

Reid Mayne

The Guerilla Chief, and Other Tales



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Story 1, Chapter I

Cerro Gordo

“*Agua! por amor Dios, agua – aguita!*” (Water! for the love of God, a little water!)

I heard these words, as I lay in my tent, on the field of Cerro Gordo.

It was the night after the battle bearing this name – fought between the American and Mexican armies in the month of April, 1847.

The routed regiments of Santa Anna – saving some four thousand men captured upon the ground – had sought safety in flight, the greater body taking the main road to Jalapa, pursued by our victorious troops; while a large number, having sprawled down the almost perpendicular cliff that overhangs the “Rio del Plan” escaped, unperceived and unpursued, into the wild chapparals that cover the *piedmont* of Peroté.

Among these last was the *lamé* tyrant himself, or rather should I say, *at their head leading the retreat*. This has always been his favourite position at the close of a battle that has gone against him; and a score of such defeats can be recorded.

I could have captured him on that day but for the cowardice of a colonel who had command over me and mine. I alone, of all the American army, saw Santa Anna making his escape from the field, and in such a direction that I could without difficulty have intercepted his retreat. With the strength of a corporal’s guard, I could have taken both him and his glittering staff; but even this number of men was denied me, and *nolens volens* was I constrained to forego the pleasure of taking prisoner this truculent tyrant, and hanging him to the nearest tree, which, as God is my judge, I should most certainly have done. Through the imbecility of my superior officer, I lost the chance of a triumph calculated to have given me considerable fame; while Mexico missed finding an avenger.

Strictly speaking, I was not *in* the engagement of Cerro Gordo. My orders on that day – or rather those of the spruce colonel who commanded me – were to guard a battery of mountain howitzers, that had been dragged to the top of the cliff overlooking El plan – not that already mentioned as the field of battle, and which was occupied by the enemy, but the equally precipitous height on the opposite side of the river.

From early daylight until the Mexicans gave way, we kept firing at them across the stupendous chasm that lay between us, doing them no great damage, unless they were frightened by the whizz of an occasional rocket, which our artillerist, Ripley – now a second-rate Secesh general – succeeded in sending into their midst.

As to ourselves and the battery, there was no more danger of either being assaulted by the enemy than there was of our being whisked over the cliff by the tail of a comet. There was not a Mexican soldier on our side of the *barranca*; and as to any of them crossing over to us, they could only have performed the feat in a balloon, or by making a circuitous march of nearly a dozen miles.

For all this security, our stick-to-the-text colonel held close to the little battery of howitzers; and would not have moved ten paces from it to have accomplished the capture of the whole Mexican army.

Perfectly satisfied, from the “lights with which we had been furnished,” that there was no danger to our battery, and chafing at the ill-luck that had placed me so far away from the ground where laurels were growing, and where others were in the act of reaping them, I lost all interest in Ripley and his popguns; and straying along the summit of the cliff, I sat me down upon its edge.

A yucca stood stiffly out from the brow of the precipice. It was the tree-yucca, and a huge bole of bayonet-shaped leaves crowning its corrugated trunk shaded a spot of grass-covered turf, on the very edge of the escarpment.

Had I not scaled the Andes, I might have hesitated to trust myself under the shadow of that tree. But a cliff, however sheer and stupendous, could no longer cause a whirl in my brain; and to escape from the rays of a tropical sun, at that moment in mid-heaven, I crept forward, caught hold of the stem of the yucca, lowered my extremities, all booted and spurred as they were, over the angle of the porphyritic rock, took a Havana out of my case, drew a fusee across the steel-filings, and, hanging ignited the cigar, I commenced watching the deadly strife then raging in full fury on the opposite side of the ravine.

The prudent *nawab*, who preferred looking at a tiger-hunt out of a two-storey window, or the spectator of a bull-fight in the upper tier of a “plaza de toros,” could not have been safer than I, since, without running the slightest risk, I had a “bird’s-eye view” of the battle.

I could see the steady advance of Worth’s division of regulars, supported by the fiery squadrons of Harney’s Horse; the brigade of Twiggs – that hoary-headed sexagenarian *bavard*, since distinguished as the “traitor of Texas;” the close-lined and magnificently-mounted troop of dragoons with horses of light grey, led by Phil Kearney – Kearney, the accomplished gentleman – the best cavalry officer America ever produced; the dashing, daring Phil Kearney, who, under my own eyes, lost his right arm in the *garita* of San Antonio de Abad; the lamented Phil. Kearney, since become a victim to the accursed Secesh rebellion, or rather to the mismanagement of that wooden-headed pretender whose stolid “strategy” ignorance still continues to mistake for genius – McClellan.

I saw them, one and all, regulars and volunteers, horse and foot, move at the “forward.” I saw them advance towards the hill “El Telegrafo.” I saw them mending their pace to the double-quick, and break into a run at the “charge!”

I could hear the charging signal and the cheer that succeeded it. I could see the base of the hill suddenly empurpled with smoke – a belt of conglomerate puffs rapidly merging into one another. I could perceive the opposing puffs upon the summit, growing thinner and thinner, as the blue mantle below *caped* gradually up towards the shoulder of the “cerro.”

Then the smoke upon the summit became dissolved into translucent vapour; the tricoloured Mexican flag flickered for a moment longer through its film, until, as if by some invisible hand, it was dragged down the staff; while at the same instant the banner of the stars and stripes swept out upon the breeze, announcing the termination of the battle of Cerro Gordo.

Story 1, Chapter II

The Escape of El Cojo

Despite the chagrin I felt at being literally *hors de combat*, I could not at this moment avoid surrendering myself to a feeling of exultation.

Both my chagrin and exultation were suddenly checked. A spectacle was before my eyes that inspired me with a vivid hope – a dream of glory.

Like a string of white ants descending the side of one of their steepest “hills,” I perceived a long line moving down the face of the opposite cliff. In the distance – a mile or more – they looked no larger than *termites*. Like them, too, they were of whitish colour. For all that, I knew they were men – soldiers in the cheap cotton uniforms of the Mexican infantry.

Without any strain upon my powers of ratiocination, I divined that they were fugitives from the field above, who, in their panic, had retreated over the precipice – anywhere that promised to separate them from their victorious foemen.

The moving line was not straight up and down the cliff, but zigzagged along its face. I could tell there was a path.

At its lower end, and already down near the “plan” of the river (Plan del Rio), I perceived a group of men, dressed in dark uniforms. There were points on the more sombre background of their vestments that kept constantly scintillating in the sun. These were gold or gilt buttons, epaulettes, steel scabbards of sabres, or bands of lace.

It was easy to tell that the individuals thus adorned were officers, notwithstanding the fact that, as officers, they were at the *wrong* end of the retreating line.

I carried a lorgnette, which I had already taken out of its case. I directed it towards the opposite side of the ravine, upon the dark head of that huge caterpillar sinuously descending the cliff.

I could distinguish the individuals of this group. One was receiving attentions from the rest – even assistance. The Mexican Caesar was easily recognised. His halting gait, as he descended the sloping path, or swung himself from, ledge to ledge, betrayed the cork leg of *El Cojo*.

A mule stood ready saddled at the bottom of the precipice. I saw Santa Anna descend and approach it. I saw him, aided by others, mount in the saddle. I saw him ride off, followed by a disordered crowd of frightened fugitives, who, on reaching the chapparal, took to their heels with the instinct of *sauve qui peut*.

I looked up the valley of the river. It was enclosed by precipitous “bluffs,” as far as the eye could reach; but on that side where we had planted our battery – scarce a mile above our position – a line of black heavy timber told me there was a lateral ravine leading outwards in the direction of Orizava. The retreating troops of Santa Anna must either find exit by this ravine, keep on up the stream, or risk running back into the teeth of their pursuers on the opposite side of the river.

I hurried back to the battery, and reported what I had seen. I could have made my colonel a general – a hero – had he been of the right stuff.

“Tis an easy game, colonel; we have only to intercept them at the head of yonder dark line of timber. We can be there before them!”

“Nonsense, captain! We have orders to guard this battery. We must not leave it.”

“May I take my own men?”

“No! not a man must be taken away from the guns.”

“Give me fifty!”

“I cannot spare them.”

“Give me twenty; I shall bring Santa Anna back here in less than an hour.”

“Impossible! There are thousands with him. We shall be lucky if they don’t turn this way. There are only three hundred of us, and there must be over a thousand of them.”

“You refuse to give me twenty men?”

“I can’t spare a man. We may need them all, and more.”

“I shall go alone.”

I was half mad. The glory that might have been so easily won was placed beyond my reach by this overcautious imbecile.

I was almost foolish enough to have flung myself over the cliff, or rushed alone into the midst of the retreating foes.

I left the battery and walked slowly away out of sight of my superior. I continued along the counterscarp of the cliff, until I had reached the edge of the lateral ravine leading out from the river valley. I crouched behind the thick tussocks of the zamias. I saw the retreating tyrant, mounted on his mule, ride past, almost within range of my rifle bullet! I saw a thousand men crowding closely after, so utterly routed and demoralised that nothing could have induced them to stand another shot. I was convinced that my original idea was in perfect correspondence with the truth, and that with the help of a score of determined men I could have made prisoners of the whole “ruck.”

Instead of this triumph, my only achievement in the battle of Cerro Gordo was to call my colonel a coward, for which I was afterwards confined to close quarters, and only recovered the right to range abroad on the eve of a subsequent battle, when it was thought that my sword might be of more service than my condemnation by court-martial.

Of such a nature were my thoughts as I lay under canvas on the field of Cerro Gordo on the night succeeding the battle.

