ñora," he answered, with deep respect, "I have not waited for your coming to tell your husband that he has made a strange mistake. But I now repeat, in your presence, that this is the first time I have addressed a word to you since we parted last in your own *sala*, and that it was accident, instead of any appointment, which brought me to the gate of your garden to-night. That you found us in deadly combat is easily explained: a man capable of defending his life does not permit himself to be unresistingly murdered."

"Murdered!" she repeated. "You! — and for what? Answer!" she said, turning imperiously toward her husband. "If you would not have me believe you a maniac, answer what reason you have to suspect me of being a dishonoured woman, and this gentleman of being my partner in dishonour and guilt."

Even Don Luis, maddened by that passion which of all others most obscures the faculty of judgment and sets reason at defiance, could not resist the effect of her speech and manner. If she were guilty, never before had guilt worn such a seeming, never before had culprit arraigned judge with such authority and such indignation.

He looked at her for an instant with the fire of his glance burning fiercely under his dark, bent brows, before he replied. "It is not for me to answer your questions," he then said, sternly, "for you are as well aware as I am what reason I have, not to suspect but to know you a dishonoured woman, who not half an hour ago entered this garden, returning from a midnight meeting with your lover. Nay, not a word! — *I saw you!* That is enough. For I have long suspected you and this gentleman, your former lover, your discoverer as he once proudly declared himself, and, finding by chance the gate unlocked, I waited to see who would enter. You came, stealing like a thief into the home my folly had given you, and, letting you pass, in order that I might surprise your companion, I hurried to the gate and found this man, whom yet you have the unparalleled audacity to declare to be not your lover."

She threw up her arms with a tragic gesture, and lifted her face toward heaven.

"I declare it again!" she cried, solemnly. "I swear it by the blood of God! He is no more my lover than it was I whom you saw enter this garden. What he was doing at the gate I know not. But I had not left the house to-night, until I heard the clash of your swords and came to learn the cause."

"A likely story!" said Don Luis, with bitter scorn, "that you would have come to learn the cause of clashing swords, instead of rousing the household, unless you had known the cause full well. Infamous woman, do not add falsehood to your guilt, for I tell you again that I saw distinctly the figure which entered this garden from the street, and it was yourself. Who else could it have been? Who could be mistaken for *you*?"

"God knows!" she answered, in an awe-struck tone. "Perhaps the shadow of that woman who laid her dead hand on my life in my childhood, whose living likeness I am, and whose fate I seem doomed to repeat. I felt it always — a shadow, a presentiment of certain evil! Did I not tell you so long ago at Las Cruces?" turning with sudden energy to Ingraham. "But let the fate fall on me alone. Remember" — her voice sank to a tone of fear and horror — "her story; remember the man who was slain, innocent perhaps as you, while she, no doubt, was innocent as I. Go, go! *Por el amor de Dios*, go! It is the fatality of that old tragedy which is upon us. Go!"

Her passionate anguish — for it was nothing less — filled and possessed her so that she sank upon her knees, holding out her hands to him in an attitude of entreaty he could never forget,

while the tones of her voice, rising again in the last adjurations, rang so clearly on the still night air that their sound evidently penetrated to the house. There was a sound of doors hastily opened, lights appeared, voices were heard. Don Luis turned to Ingraham.

"Go!" he said, sternly, repeating C ármén's word. "Our meeting will come later. If you have one instinct of a gentleman, do not be found here. Go!"

As he turned in obedience to this imperative command, Ingraham saw C ármén sink to the ground. The next moment he found himself in the street, while the garden gate clashed shut behind him, as if ending a wild and fearful dream.

#### XXIV.

It was a proof of Ingraham's condition of mind — of the effect of the scenes through which he had passed — that as he walked away from that closed door, along the narrow, silent *callejon*, he asked himself if it were not possible that C ármén was right, that the false situation in which he and she — for he now believed her innocent as himself — were involved was indeed owing not to any human agency, but to some *diablerie* born of that strange likeness which she bore to the long-dead Marquesa. If that form which had walked before him and which had entered the garden was not C ármén, who was it? Who, as Don Luis had asked, could be mistaken for her? — and mistaken by the two men who knew her best? He did not wonder at C ármén's answer to that question, for he alone knew how deeply her wild fancies about the Marquesa were wrought into her inner life and had formed part of it from her earliest childhood. To her the obvious solution of the occurrence that had placed her in a position so terrible was the fatality which overshadowed her, and of which she had always been so conscious that she had drawn back in dread from anything that could increase the mysterious bond between the portrait and herself, when Ingraham first proposed to make her resemblance to it clear by painting her likeness. Remembering this, remembering his own instinctive forebodings, which had seized him afresh when he saw how that likeness had deepened, and remembering also the indescribable effect which the picture had produced upon him — an effect so strong that he could not wonder at its power over the imagination of a girl who was like a vessel fitted by Nature to feel it — he, too, was almost ready to believe that the web of fate closing around C ármén and himself had been woven by no mortal influence, but was the long-drawn effect of that tragedy which had wrecked the Marquesa's life.

The old shudder — that which he had felt as he stood before the marvellous picture, glowing with tints almost of life itself, and which he had again felt when he saw C ármén in the full maturity of her equally marvellous beauty — passed over him as he thus seemed to recognise the power of a sinister destiny which had drawn him from the other side of the world to make him the sport of a fate which he was unable to avert. For how could he prove C ármén's innocence and his own? — how speak of the figure — mortal woman, or appearance only — which he had followed through the moonlight, and which had trapped him into a situation that justified the conclusions Don Luis had drawn? How was it possible for the latter to believe the wildly improbable story of his accidental appearance in the place where he was found, or — did he choose to tell it — the equally improbable story of another man who had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him? Possible explanation there seemed none; and yet without explanation how could he avoid fighting Don Luis, who would surely insult him publicly if there were no other means of forcing him to fight? Instant departure was open to him, but that he did not take into consideration for a moment. Even had his own honour not been involved, he could not have left C ármén in this crisis of her strange fate — C ármén, to whom, acting under a prophetic instinct which it astonished himself to recall, he had offered himself as a defender should she ever need one. And surely she needed one now. He was conscious of a cold chill as he

thought how absolutely she was in the power of a man who had said of the ancient tragedy, "There would have been few to blame him had he run his sword through her heart also." What was to prevent his doing now, in like circumstances, what he had then spoken of — this man who came of a race ever fiercely unforgiving to infidelity? He recalled the stories he had heard from those who knew the country well, of knife-thrusts that had avenged even the suspicion of betrayal. Don Luis would not kill his wife, or mark her for life, after the fashion of a peon whose Indian blood was aflame with *vino mescal*, but such vengeance as a gentleman could permit himself he would surely take. Of that Ingraham had no doubt. His own power to help the woman who had laid her touch so unconsciously yet so persistently upon his life was small indeed. But he registered a solemn vow that what man could do in her behalf he would do, not only because she was to him yet, and in spite of all his efforts, the one woman of the world, but because the old sense of responsibility came back to him, and he felt himself as much the creator of the changed conditions of her life as of the picture that had revealed her to the eyes of the man she had chosen.