“Agua! por amor Dios, agua – aguita!”

These words reaching my ear, and now a second time pronounced, broke in upon the train of my reflections.

They were not the only sounds disturbing the tranquillity of that calm tropic night. From other parts of the field, though in a different direction and more distant, I could hear many voices speaking in a similar strain, in tones of agonised appeal, low mutterings, mingled with moanings, where some mutilated foeman was struggling in the throes of death, and vainly calling for help that came not.

On that night, from the field of Cerro Gordo, many a soul soared upward to eternity – many a brave man went to sleep with unclosed eyes, a sleep from which he was never more to awaken.

In what remained of twilight after my arrival on the ground, I had visited all the wounded within the immediate vicinity of my post – all that I could find – for the field of battle was in reality a wood, or rather a thicket; and no doubt there were many who escaped my observation.

I had done what little was in the power of myself and a score of companions – soldiers of my corps – to alleviate the distress of the sufferers: for, although they were our enemies, we had not the slightest feeling of hostility towards them. There had been such in the morning, but it was gone ere the going down of the sun, leaving only compassion in its place.

Yielding simply to the instincts of humanity, I had done my best in binding up wounds, many of them that I knew to be mortal; and only when worn out by fatigue, absolutely “done up,” had I sought a tent, under the shelter of which it was necessary I should pass the night.

It was after a long spell of sleep, extending into the mid-hours of the night, that I was awakened from my slumbers, and gave way to the reflections above detailed. It was then that I heard that earnest call for water; it was then I heard the more distant voices, and mingled with them the howling bark of the coyote, and the far more terrible baying of the large Mexican wolf. In concert with such choristers, no wonder the human voices were uttered in tones especially earnest and lugubrious.

“Agua! par amor Dios, agua, aguita!”

For the third time I listened to this piteous appeal. It surprised me a little. I thought I had placed a vessel of water within the reach of every one of the wounded wretches who lay near my tent. Had this individual been overlooked?

Perhaps he had drunk what had been left him, and thirsted for more! In any case, the earnest accents in which the solicitation was repeated, told me that he was thirsting with a thirst that tortured him.

I waited for another, the fourth repetition of the melancholy cry. Once more I heard it.

This time I had listened with more attention. I could perceive in the pronunciation a certain provincialism, which proclaimed the speaker a peasant, but one of a special class. The *por amor Dios*, instead of being drawled out in the whine of the regular alms-asker, was short and slurred. It fell upon the ear as if the *a* in *amor* was omitted, and also the initial letter in *aguita*. The phrase ran: – “*Agua! por ’mor Dios, ’gua, aguita!*”

I recognised in those abbreviations the *patois* of a peculiar people, the denizens of the coast of Vera Cruz, and the *tierra caliente*– the *Jarochos*.

The sufferer did not appear to be at any great distance from my tent – perhaps a hundred paces, or two hundred at most. I could no longer lend a deaf ear to his outcries.

I started up from my *catre*– a camp-bedstead, which my tent contained – groped, and found my canteen, not forgetting the brandy-flask, and, sallying forth into the night, commenced making my way towards the spot where I might expect to find the utterer of the earnest appeal.

Story 1, Chapter III

The Menace of a Monster

The tent I was leaving stood in the centre of a circumscribed clearing. Ten paces from its front commenced the *chapparal*— a thicket of thorny shrubs, consisting of acacia, cactus, the agave, yuccas, and copaiva trees, mingled and linked together by lianas and vines of smilax, sarsaparilla, jalap, and the climbing bromelias. There was no path save that made by wild animals – the timid Mexican mazame and its pursuer, the cunning coyote.

One of these paths I followed.

Its windings soon led me astray. Though the moon was shining in a cloudless sky, I was soon in such a maze that I could neither tell the direction of the tent I had left behind, nor that of the sufferer I had sallied out in search of.

In sight there was no object to guide me. I paused in my steps, and listened for a sound.

For some seconds there was a profound silence, unbroken even by the groans of the wounded, some of whose voices were, perhaps, now silent in death. The wolves, too, had suspended their hideous howlings, as though their quest for prey had ended, and they were busily banqueting on the dead.

The stillness produced a painful effect, even more than the melancholy sounds that had preceded it I almost longed for their renewal.

A short while only did this irksome silence continue. It was terminated by the voice I had before heard, this time in the utterance of a different speech.

“*Soy moriendo! Lola – Lolita! a ver te nunca mas en este mundo!*” (I am dying, Dolores – dear Dolores! never more shall I see you in this world!)

“*Nunca mas en este mundo!*” came the words rapidly re-pronounced, but in a voice of such different intonation as to preclude the possibility of mistaking it either for an echo or repetition by the same speaker.

“No, never!” continued the second voice, in the same tone, and in a similar *patois*. “Never again shall you look upon Lola – you, Calros Vergara, who have kept me from becoming her husband; who have poisoned her mind against me – ”

“Ah! it is you, Rayas! What has brought you hither? Is it to torture a dying man?”

“*Carajo!* I didn’t come to do anything of the kind. I came to assure myself that you *were* dying – that’s all. Vicente Vilagos, who has escaped from this ugly affair, has just told me you’d got a bit of lead through your body. I’ve sought you here to make sure that your wound was fatal – as he said it was.”

“*Santissima!* O Ramon Rayas! that is your errand?”

“You mistake – I have another: else I shouldn’t have risked falling into the hands of those damnable *Americanos*, who might take a fancy to send one of their infernal bullets through my own carcass.”

“What other errand? What want you with me? I am sore wounded – I believe I am dying.”

“First, as I’ve told you – to make sure that you *are* dying; and secondly, if that be the case, to learn before you *do* die, what you have done with Lola.”

“Never. Dead or living, you shall not know from me. Go, go! *por amor Dios!* do not torment a poor wretch in his last moments.”

“Bah! Calros Vergara, listen to reason. Remember, we were boys together – scourged in the same school. Your time’s up; you can’t protect Lola any more. Why hinder me – I who love her as my own life? I’m not so bad as people say, though I am accused of an inclination for the *road*. That’s the fault of the bad government we’ve got. Come! don’t leave the world like a fool; and Lola without a protector. Tell me where you’ve hidden her – tell me that, and the n – ”

“No! no! Leave me, Rayas! leave me! If I am to die, let me die in peace.”

“You won’t tell me?”

“No – no – ”

“Never mind, then; I’ll find out in time, and no thanks to you. So, go to the devil, and carry your secret along with you. If Lola be anywhere within the four corners of Mexico, I’ll track her up. She don’t escape from Rayas the *salteador*!”

I could hear a rustling among the hushes: as if the last speaker, having delivered his *ultimatum*, was taking his departure from the spot.

Suddenly the sound ceased; and the voice once more echoed in my ear —

“Carrambo!” exclaimed the man now known to me as Ramon Rayas, “I was going away without having accomplished the best half of my errand! Didn’t I come to make certain that your wound was mortal? Let’s see if that *picaro* Vilagos has been telling me the truth. Through what part of the body are you perforated?”

There was no reply; but from certain indications I could tell that the *salteador* had approached the prostrate man, and was stooping down to examine his wounds.

I made a movement forward in the direction in which I had heard the strange dialogue; but checked myself on again hearing the voice of Rayas.

“*Carajo!*” ejaculated he, in a tone that betokened some discovery, at the same time one causing disappointment. “That wound of yours is not mortal – not a bit of it! You may recover from it, if – ”

“You think I have a chance to recover?” eagerly interrogated the wounded man – willing to clutch at hope, even when offered by an enemy.

“*Think* you have a chance to recover? I’m *sure* of it. The bullet has passed through your thigh – what of that? It’s only a flesh wound. The great artery is not touched. That I’m sure about, or you’d have bled to death long ago. The bone is not broken: else you could no more lift your foot in that fashion, than you could kick yonder *cofre* from the top of Peroté. *Carrambo!* you’d be sure to get over it, if – ”

There was an interval of silence, as though the speaker hesitated to pronounce the condition implied by that “if.” The peculiar emphasis, placed on the monosyllabic word, told me that he was making pause for a purpose.

“If what, Capitan Rayas?”

The interrogatory came from the wounded man, in a tone trembling between hope and doubt.

“If,” answered the other, and with emphatic pronunciation, – “*if you tell me where you have hidden Dolores.*”

There was a groan; and then in a quivering voice came the rejoinder.

“How could that affect my recovery? If I am to die, it could not save me. If it be my fate to survive this sad day – ”

“It is *not*,” interrupted the *salteador*, in a firm, loud voice. “No! This day you must die – this hour – this moment, unless you reveal to me that secret you have so carefully kept. Where is Dolores?”

“Never! Rather shall I die than that she should fall into the power of such a remorseless villain. After that threat, O God! – ”

“Die, then! and go to the God you are calling upon. Die, Calros Vergara – !”

During the latter part of this singular dialogue, I had been worming myself through the devious alleys of the thicket, and gradually drawing nearer to the speakers. Just as the “Die, then!” reached my ears, I caught sight of the man who had pronounced the terrible menace – as well as of him to whom it was addressed.

Both were upon the other side of the little opening into which I had entered, the latter lying prostrate upon the grass; the former bending over him, with right arm upraised, and a long blade glittering in his grasp.

At the sight my sword leaped from its sheath, and I was about to rush forward; when, on calculating the distance across the glade, I perceived I should be too late.

Quick as the thought I changed my weapon, dropping the sword at my feet, and drawing my revolver from its holster in my belt.