So, endeavouring to regulate the tumult of his thoughts, he walked through the silent streets, where all the noises of the day were hushed, and the closely-barred houses with their grated windows, standing in white light or wrapped in deep shadow, seemed fit homes of strangeness and mystery. Yet the sense of moving in a dream never left him, not even when knocking up the sulky *portero* to admit him into his hotel, or when laying himself down to await the calmer thoughts and possible developments of the next day.

But when he awoke the next morning, after finally falling into a brief and troubled sleep, it was still with a sense of absolute unreality that he recalled the events of the past night, and questioned whether what had taken place had not been merely a vision of disturbed slumber. It was some time before rousing recollection could convince him of the reality of all that had occurred; but, this once accomplished, the wild fancies of the night vanished, as he considered the situation in which he found himself by the clear light of day and of reason.

Viewed thus, the circumstances that involved him as in a net seemed hardly less hopeless of explanation now than they had appeared in the hours of darkness. In order to make even an attempt to clear himself, it would be necessary to tell the story of the two figures he had seen in the Alameda and which he had followed to the gate in the rear of the Fernandez del Valle house. But how was it possible to tell such a story as this, even if he were able to prove the existence of the man who had so quickly disappeared, since it placed him in the position of a spy — a position which he now blushed to recall, wondering what madness had for the time possessed him — since it added the further proof of his identification of Cármen to that of Don Luis? Clearly, for her sake alone, his lips were sealed, and this, which would have been the case under any circumstances, was especially so since the strong impression of her innocence produced by her presence, her manner, her voice, had not faded from his mind. Here in the clear, sober daylight, as in the mysterious shadowy night, he repeated to himself that he believed her assertion rather than the testimony of his own sight. For, although he as well as Don Luis had been prepared to doubt her by the suspicions and fears which, setting reason at defiance, her singular likeness to the Marquesa had inspired, it was now, as ever, only necessary for him to hear her speak to forget, in the conviction of her lofty simplicity, all these suspicions and fears. He put aside the wild fantasy that one so like herself could only have been the ancestress whom she resembled; but he did not for an instant doubt her sincerity in believing this — the less because he was not himself free from the same superstition. For he was, as sure as herself that, whether what he had seen was mortal being or shadow of the dead, the fatality which pursued them was the same — a fatality which plainly and evidently tended to a repetition of the tragedy that had wrecked the life of the woman whose living image she was.

To feel one's self in the grasp of overmastering fate — of a fate which no effort can avert, relentless as that of the Greek dramatists and pitiless as the action of Nature — is not a common experience. But it was one which came to Ingraham now. Like an Arab, he said to himself, *Kismet*. It was in vain that he had gone away, that he had put the width of the world between

himself and Cármen and the accursed picture that had bewitched them both. His steps had been drawn back by — why had he not recognised it? — the same influence that had fallen over him as he stood before the portrait first, the same influence that had now woven around him a net of circumstances which he had no more power to break than one bound hand and foot by a fabled spell of sorcery.

This being so, there was nothing to do but await the issue of events. With regard to what the first event would be he had not the least doubt. A messenger would come from Don Luis charged with a challenge, which he did not see his way either to accept or decline. To accept would be to acknowledge that he had done him a wrong; to decline would be to incur a stigma of cowardice, and, unless he promptly quitted Mexico, to bring upon himself a public affront which would render a duel unavoidable. He was still revolving in his mind this dilemma, when a knock at the door caused him to say to himself that the hour of decision had come. He walked across the floor and opened it, facing, to his great surprise, instead of one of the friends of Don Luis, the major-domo of the Fernandez del Valle household, in his picturesque Mexican dress. Removing a silver-laced sombrero, the man presented to him a large, square envelope, sealed and stamped with the family crest.

"You will wait for an answer?" Ingraham inquired, much astonished at such a mode of communication.

"No, se ñor," the man replied. "Don Luis has left the city. He departed with all the family early this morning for his hacienda in Michoacan, leaving directions only that I should with my own hand deliver this letter to you. There was nothing said of an answer. I have the honour to bid you good-day, se ñor."

Ingraham hardly noticed his departure. His words had so filled him with astonishment that he tore open the envelope in haste and drew forth the enclosure. He found these words written on the sheet within:

"Se ñor: It was my intention to have sent you this morning a friend who would arrange with you time and place for the conclusion of a meeting in which we were unhappily interrupted last night. But cooler consideration has brought me to a decision, in which I hope you will acquiesce, to avert the scandal which would follow our meeting in Mexico, by arranging that it shall take place elsewhere. I leave this morning with my family for Las Cruces. I shall be absent for a length of time barely sufficient to go there and myself return to the capital, when I shall at once send a trusted friend to learn from you at what place — the farther the better — you will meet me. Hoping that I am not mistaken in trusting thus to the sense of honour of the man whom I once held as a friend, and whom I can not conceive to be a coward as well as a traitor,

I am, etc., etc.,

"Luis Fern ández del Valle."

"Well, Se ñor Don Luis Fern ández del Valle," said Ingraham, smiling faintly over the last words, "you are determined to make it impossible for me to avoid meeting you. Yet I have no desire whatever to kill you, and I certainly do not intend that you shall kill me if I can prevent it. Here at least is a respite, and if I could but find the man who disappeared last night — for it is too much to believe that he was a spectre! But I have positively no means of identifying him, thanks to my cursed folly in failing to face him boldly in the Alameda. If I believed that the woman was Cármen, I should know well where to find him" — and his thoughts turned darkly to Rivera; "but if it were some one else, what possible clue to his discovery have I? If I could communicate with her, she might learn who of her household was absent on that night. But without such a suggestion, with the fixed delusion in her mind that it was a supernatural appearance, what hope is there of her making any inquiry, any effort to clear herself? And he has taken her to Las Cruces!" For the first time the full meaning of this flashed upon Ingraham's mind, bringing with it again the crushing sense of a mysterious, unrelenting fate which had been for a few minutes forgotten. "To Las Cruces! That means to hopeless imprisonment, to the fate of the Marquesa

over again! Well, my task is plain now. I have promised her help, and she shall have it. Nothing short of open insult shall force me to meet this man and risk my life until I have offered her the opportunity to clear herself if that be possible; if not, to seek a refuge where his cruelty can not reach her. To-morrow I, too, will start for Michoacan. If it is fate which has brought us to this point, hereafter I will be my own fate — and hers."

## XXV.

Not until after he had taken this resolution did it occur to Ingraham to consider how he could, for a time at least, rid himself of the companionship of Brooke. Since it was by his own desire and arrangement that they were engaged to leave Mexico together the next morning, there was difficulty in finding an excuse for overturning this arrangement and taking his departure alone. But he was none the less firmly resolved to do so, nor did he trouble himself very much about the excuse which he should make, trusting to the inspiration of the moment when he announced his change of plan. It was noon before he met Brooke, it having been long understood between them that neither should intrude upon the other in the morning, but a single glance at the young man's countenance was then sufficient to indicate that something of a disturbing nature had occurred to him also. Ingraham, who was by this time in possession of that calmness of mind which is the result of fixed decision, at once perceived these signs of discomposure when the tall figure, pausing in the open door of his anteroom, obstructed the flood of brilliant sunshine pouring in, and forced him to look up from the writing on which he was engaged.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Why should you think that anything is the matter?" Brooke returned, making an unsuccessful attempt to change his expression as he sat down. "I have been very much surprised — that is all. You'll agree with me that it is a little singular that just when we had valiantly and virtuously made up our minds to put temptation behind us by taking refuge in flight, the temptation should suddenly and unexpectedly remove itself. In other words, the whole of the Fernandez del Valle have this morning left Mexico."

"Indeed!" said Ingraham, with the command of countenance which it is not difficult to maintain when listening to news already well known. "It has not taken you long to discover the fact. How did you learn it?"

"I met Rivera just now and heard it from him."

Despite his self-command, a flash came into Ingraham's eyes. Rivera was the man on whom (if he could believe the woman to have been C ámen) his suspicions rested, and this intelligence roused them at once. But he controlled his voice and manner, though he could not control his glance.

"And how did Rivera acquire his information so soon?" he asked.

"Easily enough. A note from Don Luis to his father stated that urgent personal business called him away, and requested Se ñor Rivera to make the proper excuses and explanations for his absence. I shouldn't think their legislative duties amount to much, but he is a senator, you know — Don Luis, I mean — and so is Se ñor Rivera."

"Yes," Ingraham assented, saying to himself that this accounted for Rivera's knowledge. Of course Don Luis could not leave his official duties without some formality of the kind, and the elder Rivera, being one of his closest friends, was naturally the person whom he would delegate to make the proper explanations of his absence.

"Was Don Alfredo certain that all the family are gone?" he inquired, after a moment.

"Perfectly certain," Brooke replied. "All, without exception, are gone. The curious thing about it is that there was not a word uttered of such an intention on the part of any one, last night. Don Alfredo and I were both there — at the Fernandez del Valle house, I mean — and it is difficult to understand either a reticence so extreme or a resolution so sudden."

"Oh, as for that," said Ingraham, "they might have had some reason for keeping their own counsel, or an urgent message of some kind might have reached Don Luis after your departure. His mother and elder children are at the hacienda in Michoacan, and one of them may be ill. Did you" — he endeavoured to make his voice careless — "leave the house with Don Alfredo last night?"

"No," Brooke answered, with a quick glance. "I left earlier than he did. Why do you ask?"

"From curiosity merely. And did not Doña Inés give you even a hint of her coming departure?"

"Not the slightest; and that is what seems most strange."

"It would be very strange," Ingraham agreed, "if the departure had not been, as I suggest, unforeseen and unprepared for. Now, what shall *we* do? It seems hardly worth while to fly from a temptation that, as you remark, has removed itself. So perhaps you may wish to remain longer in Mexico, although its principal attraction has departed."

"I was about to propose something of the kind," said Brooke, with a little hesitation. "I don't like to leave Mexico so abruptly; that is, I think it would be agreeable to prolong our stay a little. You haven't any particular desire to leave, have you?"

"N — o," replied Ingraham, hesitating in turn. "I am quite willing to remain longer, if you don't mind being left alone for a few days while I go off on a sketching-tour. I haven't done any work of the kind for some time, but the man who wouldn't feel his artistic impulses roused in Mexico must have no artistic impulses at all. No doubt you'll be able to amuse yourself very well without me, and I don't think it would amuse you at all to accompany me."

"Oh, there'll be no difficulty in amusing myself," Brooke replied. "Where do you think of going?"

"To Toluca, I think. I have long intended to do some sketching in that lovely valley. I shall be over there for a few days, and then on my return we will settle our plans definitely."

"Very well," replied Brooke, so readily that it appeared as if, for some reason, he found this proposal rather a relief than otherwise. "When do you think of going?"

"There is no reason for delay. Since our departure is deferred, I shall take this afternoon's train for Toluca."

It was not at Toluca, however, but at Acambaro, where the railroad to Morelia connects with the main line of the Mexican National, that Ingraham left his train that night. He disembarked, the most irreproachable of gringo travellers in manner and attire, but when he appeared the next morning the landlord of the hotel where he had spent the later portion of the night opened his eyes in astonishment. The gringo was transformed into a Mexican, exact in every point of national costume. Tight-fitting breeches of dark cloth, short, braided jacket, folded sarape laid across the shoulder, broad sombrero, all was perfect, even to the pointed shoes and the nicotine-stained finger-ends.

"Ah, Señor," the landlord could not refrain from saying, "you are a complete Mexican this morning."

"It is a very convenient dress when one is going out into the country, and enables one to avoid remark in places where foreigners are seldom seen," Ingraham replied, carelessly.

His adoption of the dress had been for this purpose, as well as to avoid recognition in Morelia. It was hardly possible, he thought, that after three years any one there would remember his face sufficiently to know him in this semi-disguise. He was careful, however, not to go to the same hotel where he had stayed before, and he did not register his name for the few hours he remained.

The next day found him again in Patzcuaro, where he learned, by apparently casual inquiry, that the Fernandez del Valle party had passed through on their way to Las Cruces. His plans for his own movements were all carefully made, and he now proceeded to put them in execution. From Patzcuaro he obtained an Indian canoe to convey him by the lake to

Tzintzuntzan, the village famous in ancient times as the Tarascan capital of Michoacan, and as the primitive see of the saintly and heroic Bishop of Quiroga, while in degree, at least, it is famous in modern times from the remarkable romances that certain travellers have woven about the noble "Entombment" of Titian which is preserved here, treasured jealously by the people, not from superstitious reverence, nor yet from any knowledge of its artistic value, but because it is associated with the memory of the great bishop (having been sent to him by Philip II), to whom they owe a debt of gratitude which after the lapse of three centuries they still pay in undying love and reverence.

Having during his stay at Las Cruces made an excursion across the valley to this village, Ingraham knew that it was not very far from the hacienda, and selected it, therefore, as his point of approach. Thence he passed over to the neighbouring town of Iguatzio, and after much trouble succeeded in obtaining there a mount — a very sorry horse which he purchased outright for the sum of twenty dollars. Thus equipped, and gratified to find that his Mexican dress protected him from the curious observation which in remote districts follows a foreigner, he set forth, turning his face inland, and crossing the valley toward the blue, well-known outline of the hills which rose above Las Cruces, and which, like friendly sentinels, seemed beckoning him from afar.