To cock the pistol, take aim, and pull the trigger, were three actions in one, the result being a crack, a flash, a cloud of smoke, a cry of commingled rage and pain; and succeeding to these sounds, a loud breaking among the bushes on the opposite side of the opening, as if some individual was making his way through the thicket, without staying to seek for a path, and with no other thought than to put space between himself and the form still recumbent upon the sword!

The latter I knew to be Carlos, or Calros, in the patois of his *con-paisano*. The fugitive was the *salteador* so lately threatening his life.

Had the murderer succeeded in his design? I saw his blade brandished aloft, as I drew my pistol from its holster. I had not seen the downward thrust; but, for all that, it might have been made.

With a heart brimful of anxiety, I ran across the glade. I say brimful of anxiety: for something, I could not tell what, had excited my sympathy for Calros Vergara.

Partly may it have been from hearing that speech of sombre but significant import, – “*Soy moriendo! Lola! – Lolita! a ver te nunca mas en este mundo!*” and partly from admiration for a noble nature, that preferred even death to the disclosing of some secret, which might compromise the welfare of his beloved Dolores.

I thought no more of the robber, or his efforts to escape. My whole attention became devoted to the man whom he had marked out for his victim; and I made all haste to ascertain whether I had been successful in hindering his fell intent.

In a score of seconds I was standing by the side of the prostrate Jarocho, bending over his body. I held the pistol in my hand, my finger still pressing upon the trigger, just as after firing the shot that had disembarassed him of his enemy.

“Are you safe?” I inquired, in the best Mexican-Spanish I could command. “He has not succeeded in – ?”

“Strike, villain! through my heart, if you will. Ah! Dolores! Better my death, and yours – better far be in your grave than in the embrace of Ramon Rayas! *O Santissima Madre!* – I die – I die! Mother of God protect —*Lola! – Lolita! quer-i-da herm...*”

The last phrase was pronounced in a whisper, gradually growing so indistinct that I could not make certain of the final words, though with my ear close to the lips of the speaker.

His voice was no longer heard even in whispers.

I raised my head, and looked down upon the face of Calros Vergara. His lips moved no more. His eyes still open, and glistening under the light of the moon, seemed no longer to see, no more to mistake me for his enemy. He appeared to be dead.

Story 1, Chapter IV

An Angel Voice

For some seconds I hung over what I supposed to be an inanimate form; it was that of a mere youth, and fair to behold, as was also the face, which was conspicuously upturned to the light of the moon. Notwithstanding its deathly pallor, it exhibited a fine type of manly beauty. The features were regular, the complexion brown, the cheek soft and smooth, the upper lip darkly bedecked with the young growth of virility, the eye rotund and of noble expression, the forehead framed in a garland of glossy black hair, whose luxuriant curls drooped down upon each side of the full rounded throat – all these I saw at a single glance. I saw also a faultless figure, habited in the costume of a peasant rather than of a soldier, but a peasant of a peculiar people, the *Jarocho*s. In the words lately proceeding from the lips of the unfortunate youth, I had recognised the *patois* of this people, and was not surprised at seeing a richly-embroidered shirt of the finest linen, neatly fitting over the young man's breast, a sash of China crape around the waist, calzoner^{os} of velveteen, with rows of bell-buttons, and boots with spurs attached, apparently of silver.

Striking and rich as was the costume, it was still only that of the Mexican peasant. A few peculiarities, such as; the hat of palm-sinnet, and the checked kerchief, that had covered the back part of the head, both lying near, denoted their *ci-devant* wearer to be a denizen of the coast lands – in short, a “Jarocho.”

These observations did not detain me, or only for a second of time, as I bent down over the prostrate form. My whole design was to examine the wound which I supposed to have been given by the robber, and which I really believed to have caused the Jarocho's death.

To my astonishment, I could discover no wound, at least none that was fresh. There was a blotch of coagulated blood on the left thigh, darker in the centre as seen through the torn calzoner^{os}; but this was from the wound received in battle.

Where was that just given by the sword of the Salteador? Certainly I saw stains of blood recently spilt. There were several spots upon the white linen shirt, besprinkling the plaits upon the bosom, and others upon the sleeves; also the cheeks of the youth showed a drop or two on their pallid ground.

Whence had these blood-drops proceeded?

I could not guess. I could discover no recent stab on the Jarocho's body, not a scratch to account for them!

Had the robber, after all, failed in his fatal thrust? Had the death of his intended victim been caused by the shot-wound in the thigh, hastened by the terror of that horrid threat?

While thus conjecturing, my eye fell upon an object glancing through the grass. I stooped down and took it up. It was a *macheté*– half sword, half hunting-knife – to be met with in every Mexican house, or seen hanging on the hip of every Mexican *cavallero*.

Was it the weapon of the wounded man, or that I had lately seen in the hand of his enemy?

I took it up to examine it. The blade was bright: not a speck appeared on its polished surface!

Between my fingers, as they grasped the hilt of riveted horn, I felt something *wet*. Was it dew from the grass?

No. The moonlight fell upon something darker than dew. Both the haft of the weapon and my fingers encircling it were red as rubies. It was blood, and fresh from the veins of a human being!

As it could not be the blood of Calros, I concluded it must be that of Ramon Rayas. My bullet must have been true to its aim.

While thus occupied with conjectures, a new voice fell upon my ear, as different from either of those lately listened to as music from the rudest noise.

“Calros! dear Calros!” called the voice, “was it you I heard? Speak, Calros! *valga me Dios!* That shot! Surely it was not for him? No – no – I heard him speaking after it. Calros! Answer me, if you are near. It is I who call – I, your own Lola!”

Had it been the voice of an angel coming out of the chapparal, or from the sky above it could not have sounded sweeter, nor thrilled me with a stranger impulse.

For some seconds I remained irresolute as to what answer should be made to the pathetic appeal. I hesitated to apprise the speaker of the presence of Calros. Only his body was present; his spirit was not there!

What a sad spectacle for the eye of the loved Dolores – the *loving* Dolores – how could I doubt it? Looking upon the handsome Jarocho – graceful even in the attitude of death – I could not wonder at the earnestness of that feminine voice, pronouncing him her “*querido Calros.*”

Once more it fell upon my ear, continuing the passionate appeal.

“Calros! O Calros! Why do you not answer me? It is Lola – your own Lola!”

“Lola!” I responded, yielding to an irresistible emotion, “this way; come this way! Calros is here.”

An exclamatory phrase, expressing gratitude to the “Mother of God,” was heard in response; and quickly following the words, a female form, fair as the mother of men, parting the hushes that bordered the glade, stepped cut into the opening.

Story 1, Chapter V

An Unpleasant Misunderstanding

Yes, fair as the mother of men – it is no exaggeration to say it – was she who, answering my summons, had emerged from the shadowy chapparal, and now stood exposed to my view under the full light of the moon. It was a full moon – a Mexican moon, that delights to shine upon lovely woman; and no lovelier could its beams have ever embraced than she who now stood before me.

It was beauty of a type peculiar to the land in which I viewed it – peculiar even to a single province – the *tierra caliente*, or coast-region, of Vera Cruz.

The image of Lola is still upon the tablets of my memory, permanently impressed as I saw her at that moment; perhaps more deeply graven upon my heart as I beheld her afterwards.

The picture presented to my eye, and viewed under the moon's mellow light, was that of a girl just approaching the completeness of womanhood – or rather having completed it, for there seemed nothing wanting to make the perfect woman.

A figure of medium height, neither sylphlike nor slender, but of full physical outline, in points even imposing.

I do not deny that there is something sensual in this type, and I know there are those who incline more to the intellectual. For my part, I doubt the honesty of such ethereal admirers; and must still cling to the belief that bold elliptical outline is the true ideal of beauty in the feminine form.

That of Lola, seen against the verdant background of the chapparal, exhibited this curve in all its luxuriant windings. It was displayed in the tournure of the head, the cheeks, the throat, and shoulders; it embraced bosom, waist, and limbs; it ran over her whole figure – a living, moving curve, like the undulations of some beautiful serpent, always tapering to an end, but never terminating.

It was the curve discovered by Hogarth, though but poorly expressed in his pictures. It was perfectly presented in the outlines of the lovely apparition that came before my eyes in that moonlit glade, on the field of Cerro Gordo.

Her dress did not destroy the voluptuous line. It could not, even had it been one of those monstrous contrivances of fashion for concealing the too-often distorted form. But it was not thus designed. The sleeveless chemise of snow-white cambric, and the translucent skirt of thin muslin, like the gown of Nora Creina, left —

“Every beauty free
To sink or swell as heaven pleases.”

The slight scarf of bluish grey cotton (*rebozo*) drawn over the crown of the head, and falling loosely down in front, scarcely interfered with the symmetrical outlines of the bosom; while behind, two thick plaits of hair, escaping from under it, hung down to the level of its fringed ends, terminating in a tie of bright red ribbons.

At first sight, I thought the girl was barefoot. The skirt and petticoat (*enagua*) permitted to be seen beneath them a pair of statuesque ankles, nude to mid-knee. But although thus stockingless, I soon perceived that her feet were in *satin slippers*, hidden behind the herbage. Neither the naked ankles, nor the slight but costly *chaussure*, gave me any surprise, however inappropriate either might be deemed to a walk through the thorny chapparal. I knew that both were in the fashion of the country.

At the moment, I was not thinking of either circumstance, nor of the incongruity of bare feet in satin slippers. My eyes and thoughts were turned higher, gazing on a face of peculiar loveliness.

It was a beauty I remember well, but can ill describe.