## XXVI.

It was dusk in the chapel of Las Cruces by the time the Evening Rosary was finished, but the candles lighted upon the altar for Benediction threw their soft radiance, over the kneeling groups on the pavement beyond the altar rail — groups composed chiefly of women with draped heads and delicate brown faces uplifted toward the centre of the radiance, of many children, and of a few men who had dropped in at the end of their day's toil to lift their worn hands in touching supplication toward "El Sant ímo," as the Mexicans call the sacred Host.

Among these men was one who knelt like the rest, but withdrawn as far as possible from the light of the candles into a shadowy corner formed by one of the lesser altars which in Mexican churches are generally placed along the sides of the nave. From this dusky nook he could, himself unobserved, scan closely the figures and faces around him, and he had soon after his entrance perceived the person whom he sought. C ármén was kneeling near the rail which divided the sanctuary from the body of the chapel, and the radiance from the altar fell full upon her face, framed in the black drapery which surrounded it. While strikingly noble and lofty, there had been nothing very spiritual in the character of her beauty since its development; but, observing her closely now with that keen artist glance which perceives so much, Ingraham was struck by the fact that her face seemed lifted into a higher beauty than it had ever possessed before. Like fine carving in ivory, the exquisite outlines of her features showed in the midst of the severe black folds which shrouded her; under their level brows her eyes burned with a sorrowful splendour, and her nobly-cut mouth was set in lines of proud yet pathetic endurance. Seen thus, she might have been painted for some wronged queen who had carried her majesty and her sorrows to the cloister.

Little, besides that face, did Ingraham observe during the progress of the services. The shrill, sweet singing of the boys who formed the choir floated unnoticed around him, and he heeded nothing that went on until, the Benediction over, the sacristan began to extinguish the candles on the altar, and the people to rise and move toward the outer door. He remained quietly in his corner until almost every one had left the building, only a few dark figures remaining here and there scattered over the pavement in the obscurity which was now lighted only by the lamps hanging on each side of the sanctuary, when he rose, and, moving forward, knelt again near a side door through which he knew that C ármén would go out, since it led directly into the court of the

house. Here he waited, secure in the fact that she must pass close by him in order to leave the church.

It was necessary, however, to exercise some patience in this waiting, for it was long before she moved. At length she rose, drew still closer around her the black mantle which enshrouded her — just such a mantle as that figure had worn which Ingraham followed through the moonlit streets of Mexico — and crossed the church, with a grace as incomparable as it was unconscious, toward the door by which he waited. Having taken thought of every detail, he had placed himself where he knew that she would pause at least an instant beside a stone basin containing holy water. He was not mistaken. She paused, so close to him that her draperies touched him, and as she dipped her fingers into the water he breathed rather than said, in the lowest possible whisper —

"Do not speak, nor look at me, but take the paper which I will put into your hand."

She started at the first sound of his voice, but retained her self-possession perfectly and blessed herself with one hand while with the other she took the paper which he slipped beneath her mantle. He felt her fingers close upon it, then her draperies swept by him, the door opened at her touch and closed again behind her.

In order to avert any possible suspicion, he waited a little longer in the church, then rose, and passed down the shadowy nave into the outer air. There was a faint stain of colour yet visible in the western sky, but the stars were shining above, as he stepped through the doorway and felt the chill touch of the Mexican night. Drawing his *zarape* closely up about his face — for he did not wish to be recognised by any of the servants of the house or labourers of the estate — he turned sharply from the church door and took a path across the fields by which he had come, and which led at a distance of a mile or so into the *camino real* (highway) that passed through the lands of Las Cruces to a town distant a couple of leagues.

It was a very small town, a collection of the usual adobe dwellings around a deserted-looking plaza and a picturesque old church, and Ingraham's lodgings therein were of the most primitive description — a room in a *meson* (which may be said to resemble an Oriental khan more nearly than any other conceivable house of entertainment), and food of a more eatable quality than might perhaps be imagined, taken at a *fonda*. But he was not only of the material of which good travellers are made, since he was able even on ordinary occasions to treat personal discomforts with contempt, but on the present occasion comfort was something to which he did not give a thought. The one idea which possessed him and directed all his actions was to be near Las Cruces — that is, near C á rmen. Everything else was subordinate to that; and as he now walked rapidly along the high-road in the clear starlight, seeing on each hand, beyond the stone walls which bounded his way, the wide fields and pastures stretching away to the hills outlined against the deep violet sky, his heart felt almost light, so much was he relieved to have succeeded in his first attempt to communicate with her. Before this, no doubt, she had found an opportunity to read his letter, and knew that she was not left helpless and alone, but that one willing to serve her in any extremity was near and waited only her bidding to aid her. It seemed to Ingraham as he strode along through the vast, silent world of outspread plains and heights, delighting in the fresh cool air which was reviving as wine to his fevered and jaded faculties, that he was as one who followed a path marked out for him by a fate inevitable and beyond his control. All his surroundings, all the influences of this remote, primitive world in which he found himself, came to the aid of that deep fount of superstition which exists more or less in every nature, but especially in the imaginative and artistic. By ways which they knew not, by acts for which they owed no responsibility, both C á rmen and himself had been brought to this point, whence their road would lead — whither? He did not ask, nor did he form a plan. A great sense of calm had taken possession of him in the belief that his actions would be directed to their destined end. All that was within his power had been accomplished when he laid his service at the feet of the woman whose life he had so strangely touched and affected. The rest was with her — or with the fate that had first brought him within the shadow of Las Cruces.



The next evening found him again in the dusky church, beside the holy-water font. Again he watched the beautiful pale face in the light of the candles, the dark, luminous eyes full of sadness, the proud, sweet mouth set in its lines of pain. The knowledge of a friend, a deliverer if she chose, near at hand, had not wrought the change in her aspect for which he had hoped. More than ever she looked like one who, wronged but majestic, asked consolation only from God for the injustice of man. She did not once turn her head nor suffer her eyes to stray in the direction where he had told her he would await her answer to his letter, but neither did she keep him waiting as, unconsciously, on the evening before. When the services were concluded, she rose at once and moved across the church toward the door near which he knelt. One glance of her eyes met his as she paused to take holy water, and in the same instant extended her hand beneath her drapery. It was a moment's work to meet it with his own and receive a folded paper. No sooner had he taken this than she passed on and the door again closed upon her.

Ingraham did not permit his impatience to make him forget any precaution in leaving the church, and it was not until he was a mile at least from Las Cruces that he paused in a sheltered spot, and, by the light of one or two of the wax *cerillas* which, like every smoker, he carried, read what was written on the paper that had been given him. It was but a few lines:

"With a grateful heart I thank you for your desire to aid me," Cármen had written, "but you can do nothing for me. Only God can make my innocence clear. I beg that you will go away, for your presence here exposes us both to great risk, and would be regarded as a proof of that which has been unjustly charged against us, if it were known. So go, I beseech you, go at once; and may God go with you."

That was all. The tiny taper burned down to his fingers; he dropped it and stood in the starlit darkness asking himself what he should do. Go! He almost laughed aloud at the idea. Go, and leave Cármen to her fate, to the isolation, the imprisonment, the cruelty, perhaps, that awaited her? He swore a great oath in his heart that he would never do so. She was not only a creature in need of help — sore need, he felt convinced — but she had upon him a claim deep-rooted in the destiny which had made him her discoverer, almost her creator, in the fate that controlled them both like blind atoms, and in every pulsation of the heart that had been hers since the first day he looked upon her. Go! Not until he had spoken to her face to face, not until he had offered her all that he had resolved upon, not until with her own lips she told him that she preferred captivity to freedom, and pain to such happiness as might yet be hers!

And so, though sensible of the risk which he incurred, the next evening saw him again kneeling in the shadowy church. It was his only way of approaching her, for he had no messenger whom he dared trust. But, aware that, even if he was not recognised, the presence of a stranger could not but be remarked in this hacienda chapel, he determined not to appear in it again. He had therefore prepared a letter, in which, after assuring her that nothing would induce him to go until he had obtained a personal interview with her, he said that, in obedience to her wishes, he would not come again to the church, but that every evening would find him in the *huerta* behind, where he should wait in the hope that she would be able to meet him or else convey some message appointing a time and place of meeting. "Run no risk," he said, in conclusion, "but remember that I shall be there every evening at dusk until you come or send me your commands. The only command I shall not obey is the command to go without seeing you."

With this missive ready in his hand, he again waited her coming by the holy-water font. As she approached after the services were ended, he observed that her eyes sought the spot where he knelt, as if in apprehension of his being there, and when she perceived him there was no mistaking her glance of keen reproach. But she did not refuse to take the letter which he slipped into her hand, as she paused beside him for a moment, and then, as upon the other occasions, passed on and left the church without another glance in his direction.

## XXVII.

It was with a renewal of the now familiar sense of being in the grasp of a destiny over which he had no control that Ingraham found himself again in the well-remembered *huerta* of Las Cruces — the *huerta* where C ámen had once met him, where for a few brief moments he had fancied she loved him, and where Don Luis had stepped between them. How that unforgotten scene came back to him as he stood once more in the spot where it had taken place, the spot where everything was as unchanged as if he had left it the day before, where, indeed, half a century might pass and make no change! Yonder rose the stern, fortress-like walls of the old house, around him were the shaded walks overhung by fruit-trees, and before him was the *glorieta*, with its brimming basin, and its stone seats gray with age. Everything was so absolutely the same as on that past evening, even to the colour still lingering above the western hills and the sweet sound of singing from the chapel, that he almost asked himself if all that seemed to have occurred in the interval had not been a dream and he was not now waiting for the C ámen of the past to come and hear his story of love?

But these fancies soon faded under the stern considerations of reality. Would C ámen, the C ámen of the present — not a girl free to be wooed and won in all honour and nobleness, but a woman bound by iron bonds of duty, a misjudged and unhappy prisoner — venture to meet him? He hardly dared hope that she would be able to do so on the first evening. It would probably be some time before she could make an opportunity to leave the house unobserved. No matter. He had promised that whenever she came she would find him awaiting her, and, if it were necessary to wait for weeks instead of days, that promise should be kept. He hoped, however, that the period of waiting might not be too much prolonged, for he knew well the danger he ran in every visit to Las Cruces — danger of inquiry and recognition — danger more grave even for her than for him. Had it been foretold to him that he would ever find himself in such a situation, lurking in disguise in another man's garden, like a lover in a melodrama or, far worse, a spy, he would have laughed in incredulous scorn. But now he scarcely considered the misconceptions which would attach to him should he be discovered, or gave a thought to the personal danger that menaced him. Still less did he think of the romanticism of his position or its extravagance in other eyes. Little as his life had prepared him for anything of the kind, the day of trifles was over with him and the day of realities had come. Passion in its deep sense and original meaning — not the perverted meaning in which the word is too often used — had seized him in that strong grasp which leaves no room for thought of anything save the two great things which it represents — suffering and sacrifice. For as no true passion ever existed without its throes of suffering, so that does not deserve the name in which the thought of self is not annihilated. To noble heights of endurance and of achievement, not to depths of baseness and self-seeking, does passion, God's greatest force in the soul of man, lead those who are able to feel it. And such passion was now in this man's heart — passion in which self was set aside in the thought of another, in the ardent desire to serve one whose life, overshadowed by darkening fate, seemed interwoven with his own, and who had neither helper nor defender save himself. In what light of quixotic folly his intentions would be regarded by those whose love is low as their faith in all that lifts humanity above the brutes to which it is akin is small, he did not for one instant trouble himself to reflect. The modern world, its standards and its scepticisms, its mockery and its littleness, was very far removed from this life which was a survival of other ages, this remote wilderness of Nature, this primitive simplicity of man, that made a setting for the drama of his fate.

And of C ámen's. For, let it be said again, it was of her alone that he thought as he paced the walks where the evening shadows were momentarily deepening, never losing sight of the fountain-filled space over which dusk and starlight mingled, nor of the walk which led from the direction of the house, and along which, if she came at all, she would appear. But he had so schooled himself to the anticipation of disappointment, so settled in his own mind that she would

not come on this first evening, that it was with a start of surprise, an almost suffocating bound of the heart, that he suddenly saw her approaching.

For it was herself. There could be no error this time. Shrouded though she was in her black mantle, the incomparable grace of her movements and the superb dignity of her bearing could not be mistaken.

There was about her no air of one who came to a secret tryst, no furtiveness of glance or stealthiness of movement. Composedly as if she had been a queen going to her presence-chamber, she passed along the walk and into the open circle, where she paused and glanced around. As she paused, Ingraham emerged from the shadows on the farther side and came toward her. They met by the fountain, and, as he silently but with a bearing of infinite respect bowed deeply, she held out her hand in the gesture with which one welcomes a friend.

"Se ñor," she said, and her clear tones fell like music on his ear, so grave and sweet were they, "I am sorry that the day should have arrived when I can not say that I am glad to see you at Las Cruces. Instead I must ask, why have you come?"

"I have come," Ingraham answered, "to serve you, if you will suffer me to do so."

"And how," she said, with the same grave sweetness, "should you be able to serve me? There is no way: I have told you that. And by your presence here you do both yourself and me great wrong, and expose us both to great danger. For, because I believe in your desire to serve me, because I believe that you are truly the friend of one who is a wronged and unhappy woman, I have come here to meet you, to thank you for wishing to defend me, and to bid you go and leave me in the hands of God. I have done this at the risk of more than my life, at the risk of such misconception as makes life a thing of little worth. And since I could give you no higher proof of my gratitude and my trust, I pray you now to go."