To say that the complexion was a golden brown, with crimson in the cheeks; that the lips were like a pair of rose-leaves convexly curving against each other, and when parted, displaying a row of pearly teeth; that both eyebrows and lashes were crescent-shaped and black as ebony; that the eyes

were of the same hue, but sparkling with liquid light; that the nose was slightly aquiline; the throat full and boldly rounded upward – to say all this, would only be to state a series of physical facts, which can give no idea of the loveliness of that face. It was the combination of these features – their mutual adaptation, their play, that produced the charm which I have called *peculiar*.

And it was so. Even with a heart at that time not wholly free, it enchained me – and I stood admiring. The face was near, and the moon full enough upon it to enable me to view it with distinctness. I could trace every feature, every shade of expression, even to the quick changing of the colour upon her cheek.

I stood in silence gazing on this apparition so unexpected, so lovely. Surprise, along with admiration, restrained my speech.

For a time the girl was equally silent, though her silence had a different cause. Her eyes were fixed, not upon me but upon the form at my feet. She had only glanced at me, and then quickly transferred her gaze to the prostrate figure.

It was a look of eager inquiry, lasting not long. In a second it changed to one of recognition, and the instant afterwards her eyes filled with an expression of intense agony. She saw Calros – her beloved Calros – prostrate, his face besprinkled with blood. It was Calros, silent, but not asleep; speechless and motionless; perhaps dead?

“Dead! Mother of God, dead!” were the words that, in accents of anguish, came peeling from the lips of Lola.

Her eyes flashed upward. In an instant the expression changed – grief giving place to indignation – something still more dire.

I saw that I was myself its object. With astonishment did I perceive this. It had not occurred to me to reflect on my compromising position. I was still standing over the body of the Jarocho, blood-besprinkled as it was. Less than five minutes before, Calros’s voice had been heard, along with that of another man, mingling in excited dialogue.

A shot had been fired. I held a pistol in my hand, from the muzzle of which a slight film of sulphureous smoke could be seen stringing outward. Calros appeared to be dead. Who but I could have been his slayer?

I heard the word *asesino* ringing in my ears, with other epithets of like fearful signification, as the girl rushed up to the spot where I stood. There was no weapon in her hand, or I might have fancied she was about to strike me. Even with her clenched fist, I was for a while uncertain whether this was not her intention; and to avoid her, I stepped back.

She stood for some seconds looking me straight in the face. Behind the parting of her tightly compressed lips was displayed a double row of teeth, that, despite their pearly whiteness, gleamed fiercely in the moonlight; while her eyes, as they flashed, seemed to send forth jets of living fire!

“I am innocent!” I called out. “It is not my act; it was not I who – ”

“*Asesino! monstre!* Whoever thou art; false fiend, to deny a deed of which —*madré de Dios!* – I have been almost a witness. There – there – the weapon still in your hands – his blood freshly spilt!”

“It is not *his* blood,” I replied, hastily interrupting her.

But she heard not the rejoinder! for suddenly turning from me, she flung herself upon the prostrate form, drowning my voice with her wild exclamations.

“Dead! Calros! dear Calros! Are you dead? Speak to me one word – a whisper, to say you still live! *Ay de mi!* it is too true. No answer – no breath! Where is the wound that has robbed you of life, and me of my only friend? Where? – where?”

And as she continued to give voice to these detached exclamations, she proceeded, as if mechanically, to examine the wounds of the unconscious Jarocho.

Story 1, Chapter VI

A Devoted Woman

I felt the awkwardness of the situation. Appearances were against me. Some explanation must be given.

Stepping nearer, I bent down by the side of the young girl; and as soon as her silence gave me an opportunity of being heard, repeated my asseveration.

“It is not *his* blood,” I said, “but that of another. Your friend has received no wound – at least none lately given, and least of all by *me*. His death – if he be dead – has been caused by this.”

I pointed to the dark spot on his thigh.

“It is a bullet wound received in the battle.”

“The blood upon his bosom – his cheeks – you see – ’tis fresh?”

“I repeat it is not *his*. I speak truly.”

My earnest utterance seemed to make an impression upon her.

“Whose then? whose blood?” she cried out.

“That of a man who was in the act of killing Calros, when my pistol frustrated his intent. I fear after all he may have been successful, though not exactly according to his design. He intended to have stabbed the wounded man with his *macheté*.”

I took the mongrel sword, and held it up to the light.

“There’s blood on its blade, as you see; but it is that of him who would have been the true assassin, had not my bullet disabled his arm. Have you ever seen this weapon before?”

“O ñor; I could not tell. ’Tis a *macheté*. They’re all alike.”

“Have you ever heard the name of Ramon Rayas?”

The answer was an exclamation – almost a shriek!

“You know him, then?”

“Ramon Rayas! oh, the fiend – he – it was he. He vowed to kill Calros. Calros! O Calros! Has he fulfilled his vow?”

Once more the girl bent over the body of the Jarocho; and leaning low, recklessly placed her lips in contact with his blood-stained cheek. At the same time her arms fondly flung around, seemed to enfold the corpse in a loving embrace. Had he been alive and conscious, with the certainty of recovering, I could have envied him that sweet entwining.

My impulse was of a holier nature. If I could not restore the dead, I might give comfort to the living. But was he dead? It was not till that moment I had doubted it.

As I stooped over the body, I heard a sound that resembled a sigh. It could not be the sobbing of the bereaved Lola – though this also was audible.

The girl had again raised her head, and was holding it a little to one side, while the sound that had attracted my attention seemed to proceed from a different direction – in fact from the lips of the man supposed to be dead.

I lowered my ear to his face, and listened for a repetition of the sound. It came in a moment as I had before heard it – a sort of sigh half suppressed, like the breath struggling from a bosom over-weighted.

“Lola,” I whispered, “your Calros is not dead. He still breathes.”

I needed not to communicate this intelligence. The ear of affection had been bent, keenly as my own. By the sudden brightening of her countenance, I could perceive that Lola had heard that same sound, and was listening to catch it again, as if her life depended on its repetition.

She had mechanically pushed me aside, so that her ear might be closer to the mute lips of Calros.

“One moment,” I said, gently raising her from her recumbent position; “perhaps he has only fainted I have a remedy here; a stimulant that may serve to restore him. Permit me to administer it.”

I drew forth the flask which providentially I had brought from the tent. It contained “Catalan brandy,” one of the most potent of spirits.

Silently but readily she glided out of the way, watching my movements like some affectionate sister who assists the physician by the couch of an invalid brother.

I felt the pulse of the wounded man. My medical skill was not extensive; but I could perceive that its beating, though feeble, was not irregular – not flickering, like a lamp that was destined soon to become extinguished.

Lola read hope in my looks: her own became brighter.

I pulled out the stopper. I applied the flask to the lips of the unconscious Calros, pouring into his mouth a portion of the Catalonian spirit.

The effect was almost instantaneous. His bosom began to heave, his breath issued forth more freely, his glazed eyes showed signs of reanimation.

The girl could scarcely be restrained from repeating her fond embraces.

Presently the eyes of the invalid seemed to see – almost to recognise. His lips moved, as though he was endeavouring to speak, but as yet there came forth no sound.

Once more I applied the flask, pouring into his throat nearly a wine-glassful of the Catalan.

In less than a score of seconds the dose produced its effect – made known by a movement throughout the frame of the Jarcho, and a muttered whisper proceeding from his lips.

Again the girl would have strangled him with her passionate caresses. Judging from the joy with which she witnessed his resuscitation, her affection for him must have been boundless.

“Keep away from him!” I said, adding to the verbal caution a slight exertion of physical force. “There is scarcely an ounce of blood in his body, that is why he has fainted; that and the shock caused by the threat of – ”

I did not choose to disquiet her by repeating what appeared to be a dreaded name. “Excitement of any kind may prove fatal. *If you love him* stay out of his sight; at least for a while, till he recover strength sufficient to bear your presence.”

How idle in me to have made use of these words, “if you love him!” The appearance of the handsome Jarcho, handsome even with death’s pallor on his brow, forbade any other belief; while the beautiful Jarcho, beautiful through all the changes of anger and hate, despair and hope, showed by her every action that Calros Vergara was the loved one of her life.

“Keep out of sight,” I again requested: “pray do not go near him till I return. The night air is unfavourable to his recovery. I must seek assistance, and have him carried into my tent. I entreat you, Señorita, do not make yourself known to him now, or the shock may be fatal.”

The look given by the girl, in answer to my solicitations, produced upon me an impression at once vivid and peculiar. It was a mingling of pleasure and pain, just in proportion as my fancy whispered me, that in those glances there was something more than gratitude.

Alas! it is true. Even in that melancholy hour, I felt pleasure in the thought that, whether he might recover or die, I should one day supplant Calros Vergara in the affections of his beloved Lola!

Story 1, Chapter VII

Despoiling the Dead

I aroused half-a-dozen of my men from their midnight slumbers. Among them was one who had some skill in surgery, derived from a long experience as hospital assistant.

There was a *catre*, or leathern bedstead, in the tent – a common article of camp furniture among the officers of the Mexican army. By splicing a pair of tent-poles along its sides, it could be converted into a “stretcher” of a superior kind.

The transformation was soon made; and, returning to the chapparal, we placed the wounded man upon the *catre*, with as much tenderness as if, instead of an enemy, he had been one of our own comrades.

He had by this time so far recovered as to be sensible of what was passing; but it was not until he had been carried within the tent, and his wound carefully dressed by the ex-hospital assistant, that I consented to an interview between him and his “querida Lola.”

Mistrusting the effect of any sudden excitement – even though caused by joy – I had entreated the girl to remain out of sight; and though suffering from a painful impatience to speak to her beloved Calros, she had obeyed me.