It is impossible adequately to express the infinite dignity and the exquisite gentleness of these words. They were such as made Ingraham in his heart thank God that he had harboured no thought or desire which would have rendered him unworthy of such trust, which would have made him bend his head before her, a shamed, dishonoured man. Instead, he looked into the dark eyes which even in this obscurity were such wells of soft light, and answered with the haste of one who feels that his time for pleading may be short.

"You do me no more than justice," he said. "I have come at every risk because I believe I am your only possible defender. Can you tell me that you do not need a defender? Has not the fate of the Marquesa fallen upon you? Has not the man who so unjustly judged you from mere appearances also condemned you to imprisonment here, even as she was condemned?"

"It is true," she answered, quietly. "And if part of her fate has been mine, why not the rest? I was foolish to dream that it would be otherwise, that I could take her place and know only the happiness and brilliancy of her lot without tasting its bitterness. I understand better now. The rest of my life is to be spent like hers in the dark shadow of loneliness and shame. Well, the padre says that I must not think of it as fate, but as the will of God. So be it. Fate, or God's will, it is fixed — I know now that it has always been fixed — and there is nothing for me but to endure with the courage which it may please God to give me. And so, again, se ñor, I pray you go!"

"And leave you to such a fate? — to the helplessness that makes such a fate possible? Never!" cried Ingraham. "I will die upon your threshold first! This is a wilder delusion than that which made you wreck your life and mine — for you wrecked both, C ámen — when, because of your fancies about that infernal picture, you turned from me to Don Luis. What can I say to you? Do you not see that if you are suffering the fate of that woman, it is only because her story suggested to Don Luis first to doubt and then to condemn you in the manner he has chosen? But if she was powerless, you are not. I am here to offer you the power to make your own fate, or to fulfil that which I believe has been ordained for you. I am no more certain that I live than I am certain that I was brought back across half the world for this purpose — to do you a service which, as I was strangely moved to tell you when we first met after my return, I owe to you as a right."

"You owe me nothing but some pain, I fear, which when I gave it I was too young and ignorant to comprehend," she replied, sadly. "But since you will not go without further words— though every minute increases the danger of discovery for us both— tell me at once the nature of the service you offer, that I may fitly thank you, if I may not accept it."

"You must accept it!" he returned, almost fiercely. "You must leave this captivity which is a wrong and an outrage to you! I will make every arrangement for your escape, and place the most ample means at your disposal, if you will leave this place and take your life into your own hands."

There was a moment's pause — a moment in which her lustrous eyes were bent upon him as if she would read not his face alone, but his inmost soul — before she said, slowly —

"And then, se ñor? What would you propose that I should do then? — after I had left my home, like a guilty rather than an innocent woman?"

"Rather like a woman too secure in her innocence to submit without appeal to insult and condemnation," he replied, quickly. "Once free, go where you will — to your father, if you can trust to his protection; if not, to Mexico, where you must have friends — and prove your innocence to the man who has so harshly judged you. Do not fear that the slanderous world shall have any opportunity to connect your name with mine. I will never approach you; I will even leave the country if you desire, although it concerns me as well as you that the charge your husband makes should be disproved. But, as God hears me, it is not of myself that I think, but of you, and all that I ask is to be allowed to set you free — I, who had more than any other to do with the fate that has bound you! Here you can do nothing; you are helpless under injury and false accusation. And if you should escape without my aid, you would be helpless still, for you would be without means. And gold is the talisman that opens all doors. Once I hoped that the wealth with which I am burdened might have opened for you all the doors of life. Instead, it can only open the door of your prison. But you will not deny me this privilege. It is all I ask — to give you freedom and the power to demand justice. Let me do this, who have been able to do no more!"

In the passionate earnestness of his pleading he had taken her hand in both his own and bent toward her, speaking eagerly. C ármén made no effort to withdraw her hand. For one passing instant she had doubted him, but now, standing wrapped in grace and dignity as in a garment, she answered, with the grave gentleness of her first manner —

"I do not know, Se ñor, why you should give so much thought to my poor fate, unless it be simply from the greatness of your kindness. But, since it is so, let me thank you best by perfect candour. You offer me, with a generosity which I should shame myself if I doubted, the power to leave this which you truly call my prison. But does it not occur to you that I should also be leaving my home — for home and prison both it is to me — and should I not thus appear to establish the truth of the charge made against me? For innocence does not fly. Flight is for guilt; and no act of mine shall ever sully my name and that of my child by acknowledging myself guilty of that of which I am accused."

"But how will you clear your name if you allow yourself to be hopelessly imprisoned here?" Ingraham asked. "Do you not see that cruel wrong has broken all bonds of duty? For the sake of yourself and of your child you should leave this prison, which is no longer a home, and take steps to discover and to prove who was the woman who entered your garden in Mexico disguised as yourself."

"Who was the woman!" she repeated, and he saw her shiver slightly. "Ah, who could it have been but her — the Marquesa — whose fate I must follow and whose cup of bitterness I must drink!"

"Great God!" he exclaimed, in dismay — for who can reason against delusion? — "do you still entertain that wild fancy? Do you not know that it is superstition — madness—"

"Is it," she interrupted, "greater superstition, greater madness, than to believe what you can not deny, that you and I, both innocent, have been drawn nevertheless into the exact reproduction of that ancient tragedy? Remember the scene upon which I came that night when the

clash of swords drew me into the garden, and tell me, if you dare, that any merely human agency could have brought such a thing about? "

"It was strange," he admitted, "but not so strange as you think. For, whether or not the event was the result of some fate which we do not comprehend, the circumstances were certainly brought about by human agency. Have you never wondered how I chanced to be outside your gate on that fatal night? Do you not know that the folly and imprudence — nay, worse— which brought me there constitute another reason why I claim the right to help you? For I did you a great injustice—"

"What?" she demanded, in a quick, imperious voice, her eyes growing larger and more luminous as they flashed upon his own through the deepening twilight.

"I followed from the Alameda," he answered, slowly, "a woman whom I took for you — for you, do you understand me? How can I ever sufficiently atone to you for that? But she deceived me, as she deceived your husband, by her likeness to you. And she was no shadow, no ghost of the dead. She was living, she was with a man whom I was mad enough not to identify when I might have done so, and she entered your gate. I was in the act of following her companion, who walked rapidly away after parting from her, when Don Luis emerged from the garden and encountered me. He had seen her, and he met me: what could he think? "

"He might have thought," she answered, proudly, "that it was easier for circumstances — nay, for his very eyes — to deceive him, than for me to do so. But he had no faith in me, was ready to believe the worst, to charge me with a crime the mere suspicion of which is the last insult to a woman! And you, too, Señor" — she had drawn her hand from him now, and stood erect before him, a noble and majestic figure, whose glance he could not meet — "you, too, believed me capable of falling to such depths. What act had I ever committed, what word had I ever said, that you should have done me such grievous wrong?"