Being assured by the improvised surgeon that there was no real danger; that the wound was not likely to prove fatal; and that the syncope of the wounded man had been caused by weakness from loss of blood, I withdrew the restriction.

In an instant after, the beautiful Lola flew into the arms of her lover.

It was an affecting scene, and touched even my rude companions, who stood around the *catre*. To me it was not pleasant – I might almost say it was painful – to listen to that interchange of endearing epithets. I coveted the caresses that were being lavished upon the handsome Jarocho.

Soon the soldiers withdrew, to resume their interrupted repose, the hospital assistant going with the rest. I was left in the tent with Calros and Lola.

I could not help envying the invalid. For the sake of being tended by such a nurse, I would willingly have changed situations with him!

Lola had heard the assurance given by the hospital assistant, and communicated it to the wounded man. There was no longer the dread of death to hinder them from indulging in a free interchange of thought.

Perhaps they had something to say to each other which should not be overheard by any one? Under the idea that my presence might be a restraint, I withdrew; I shall not say without reluctance.

Throwing my cloak over my shoulders, I walked out of the tent, leaving them alone.

The night was still; the silence more solemn than ever. Not a sound disturbed it. Even the moanings of the disabled men, who lay here and there over the field of battle, which at an earlier hour had been well nigh continuous, seemed now to have ceased.

I was astonished by this circumstance, and mentally endeavoured to account for it. Perhaps the report of my pistol had awed them into silence, under the belief that the “strippers” were abroad, and that it was better to endure their agonies in silence than to guide those vultures in their villainous search! This was the only explanation I could think of.

I strolled off into the chapparal; but I soon found my way back into the neighbourhood of the tent. Under that piece of spread canvas, rendered luminous by the lamp burning inside, there was an attraction that drew me nearer and nearer. It was irresistible; and involuntarily yielding to it, I at length found myself in front of the arcade-like entrance, gazing inward.

The flap was thrown back; and I could see the occupants inside, the invalid stretched upon the *catre*, lying on his back as we had left him, the girl bending over him, her eyes fixed steadily upon

his face. I could see that he was asleep; but not the less affectionately were those beautiful eyes bent upon his slumbering features.

The tableau should have gratified; – it tortured me!

I turned away to escape from an emotion – evil, as it was unpleasant.

I walked over the ground, lately the arena of the enemy's camp, among other tents that stood near. There were not many of them. Arbours formed by the interlacing of branches, and thatched with reeds and grass, had constituted the chief shelter of Santa Anna's soldiers.

His superior officers only had been provided with tents, of which not more than a dozen were now standing.

Several of them I entered. They were not all empty, though their living occupants had deserted them. Three or four I found tenanted by the dead. Stretched upon *catres*, or lying upon the floor, were the bodies of men whose uniforms showed them to have been officers of high rank.

One lay so near to the entrance of a tent, that the moonbeams, slanting inward through the opening of the canvas, fell full upon his face. He was a man of magnificent form, with a countenance that even in death might be termed handsome. His complexion was a dark olive, his features perfectly regular, with a coal-black moustache and chin-beard. His dress was half civilian, half military, with insignia embroidered upon the shoulder-straps, proclaiming him a general of division. His name I learnt afterwards, Vasquez, one of the bravest of our foes, who had gallantly held his position on the hill of El Telegrafo till the last moment for retreating. A bullet through the groin terminated what might otherwise have been a brilliant career; and he had been carried to his tent only to die.

No attempt had been made to dress his wound. It was perhaps looked upon as hopeless; and in the panic of retreat even an officer of rank is oft neglected. Over the groin his trousers had been torn open, as if done to examine the wound, and the sky-blue cloth, of which the garment was composed, was saturated with blood, now dark and dry. Its salt odour pervaded the atmosphere, and I was about returning outward; for, attracted by the distinguished appearance of the dead body, I had stepped inside the tent to examine it; when a singular, I might say a startling, observation, caused me to remain where I was.

The corpse lay upon its back, the head about midway upon the floor of the tent, with the feet protruding beyond the canvas on the outside, a little to one side of the entrance. It was the feet, in fact, first seen, that had drawn my attention; and the peculiar *chaussure* which they displayed caused me to stoop down and examine them. They were encased in elegant russet boots – such as were worn in the time of the second Charles, and now only seen upon the stage. A pair of bright spurs buckled over them, sparkled in the moonlight.

Had I not looked inside at the body, to which this singular *chaussure* belonged, I might have fancied a cavalier of the olden time asleep within the tent; but the very oddness of the foot-gear influenced me to examine the individual to whom it appertained.

Stepping up to the entrance, my eyes had fallen upon the handsome face; but as my own shadow hindered me from thoroughly examining it, I had gone inside to obtain a better view.

It was after I had completed the observations above detailed that I became witness of the spectacle that startled me.

As I have said, I was on the point of returning out of the tent. To do so it would be necessary for me to pass close to the corpse, in fact, to step over it, as I had done on going inside. As I raised my foot to effect this purpose, I fancied that the body moved!

In surprise I drew back my foot, and stood watching, not without a feeling of fear.

The feeling was not diminished, but increased almost to the degree of horror, when I became convinced that what I saw was no fancy – no optical illusion. *The body had actually moved, and was still in motion!*

Had I not observed the motion, the change of posture would have convinced me it was taking place: for the head, originally lying in the middle of the tent, was now nearer its edge, and gradually, but surely, approaching the circle of canvas!

All doubt would have been removed – had any existed – when I saw the corpse give, or rather receive, a sudden jerk, which brought the head close in to the canvas.

I could stay no longer inside that tent; and with a single bound I carried myself clear of the entrance.

No sooner did I get outside, than I was relieved from the influence of the supernatural. A perfectly natural – perhaps I should say unnatural – cause divested the phenomenon of its mystery. A man was in the act of stripping General Vasquez of his boots!

With shame I recognised the uniform of an American rifleman.

In justice to that uniform be it told, that the man was not an American, but a worthless mongrel, half Jew, half German; who on more than one occasion had received chastisement for strange crimes, and who afterwards, in a future battle – as I have good reason to know – fired his traitorous bullet at my own back.

“Laundrich! ruffian!” I cried. “Despoiling the dead!”

“Ach! tish only a Mexican – our enemish, captan.”

“Scoundrel! desist from your unhallowed work, or I shall devote you to a worse fate than his whose noble remains you are defiling. Off to your quarters! Off, I say!”

The human wolf skulked away, unwillingly, and with an air of savage chagrin.

I never came nearer slaying a fellow creature – not to accomplish the act.

Better, perhaps, had I completed it on that occasion. It would have spared me a severe shot-wound, afterwards received, with certain other disagreeable *contretemps*, of which Johanna Laundrich was prime agent and promoter.

Story 1, Chapter VIII

A Pleasant Explanation

The peculiar spectacle thus witnessed for a while distracted my thoughts from the marquee and its occupants.

Only for a short while. Soon again the lovely face of Lola rose up before the eye of my imagination; and the longing to look upon it became stronger than ever.

Yielding to this fascination – for which I could scarcely account – I strolled back to the *ci-devant* head-quarters of the Mexican commander-in-chief.

On arriving in front of the entrance I paused.

Had the invalid been still asleep, I might have hesitated about disturbing him. But his voice warned me that he was awake, and in conversation with some one – who, of course, could be no other than Lola.

Even then I hesitated about going in; but while thus meditating, I could not help overhearing a portion of the dialogue that was passing between them. A name already known was on the lips of Calros, from which I could easily divine the subject of their conversation. It was the name of Ramon Rayas.

“Yes, dearest Lola,” said the invalid, as if replying to some interrogatory, “it was that villain. Not content with persecuting you with his infamous proposals, he has followed me, even to the field of battle? He would have killed me outright. *Carrambo!* I thought he had done so. I saw him standing over me with his *macheté* pointed at my breast. I was too weak to make resistance. I could not raise a hand to parry his thrust. He did not strike. I know not why. There was a shot; and then I saw him standing over me again, with a pistol, its muzzle held close to my body. *Valga me Dios!* I saw no more. I became unconscious.”

“Dear Calros! it was not Rayas who held the pistol.”

“Not him! – not Ramon Rayas. It *was*, Lola. I saw him. I heard and talked to him. I listened to his threats. He wanted me to tell him – Oh! too surely was it he – he, and no other.”

“Yes, he who threatened you with the *macheté*. That’s true enough; but the man who held the pistol – that was not Don Ramon; not an enemy either, though I also thought him one.”

“And who was it?” asked the invalid, with a puzzled look upon his countenance.

“The *Americano*– he who has had you carried here into the tent.”

“Which of them? There were several around me. Was it the *medico* who dressed my wound? He must be a doctor to have done it so skilfully.”

“No, it was not he.”

“Which, then, Lola?”

“You saw an officer among them, did you not? – a handsome young officer?”

My heart then thrilled with a pleasant emotion. I bent my eyes with keen scrutiny upon the face of the invalid. I expected to see there an expression denoting jealousy. I thought it strange that no such thought could be detected on the features of Calros Vergara.

“He must be brave, too,” continued the girl, “to have conquered the Capitan Rayas.”

“Conquered Rayas! How? What mean you, Lola?”

“You see those spots of blood on your shirt-bosom? There were others on your face, but I have washed them off. I thought it was yours, Calros.”

“And is it not?”

“No. This is fresh blood, as you may tell by looking at it. It is not yet quite dried. Thanks to the holy Virgin, it is not yours; to lose more would have killed you, Calros; the *medico* said so.”

“*Carrambo!* whose is it then?”

“Don Ramon’s.”

“How? Tell me, Lola!”

“You say he was threatening to run you through with his *macheté*. You heard a shot? It was not Ramon, but the young officer, who fired it; and the bullet was aimed at Rayas himself, and not at you. It must have hit him, for his *macheté* was found beside you, the hilt stained with blood; and these drops must have come from the wound he received. Ah! *dear brother Calros!* but for this brave Americano you would now have been in another world, and I left in this, alone, and without a protector.”

Brother Calros!

A load seemed lifted from my heart; the arrow, so lately entering it, and already beginning to rankle, appeared to be suddenly plucked from it without causing pain.

Brother Calros!

No longer did I wonder at the stoical indifference with which the Jarocho had listened to that flattering eulogy bestowed upon myself.

“No, Lola Vergara” – for that should be her name – “No! Never in this world, so long as *I* live, shall you, beautiful Jarocho, be without a protector!”

That was my thought, my mental resolution. I could scarcely restrain myself from rushing into the tent, and proclaiming it aloud!

Story 1, Chapter IX

Evil Imaginings

My discovery of the real relationship existing between Calros and Lola at once cured me of an incipient jealousy, which, though slight, had promised to become sufficiently painful.

Its very existence, however, would have proved to me that I was already in love, had such proof been required to convince me.

But I needed not to reason on that head. I knew that I was enamoured with Lola Vergara – had fallen in love with her at first sight – at that very moment when her accusing eyes flashed fiercely upon me, and through her dazzling teeth was hissed forth that angry epithet, proclaiming me a *murderer*! In the full tide of anger, with frowning face and furious look, had she appeared lovely – scarcely less lovely than now in her smiles!

I had since beheld these. She smiled on learning that Calros was in no danger of death. She smiled on me as the preserver of his life, gratefully – I fancied *graciously*. On that fancy I had founded a hope; and hence the jealousy that had so quickly and causelessly arisen.

The hope became strengthened on hearing that fraternal apostrophe, “*Hermanita Calros!*” pronounced in a language unequalled in the phraseology of affectionate endearment.

The words bespoke a relationship far different from that I had supposed to exist between them – leaving her bosom free for another affection – a passion compatible, if not kindred.

Was it my destiny to inspire this passion? Was that grand triumph to be mine?

Her singular speeches, not very honestly overheard, filled me with hope.

I hesitated about entering the tent. I no longer desired to interrupt a dialogue that had caused me such supreme pleasure; and yet I yearned to proffer my devotion – to stand once more face to face, and eye to eye, with the beautiful Jarocha.

In any case I could not continue to play the part of an eavesdropper. I could now perceive the indelicacy of the act – especially as my satisfied heart no longer needed soothing.

I must either enter, or withdraw. I decided upon entering.

But not till I had set my forage-cap more coquettishly upon my head, drawn my fingers through my hair, and given to my moustache its most captivating curl.

I confess to all this weakness. I was at that time full of conceit in my personal appearance. I had heard the phrase, “handsome young officer,” applied to me by one from whose lips dropped the words like the honey of Hymettus; and, inspired by the flattering epithet, I left nothing undone to deserve it.

Nevertheless I felt embarrassed, as I presented myself once more before the lovely Lola – an embarrassment heightened by the presence of her brother.

Wonder at this, if you will. It is too easily explained. I entered the tent with the consciousness of a design that was not honourable. I stood before them both – the sister and brother – with a conscience not clear. At that moment – I confess it to my shame – I had no other thought than that of trifling with the affections of the beautiful Jarocha.

She was but a peasant – one of a race, it is true, to whom the appellation is somewhat inappropriate – a people, though poor, elegant in person, graceful in deportment, highly gifted with the *savoir faire*, as it relates to the ordinary intercourse of life – at the same time a people in whose pantheon the divinity, Virtue, finds but an inconspicuous niche.

Neither the first nor the last of these reflections may be deemed an excuse for my conduct. I do not offer them as such, though both serving at the time to satisfy my conscience.

Its scruples were not difficult to subdue. Its still small voice was unheard, or rather unheeded, under the promptings of a powerful, but unholy passion, of which Lola Vergara was then the object, and as I hoped, afterwards to become the victim.

She was but a peasant, a pretty *poblana*— perhaps already inducted into the mysteries of Cupid's court: for it would be rare for one of her race to have reached woman's age without loving. The sister of a common soldier – for such was the rank of Calros – what harm could be done? What wrong could I be dreaming about?

I did not need all this sophistry to satisfy the whisperings of my conscience. At that time of my life the task was easy of accomplishment – too easy; and with such a lure as Lola Vergara it was less than a task.

I made no effort to resist the temptation. On the contrary, I devoted myself to the winning of her heart with all the ardour of an important enterprise.

It was her *heart* I wished to win, and that only. *I wished it because she had won mine.* I deny that I had any design beyond – any thought more dishonourable. That of itself may be deemed sufficiently so, since I had no intention of offering her my hand.

Her love alone did I care for; though I will not conceal my belief, that, in the event of conquering her *heart*, any other conquest would be facile and without resistance.

This was my faith at the time – a faith founded on sad experience. I applied it to Lola Vergara, as I should have done to any other girl under the like circumstances.

The future would prove whether my creed was erroneous as it was dishonourable.

I entered the tent. She, whose affections I intended trifling with, rose from her seat, saluting me, as I stepped forward, with an air of modesty that might have shamed my secret thoughts. Her glance was full of gratitude. How ill did I deserve it!

“Señor,” said she, after answering my inquiries as to the condition of the invalid, “I hope you will forgive me for the rude manner in which I addressed you. *Volga me Dios!* To have made such a mistake! I thought you had killed my brother, not knowing when I saw you standing over him. O señor! you will forgive me?”

“There is nothing to forgive, fair Lola. Considering the situation, you could scarcely have thought otherwise. Fortunately, no one has succeeded in killing your brother; not even the American rifleman who sent his bullet through him. I am glad to hear that the wound is not dangerous.”

“Ah, señor,” interposed Calros himself, “but for you – Lola has just been telling me – but for you I should have had a wound, not only dangerous, but deadly. That *cortante* (the Jarocho pointed to the blood-stained weapon lying on the floor of the tent) would have pierced my flesh – my heart. I know it; I am sure of it. He meant to have killed me! *El demonio!*”

“You are speaking of Ramon Rayas?”

“Of him! – pardon, señor Americano. You cannot know anything of him? How learnt you his name?”

“From your own lips, Calros Vergara; and your name from his. From both of you a name prettier than either.”

I glanced towards Lola, who returned my look with a gracious smile.

Calros looked puzzled; as if not very clearly comprehending me.

“You forget,” I said, “that in the conversation which occurred between you and this Ramon Rayas, you repeatedly addressed each other by name; and also mentioned a third individual, whose acquaintance I have since had the pleasure of making – your sister, is she not?”

“*Si, ñor capitan.* Ña Lola is my sister.”

“She is worthy to be your sister, señor Calros. She who follows a brother to the field of battle – seeks for him among the slain – risking life to alleviate the pain of his wounds – ah! that is a sister for a soldier. Would that I had such an one!”

While speaking I regarded the countenance of the girl. I regarded it with a tender gaze. I fancied that she returned my thought, but so slightly as to have been perceptible only to the keen scrutiny of love. It was only a single glance she gave me; and then the long lashes fell over her eyes, hiding their sweet scintillation.

When I had finished speaking, she turned towards me, but without raising her eyes. Then pronouncing the formal phrase, “*Mil gracios señor*” she stepped silently towards the entrance of the tent.

Before passing out, she paused a moment to state apologetically the object of her departure – some trifling errand relating to the invalid.

But for this I might have fancied that my flattery had offended, or perhaps the glance of gallantry with which I had regarded her. Even had it been so, I could not then have apologised: for in another instant she was gone.

Story 1, Chapter X

An Implacable Pursuer

I was in the midst of circumstances still unexplained. A wounded man found lying upon the field of battle – a mere youth; in no respect, either in costume, accoutrements, or personal appearance, resembling the thing called a “common soldier,” and yet bearing no insignia to show that he was aught else.

Found with an enemy standing over him, not a national foe, but a countryman – and, as it appeared, an old school-fellow, *macheté* in hand, threatening to accomplish what the foeman had left incomplete – threatening his life, and only hindered from taking it by the merest accidental intervention!

Near at hand, soon after to appear by his side, a woman – not one of those hideous hags sometimes seen on the morrow of a bloody battle, skulking among the slain, and stooping, vulture-like, over the mangled corpse – but a young girl of sweet voice and lovely aspect; so contrasting with the rude objects around her, so apparently out of place amid such scenes, that instead of a human being, a form of flesh and blood, one might have believed her to be an angel of mercy, that had descended from the sky to soothe the sufferings which men in their frantic fury had caused one another!

And this angel-like creature to prove the *sister*– and not the *sweetheart*– of him whose cries had called me from my couch!

Even in this circumstance there was something to cause me surprise. It would not have been the first time I had met the soldier’s sweetheart on the field of battle; but never before had I encountered his sister.

I might have been more surprised at this peculiar encounter, but that on the afternoon of that very day I had been spectator of a scene calculated to explain it. In a field adjoining the hamlet-village of El Plan I had gazed upon four thousand soldiers of Santa Anna’s army made prisoners during the action; and circling among them – not as spectators, but real actors in the affairs of the camp – were at least half this number of women!

Though most stood in a different relationship, I learned that many of these devoted creatures were the sisters – some of them the mothers – of the men who had mingled in the fight!