He felt crushed beneath the poignant keenness of her reproach. "No act or word of yours ever belied you," he answered. "It was my own madness — the memory of the portrait, and the old accursed story—"

"Ah!" she interrupted, with a quick gesture of hands clasped over her heart, "it comes back ever to the same thing — the portrait! Say what you choose, my fate is fixed. I, C ámen, may be what I will, but, like her — that woman whose image I am — I must bear always the stigma of having done evil and incurred disgrace. Even you, the one friend on whose faith I might have thought I could rely, to whom I have ever spoken out the inmost thoughts of my heart, even you believed it of me! What hope, then, that any other will do me justice? And, this being so, all that remains for me is to bury myself here, in what is a shelter from scorn as well as a prison, until God shall send me relief by death from this body which does me such cruel wrong."

She lifted her beautiful face with an impassioned movement toward heaven, as if praying for the swift coming of the release of which she spoke, just as a man's dark figure, which had approached unseen by either, stepped into the open space where such light as yet lingered fell.

## XXVIII.

It was Ingraham who first perceived and recognised this figure. He stepped forward instantly, thus placing himself between C ámen and the man who approached.

"Don Luis," he said, quickly, "suffer me to explain my presence here before you form any judgment upon it—"

"My judgment is already formed," replied Don Luis, in a voice which indicated that he was holding his fury under control with the utmost difficulty. "What explanation can alter the fact that you are here? — that while I hastened back to Mexico to give you the meeting which no man of honour would have dared to shirk, you came here, like a coward as well as a traitor, to meet

this false woman and betray the honour of the house that has given you hospitality! I will listen to no words from you, and, if I did right, I should kill you like a dog. You have forfeited all claim to be met as a gentleman on equal terms. But for my own sake I will not be guilty of the dastardly act of killing an unarmed man. Defend yourself. If you have no weapon, here is a sword I have brought."

But Ingraham drew back from the offered blade. "No," he said, resolutely, "you can not again force me into a combat which has no reason to justify it. I have done you no injury. If I had, I would freely give you the utmost satisfaction one man can offer another. But I beg that you will hear me and learn why your wife has consented to meet me."

"It is unnecessary to tax your ingenuity in falsehood," replied the other, bitterly. "The fact speaks for itself. It was in this very spot that she met you secretly once before, and I — I was mad enough to trust her after that, and give her the opportunity to betray my trust and my honour!" He set his teeth, his eyes gleamed under the dark, bent brows. "Come!" he said, sternly, "defend yourself, or I shall kill you where you stand."

"Luis," said Cármen, stepping forward — and even at that moment Ingraham was struck with wonder at the dignity and command of her bearing — "whether you will hear Se ñor Ingraham or not, you shall hear me. You have charged me with the worst offence of which a woman can be guilty, of dishonouring myself and betraying your trust — I say nothing of your love, for had you loved me you would, I think, have had more faith — and of bringing shame upon the head of my innocent child. If I had done this thing I should have deserved all that you have said of me, for I should be a traitress to every duty and every obligation of my life. But I solemnly swear, in the presence of God, that I am innocent, and I demand of you the opportunity to prove my innocence. Se ñor Ingraham has come here — at the risk of his life, as he well knew — to tell me that you found him at your gate that night in Mexico because he had followed through the streets the woman whom you saw enter, and whose strange resemblance to me struck him as well as you. Neither you nor I made any effort to discover that woman — you because you had no doubt of my guilt, *I* because I thought the form had been only an appearance. But now I believe that the woman you mistook for me is a living woman, and I ask of you the simple justice of aiding me to find her."

There was a moment's silence, for while she spoke it was impossible even for the furious man before her to resist the compelling influence of her voice and manner, which breathed alike the simplicity of perfect truth and the loftiness of a soul proudly conscious of its own integrity. But this effect was brief. When her clear tones ceased, the reaction of passion in the mind of Don Luis was stronger perhaps for the momentary impulse toward other thoughts.

"You cover the blackness of your heart and of your conduct with a hypocrisy which might deceive an angel!" he cried, turning upon her with a concentration of rage under which a weaker though as innocent a woman might have shrunk. "If this man — of whom you speak truly when you say that he has come here at the risk of his life — knew that it was another woman whom he saw on that night, why did he not then say so, when the truth of his words might readily have been proved? And was it necessary for him to come here, in disgraceful secrecy, to tell you what he should rather have told to me, whose right it is to clear your honour, were such clearing possible? Let me hear no more of your falsities. If you have not the courage to avow your guilt, be silent! And go — if you do not wish to see me kill your lover."

"That," she said, solemnly, "you shall not do. While I live, you shall not kill an innocent man whose only fault is that he has placed himself in peril to serve me."

"To serve you!" repeated Don Luis, his fury now bursting all bonds of control. He turned to Ingraham. "If you do not wish me to think you coward enough to shelter yourself behind a woman," he said, "you will take this sword and defend yourself."

"Se ñora," said Ingraham, addressing Cármen earnestly, "I pray you to leave us. I promise you that I will not fight your husband if I can avoid it, for I think that when we are alone he will see that it is but just of him to listen to me."

"How can I leave you?" she asked, wildly, for the first time losing her self-command. "The old tragedy will be repeated. He will kill you, and your blood will be on my head!"

"On your head it shall be, shameless woman!" cried Don Luis, maddened by her words and her solicitude for Ingraham's life. As he spoke, he lunged straight at Ingraham with his sword. The action was so rapid, and Ingraham was so entirely without any means of parrying the thrust, that he would undoubtedly have been run through had not Cármen with lightning-like quickness flung herself before him. The lunge was straight and deadly, with all the power of a strong wrist and an infuriated heart behind it, and the blade passed through her body.

Of the instant that followed, Ingraham had little recollection afterward. It did occur to him to wonder dimly why he had not turned and slain the man who had done the fatal deed, but at the moment he thought only of the woman who had given her life for his, and who without a sound sank backward into his arms, as the swift steel that had pierced her breast was withdrawn.

With a great cry Don Luis dropped the sword and sprang toward her. "Cármen!" he exclaimed, in tones of keenest anguish. "Cármen, thou knowest I never meant the thrust for thee! Oh, God! — she is dead!"

But she was not dead. As he spoke, and as Ingraham endeavoured to stop the blood pouring from the wound with the folds of her mantle, she opened her eyes.

"The priest!" she gasped. "The priest! And bid him— bring— witnesses."

Witnesses that she had been murdered, both men thought she meant, but Don Luis uttered no word of protest. Since Ingraham was supporting her and holding back the red tide on which her life was passing away, it was for him to go. He rose to his feet — for he had dropped on the ground beside her — and turned, when — what was this? What should bring two dark figures emerging from the dusky alleys and hurrying toward them? Even as he perceived them, one cried out sharply in English—

"My God! we are too late! He has been killed!"