I could not help contrasting this bi-sexual crowd with the invading army to which I myself appertained; in which some half-dozen hags, under the appellation of sutler’s assistants; a like number performing the *métier* of the laundress; and one or two virgins of still more questionable calling, formed the whole female camp-following.

After such a scene as that witnessed by the *rancheria* of El Plan, it could not much astonish me to find the sister of Cairo? Vergara on the field of battle. My astonishment only arose from seeing *such a sister*!

On being left alone with the Jarocho, I could no longer repress my desire to obtain an explanation of the series of mysteries, that had so suddenly and unexpectedly surrounded me.

My interference in his behalf had furnished me with a sort of right to make the request – even to demand it.

“Ramon Rayas,” I said, as soon as the girl was gone out of hearing – “This Ramon Rayas appears to be no friend of yours?”

“Ah, señor! my bitterest enemy.”

“He is not the enemy of your sister, though! He professes to be her very best friend – at least her lover, which should be the same thing? Is *she* of that opinion?”

“My sister hates him.”

“Are you sure of that?”

”Ñor capitan, you are a stranger to me; but the service you’ve this night performed makes me feel as if I were talking to an old friend. Excuse the freedom I take. I am only a poor Jarocho – owning nothing but my *ranchito*, a few varas of garden-ground, my horse, my saddle, and my *machete*. I was going to say my liberty, but that’s not true: else why am I dragged from my home to fight battles in which I have no interest? You may say what our military oppressors say – it is to fight for my country. Bah! what use in spilling one’s blood for a country that’s not free? It isn’t for that I’ve been brought to Cerro Gordo, and shot down like a dog. It was to fight for a tyrant, not for a country – for El Cojo, and nobody else!”

“You have not been in the battle by your own will, then?”

”*Carrambo!* nothing of the sort, *ñor deconocio!* I am here by conscription; and I’ve been shot down by conscription. No matter now. *We* have no liberty left in Mexico – at least I have none. Still, ñor capitan, there’s one treasure left to me which I prize above everything else before riches, or even liberty. It was left me by my parents – who have long ago gone to a better world.”

“What treasure?” I inquired, seeing that the speaker hesitated to declare it.

”*Ña Lola – mia hermanita.*” (Lola, my dear sister.)

“I hope there is no danger of your losing her?”

“There is. This very night you must have heard something to tell you that there is.”

”Tis true I heard something that sounded like a threat; but what need you fear from a man who can have no control over you or your sister? You say she scorns his suit. If that be so, I cannot understand how she is in danger.”

“Ah! *ñor deconocio!* you know not our country, else you might understand. The man you speak of has power; that is, if he be still alive.”

The speaker glanced significantly towards the blood-stained cutlass.

“Power! How?”

“He is my captain. I am one of a band of *guerilleros*, raised in our village and neighbourhood. This man, Don Ramon Rayas, is our chief. He had his appointment from the dictator himself, Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. It’s a puzzle to me – and to others as well – how he obtained it: for it’s well known that before the beginning of this war with the Americanos, Rayas was a *salteador*.”

“A highway robber!”

“Neither more nor less, ñor capitan.”

“I heard you apply that unenviable appellation to him. But what can be his motive for attempting to take your life?”

“Only to get rid of me; and then Lola – my poor sister would be more easily —*carrai!* you know what I mean!”

I needed not a more ample explanation, though Calros proceeded to give it.

”Ñor deconocio,” said he, speaking in a low voice, so as not to be heard outside the tent, “I shall tell you all about it. You’ve seen my sister. Well, perhaps to you, whose countrywomen I have heard say are very fair-skinned, Lola may not appear much – ”

I did not interrupt Calros to tell him *how much*.

“Here, among us Jarochos, though I, her brother, say it, Lolita is thought *muy linda*.”

“She would be thought so anywhere, I should say.”

“Well,” proceeded the conscript, apparently pleased at my remark, “good looks in a girl are sometimes only a misfortune to her – more especially if she be poor, and that is just what Lola is.”

“A misfortune! How?”

I put the question with a keener interest than the invalid suspected.

Had Lola been already the victim of a misfortune?

“You see, sir stranger,” rejoined Calros, “among those who have set their eyes upon ña Lola is this Ramon Rayas.”

“An old school-fellow of yours, is he not?”

“True – such schooling as we had. That is long ago. Since then we have never seen him till lately. He left our village, and went to live in the great city of Puebla – a wicked place, though it be called the *City of the angels*. We didn’t hear of him for a long time; and then we were told that he had taken to the *camino real*– had become, as I’ve said, a *salteador*.”

“And now he is an officer in the Mexican army?”

“That’s the strangest of all. But no. It’s not so strange to us down here, who are well acquainted with Don Antonio. Ramon Rayas isn’t the only *picaro* in his employ. As I’ve told you, we’d seen nothing of Ramon since he was a boy at school. Then one day he reappeared among us with a commission to recruit – no, not that, but rather to take us young fellows by force, and make soldiers of us. I was compelled to go with the rest. We were formed into a *guerilla*, with Rayas as our captain. It was at that time his eyes fell upon Lola.”

“But did your sister accompany you in the campaign?”

“She did. There were many other women with us – the wives and sisters of my comrades. They came to work for us, and make us comfortable in camp. It is our custom, ñor Americano. ’Tis not so with you, I am told.”

“No, we don’t trouble ourselves with such company.”

“Ah, ñor capitan, it has indeed proved a trouble to me. It has required all to protect my poor little sister.”

“Protect her! Against whom?”

“Our captain – Don Ramon. His importunities – cruelties I should call them – were of daily, hourly occurrence. They were growing worse, when – ”

“You sent her out of his reach?”

“I did. I found a friend who offered me a home for her. My friend promised to keep her concealed, until this war should be over, and I could return home to protect her as a freeborn citizen of the republic.”

“How came she to be here to-night?”

“Devotion,” proudly replied the youth; “devotion, ñor capitan. She heard from some fugitives that I was shot down and left on the field. She came to find me – if dead to weep over my body – if living, to take care of me. Thanks to you, ñor deconocio, she has found me alive.”

After a short interval of silence, in which the invalid appeared to reflect, he resumed speech.

“*Madré de Dios!*” he said, “if Rayas had succeeded in killing me! But for you, ñor, he must have succeeded. Lola was near at hand, calling my name. He would have heard her. She would have come up, and then the wolf and the lamb would have met in the middle of the chapparal. *Madré de Dios! Thanks that she is saved!*”

As the more than probable consequence of such a meeting became pictured in the imagination of the Jarocho, he raised himself, half erect, upon the camp-bedstead, and emphatically repeated the thanksgiving.

The words had scarcely passed from his lips, when, for the third time, the mother of God was invoked.

On this occasion, however, a different cause had called forth the invocation – a cry heard outside the tent in the silvery intonation of a woman’s voice.

It was easy to recognise the utterance of Dolores. On hearing it the invalid sprang clear out of the *catre*; and stood for some moments balancing himself upon the floor.

Yielding to his weakness, he fell back upon the couch, just as the girl rushed inside the tent – proclaiming by her presence that no harm had befallen her.

“What is it, *dear* Lola?” cried her brother, almost word for word repeating my own interrogatory.

“He! Don Ramon! He is there – outside the tent!”

“If he will only stay till I come out, I promise you, fair Lola, you shall never more be troubled by his presence.”

I drew my sword from its sheath, and was rushing for the opening in the canvas.

”Ñor, ñor! *por amor Dios!* Go not alone! Don Ramon is wicked; but he is *brave*— he is dangerous!”

It was *Dolores* who interrupted me with these strange speeches.

“Brave!” I said, turning to her with angry astonishment. “Brave! a villain such as he, brave!”

I spoke with a bitter emphasis. The thought had shot across my brain, that the scorn of which Calros spoke, might have been only a fraternal fancy!

“I hope he will have courage enough to wait my coming. We shall see!” and with this valorous declaration, I emerged from the marquee, and ran over the ground in search of Don Ramon.

Half a score of my comrades, who had started from their couches on hearing the scream, were soon around me; but although we quartered the chapparal for a good stretch on every side of the encampment, we could find no trace of the robber.

Having doubled the number of the sentries, and taken other precautions against the return of this terrible intruder, I re-entered the tent which gave shelter to the Jarocho and his sister.

Restoring the invalid to such repose as was possible, I made preparations to leave them for the night. The girl was to sleep upon the floor of the marquee, under cover of a *serapé*, which I had procured for her accommodation.

“Have no fear, *Linda Lola!*” I whispered, as reluctantly I bade good night. “He who would harm thee must first pass over my body. *I shall sleep outside – before the entrance of the tent. Adios! Posa V. buena noche! Hasta la mañana!*”

“*Hasta la mañana!*” was the reply – simply my own words repeated, and with an innocent unconcern, that should have nipped in the bud any unhallowed hopes.

Story 1, Chapter XI

A Mexican Medico

In front of the tent – as I had whispered to her – I lay upon the ground, enfolded in my cloak. It was not the cold that kept me from sleeping, but the proximity – I might almost say the *presence* of that fair creature, since only a sheet of thin canvas was between us.

I will not confess my thoughts; they are unworthy of being recorded. Even my dreams – for I had short intervals of sleep, during which I dreamt – all tended to one theme: – the enjoyment of the beautiful Jarocha.

I listened long, with my ear keenly bent to catch the slightest sound. I felt no interest in the noises without. The night was now hastening towards day, and the sufferers who had been making it hideous seemed to have become wearied with wailing, for their voices were no longer heard.