"Brooke!" exclaimed Ingraham, recognising the voice and lifting his head in what at another time would have been amazement.

But before Brooke could reply, the man accompanying him — who had paused in terror at sight of the dark group by the fountain — rushed forward with a startled cry and fell upon his knees beside the figure which Ingraham supported. "Mother of God!" he gasped. "It is la *ni ña* — it is Doña Cármen herself!"

"Miguel," said Cármen, faintly— for it was the faithful major-domo of Las Cruces — "go for the *capellán*, and bring him quickly. Let him not delay an instant; and return thou with him when he comes."

"*Si, se ñora, si!*" the man cried, springing to his feet and flying with the speed of a deer down the shadowy path which led to the apartments of the *capellán*.

Meanwhile Brooke had seized Don Luis, whom he met face to face. "If you have murdered my friend," he cried, fiercely, "you shall answer to me!"

"Your friend!" repeated the other, in a voice that could hardly have been recognised as his own. "I tried to kill him; but, instead, I have killed my wife!"

"Doña Cármen!" cried Brooke, in horror-stricken accents. He fell back, loosing his hold of the other, and at that moment Cármen spoke again.

"Who," she said, "is this?"

"It is I, se ñora — Brooke!" replied the young man, bending over her. "Ah, great God, what awful fatality! But this wound — a doctor—"

"It is fatal," she said, stopping him. "I feel that it is. A doctor can do no good. But I am glad that you are here, se ñor. God has sent you — in time."

"In time!" he groaned, bitterly. "Oh, had I but come an hour sooner! I do not know how this terrible thing has come to pass, but I fear that it has been the result of something which occurred one night in Mexico. And if so — if so, how can I ever forgive myself? "

A hand fell on his shoulder. The next instant he found himself dragged to his feet and again facing Don Luis. "What do you mean?" asked the Mexican, hoarsely. "Speak — if you do not wish me to kill *you*! What do you know of that night in Mexico?"

"I know that a fearful mistake was made, of which I am in part the cause," the other answered. "I have only lately learned of it, and I have not lost an hour in hurrying here to tell you that the person you saw enter your garden that night was not Doña Cármen, but her sister."

There was a moment's pause, for Don Luis seemed struck dumb, and it was Cármen who breathed rather than said, "In és!"

"In és," answered Brooke, turning again toward her. "Oh, what can I say of the folly which has led to such a tragedy as this! It was only folly. She said that she was tired of being watched and restrained, that she wished to be free like an American. We had played at love-making, and that night she told me to come to the garden gate, where she would meet me for a few moments, as she had several times done before. When we met, it was I who suggested a moonlight stroll, never dreaming that she would consent to go. But she was in a mood of wild recklessness: she declared at once that she would go, and when I hesitated, suggesting that we might meet some one who would recognise her, she laughed, pulled her mantle closely over her head, and answered, 'Then I shall be taken for Cármen. Do you not know we look alike — behind?' God forgive me that I laughed too, for the serious thought of such a possibility never occurred to me. She insisted on going as far as the Alameda. It seems that you" — addressing Ingraham — "followed us from there, and that *you*" — to Don Luis — "saw her enter the garden on our return. As for me, I left her at the gate and hastened away, knowing nothing of the events which followed, although I was very uneasy when I learned the next day that you and all your household had so abruptly left town. But I dared not make even an inquiry, fearing to betray her, and it was not until I received a letter from her, urging me to silence, since she had been seen but 'fortunately had been mistaken for her sister,' that I knew it to be my instant duty to tell the truth. I went to your house, señor. I learned there that you had just left again for Morelia. I coupled this with Ingraham's mysterious absence — for Doña In és also told me in her heartless letter that I had been mistaken for him — and I hurried here as fast as I could travel, fearing some purpose of a hostile meeting. That I have come too late is so terrible that I shall not lift my hand to defend myself if you kill me, as you have killed her — this noble and innocent lady!"

But of vengeance, even on one who had been the indirect cause of such awful wrong, Don Luis had now no thought. He turned and sank upon his knees beside his wife with a cry which those who heard it never forgot. "Cármen! — Cármen!" he said, in agonized tones, taking her passive hand and covering it with kisses. "How I have wronged thee! Oh, my heart's life, forgive me, forgive me! Blind and mad that I was, how could I doubt thee! Oh, my love — my love whom I have murdered — say that thou dost forgive me, miserable man that I am!"

Ingraham had thought ever since her utterance of the word "In és!" that, if not dead, Cármen was so near death that she would not speak again, for her weight upon his arm, her head upon his shoulder, had grown more heavy, and it seemed to him that her breathing had well-nigh ceased. But the poignant agony of the appeal now poured into her ear might almost have called back the spirit which had passed beyond the things of time — and hers was still lingering on the border between life and death. Again the dark eyes opened and the faint lips stirred.

"*Gracias a Dios!*" she murmured. "The truth is known, and my child will bear no stigma of shame. Forgive thee, Luis? Yes, with all my heart. Thou wert misled; but if thou hadst believed me — Ah, that is a poor love which has no faith. But do not grieve over this — accident. It was but an accident. And it is best so. The fatality is accomplished now; and it is better the sacrifice of my life than that of an innocent man."

"And art thou not innocent, my Cármen — my Cármen!" moaned the unhappy husband.

"The priest!" said Ingraham aside to Brooke. "For God's sake, hasten the priest!"

But even as Brooke turned, though with no faintest idea where to go, steps and voices were heard approaching, lights gleamed, and a minute later a tall, spare man in a *soutane*,



followed by several figures, came hurriedly up to them. Even in this moment of horror, Ingraham was struck by his composure — the composure of one long accustomed to tragic scenes. He did not ask a question; one glance at C ámen was enough, and, making the sign of the cross, he began at once to give the absolution for the dying.

But at the sound of his voice, full of solemn melody as he spoke the familiar Latin with his Spanish accent, C ámen's eyes again unclosed. And now she roused herself as she had not roused herself yet. Evidently she had reserved her strength for this effort.

"Father," she said, interrupting him, "I have something to say which can not wait. Listen to me first. I am dying, but I wish to tell you — you and all here — that it is by accident alone I have been killed. My husband had no thought of injuring me, but I flung myself before his sword, and it pierced my breast before he could withdraw it. Remember that I swear this — I who will soon be in the presence of God. And the Señor Ingraham will tell you that I speak truly. Do you understand me?" —her voice grew weaker— "I swear—"

"I understand you, my child," said the priest. "All who are here have heard and understood you. Have you anything else to tell me?"

"Nothing, I think," she answered, faintly. "So now the absolution — quick!"

He was not too quick in giving it. As the last words left his lips, C ámen's spirit passed away.

THE END.

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