Alone echoed upon the air the mocking strains of the *czentzontle*, perched upon the summit of an acacia, and answering a friend, perhaps an enemy, far off on the opposite side of the *barranca*.

The bird music fell unheeded on my ear, as did all other sounds proceeding from without. Even the firing of a gun would scarcely have distracted my attention from listening for any murmur that might reach me from the interior of the tent.

I could hear the heavy breathing of the invalid; nothing more.

Once he coughed, and became restless upon his couch. Then I heard a sweet silvery voice speaking in accents of affectionate inquiry, and ending in the pronunciation of some soothing words.

From other sounds I could tell that his nurse had arisen, and was ministering to the invalid.

By the silence, soon restored, I could perceive that she had completed her task, and had returned to her recumbent position.

She appeared to have no thoughts of him who was keeping guard without; – not as her guardian angel, but rather demon, who would not have hesitated to destroy that innocence which enabled her to sleep!

Just in proportion as the time passed, so increased my respect for Lola Vergara, and my contempt for myself.

The lovelight I had observed in her eyes was but her natural look – the simple expression of her wondrous beauty. It had no signification – at least none that was evil – and in mistaking it for the glance of a guilty passion I had erred – deeply wronging her.

Soothed by this more honourable reflection, I at length fell asleep, just as the grey light of dawn was beginning to steal over the *spray* of the chapparal.

I could not have been very long unconscious, for the beams of the sun had scarcely attained their full brilliancy, when I was again awakened – this time, not by the conflict of passion within, but by the voices of men without. The challenge of a sentry had first struck upon my ear, – quickly followed by a parley with some one who had approached the tent.

In the scarcely intelligible dialogue that ensued, I could tell that the man challenged was a Mexican, who, in broken English, was endeavouring to satisfy the demands of the sentry.

The dialogue ran thus: —

“Who goes there?”

“*Amigos!* friends!” was the response.

“Dvance, and gie the countersign!”

“*Señor centinela!* we are *medicos*— surgeon, you call – of the *ejercito* – *armee Mejicano.*”

“Ye’re Mexicans, are ye? Take care what ye’re about then. What d’ye want hyar?”

“We are *medicos* – doctor —*entiende usted?*”

“Doctors, ye say. Humph! if that’s what ye be, ye mout be o’ some use hyar, I reckon. There’s a good when o’ yer sodgers gone under for want o’ docturin. F’r all that I can’t let you pass ’ithout the countersign; leastwise till I’ve called the corporal o’ the guard.”

The group, who stood in front of the faithful sentinel awaiting permission to pass, was full under my eyes, as I turned my face towards it. The persons comprising it numbered about a score of men, only one of whom was in uniform. This individual wore a frock-coat of blue broadcloth, very long in the skirt, with gilt buttons over the breast, crimson edging, and a cord trimming of gold lace. His pantaloons were of similar colour to the coat – in fact, of the same kind of cloth. Instead of a military cap or shako he wore a black glazé hat, with broad brim; while several minor articles of dress and equipment proclaimed a costume half military, half civilian – such a style as might be seen in any army during a campaign, but more especially in that of Mexico.

The other personages of the party were variously clad – some in half military costumes, but most of them in plain clothes, – if any garments worn in Mexico can be so qualified. Several of them, two-and-two, bore stretchers between them; while others carried surgical instruments, lint, and labelled phials – insignia that declared their calling. They were the hospital staff, the *asistentes* of the young officer who preceded them, and who was evidently a surgeon belonging to the Mexican army.

It was he who had accosted the sentry.

The appearance of this party on the field of battle needed no explanation. No more did there need to be any ceremony as to their introduction.

On seeing them, I shouted to the sentry to let them pass without waiting for the arrival of that important functionary – the “corporal of the guard.”

As I arose to my feet, I was confronted by the Mexican *medico*, to whose indifferent English I had been for some time listening.

“Señor Capitan,” he said, after saluting me with a polite wave of the hand, “I have been told that I may address you in my own language. In it, and in the name of humanity, let me thank you for the kindness you have shown to our wounded soldiers. In you, sir, we no longer recognise an enemy.”

“The trifling assistance I have rendered is scarcely deserving of thanks. I fear that to some of the poor fellows who were its recipients it has been of no avail. More than one of them must have succumbed during the night.”

“That reminds me, Señor Capitan, that I should not lose time. I carry, as you perceive, a *safeguard* from the American Commander-in-chief.”

While speaking, he held out the document referred to, in order that I might examine it.

“It is not necessary,” I said; “you are of the medical staff; your errand is your passport.”

“Enough, Señor Capitan. I shall proceed to the accomplishment of my duty. In the name of humanity and Mexico, once more I thank you!”

Saying this, he walked off with his followers towards that portion of the field, where most of his wounded countrymen had miserably passed the night.

In the style and personal appearance of this Mexican there was a gracefulness peculiarly impressive. He was a man of not less than fifty years of age, of dark complexion under snow-white hair, and with features so finely outlined as to appear almost feminine. A pair of large, liquid eyes, a voice soft and musical, small delicate hands, and a graceful modesty of demeanour, bespoke him a person of refinement – in short, a gentleman.

The fact of his speaking English, though not very fluently, being an accomplishment rare among his countrymen, betokened intellectual culture, perhaps foreign travel – an idea strengthened by his general manner and bearing. There was something in his looks, moreover, that led me to think he must be clever in his calling.

I bethought me of the invalid inside the tent. Calros might stand in need of his skill.

I was about to summon him back, when the young girl, hurrying out, anticipated my intention. She had overheard the dialogue between the new-comer and myself, and, thinking only of her brother, had rushed forth to claim the services of the *surgeon*.

“Oh, Señor,” she cried, making the appeal to myself, “will you call him back to – to see Calros?”

“I was about to do so,” I replied. “He is coming!”

I had not even the merit of summoning the medics. On hearing her voice he had stopped and turned round, his attendants imitating his example. The eyes of all were concentrated on the Jarocha.

“Señorita,” said the surgeon, stepping towards the tent and modestly raising his sombrero as he spoke, “so fair a flower is not often found growing upon the ensanguined field of battle. If I have overheard you aright, it is your wish I should see some one who is wounded – some one dear to you, no doubt?”

“My brother, sir.”

“Ah! your brother,” said the Mexican, regarding the girl with a look that betokened a degree of surprise. “Where may I find him?”

“In the tent, señor. Calros, dear Calros! there is a medico, a real surgeon, coming to see you.”

And as the girl gave utterance to the words she stepped quickly inside the marquee, followed by the surgeon himself.

Story 1, Chapter XII

A Side Conversation

I was about to enter after them, when some words spoken by one of the attendants, who had drawn nearer to the tent, arrested my steps, causing me to remain outside.

“It’s Lola Vergara,” said the speaker; “that’s who it is. Any one who has had the good fortune to see that *muchacha* once, won’t be likely to forget *her* face, and won’t object to look at it a second time.”

“You’re right in what you say, Anton Chico. I know one who, instead of disliking to look at her beautiful countenance, would give an *onza* for a single glance at it. *Carrambo!* that he would.”

“Who – who is he?” asked several of the party.

“That big captain of *guerilleros*– Rayas, his name. I know he’d like to see her.”

“Why, her brother belonged to his *cuadrilla*; and the girl was with him in the camp. I saw her myself, not three days ago, down by Puente National.”

“That’s quite true!” assented the speaker who had endorsed the declaration of Anton Chico.

“She was with the army for some days, along with the other women that followed Rayas’s troop. But then all at once she was missed, and nobody knew where she went to. Capitan Rayas didn’t, I know; or why should he have offered an *onza* to any one who would tell him?”

“He made that offer?”

“*Ver dad!* I heard him.”

“To whom?”

“To that ugly *zambo* you’ve seen skulking about the camp – who belongs to nobody. It was at the Puente National, as I have said. I was standing under the bridge – the dry arch at the further end. It was just after dark; when, who should come there but Capitan Rayas, and the *zambo* following him. They were talking about this very *niña*: and I heard her name more than once. I did not hear much, for I had to keep a good distance off, so that they might not see me. But I heard that.”

“What?”

“What I’ve said about the offer of the *onza*. ‘Find out, Santucho,’ said Rayas – Santucho is the *zambo*’s name – ‘find out where he has hid her.’”

“Who has hid her?”

“*Carrambo!* that’s what I couldn’t make out; but who, if it wasn’t her own brother? – Calros, they call him.”

“There’s something ugly in all that,” remarked one of the men.

“It isn’t the *niña*, that’s certain,” jocularly rejoined Anton Chico.

“The *zambo*, then! he’s ugly enough. What say you, *camarados?*”

“The patron, who wanted to employ him, is no great beauty himself,” said one who had not before spoken. “Notwithstanding his fine trappings, he has got some black marks against him. Look here, *hombres*,” continued the speaker, drawing nearer to the others, and adopting a more confidential tone. “I’m a blind man, if I haven’t seen his phiz before; ay, and *tapado* at that.”

“*Tapado?*” echoed several.

“With black crape! It was only on my last trip but one up the country. I went with the *recua* of José Villares. He carried goods for that English house – you know – in the Calle do Mercaderos. Well, we were stopped at the Pinal, between Peroté and Puebla; every mule stripped of its *carga*; and every man of us, with José himself obliged to lie with our mouths to the grass, till the rascals had rifled the *recua*. They took only what was most valuable and easiest carried; but, *carrambo!* it well nigh ruined poor José; he has never been the same *aniero* since.”

“What of all that, *hombre?*” inquired one, who seemed to be still unsatisfied. “What has that to do with the Capitan Rayas?”

“Ah! I forgot,” said the accuser; “it was of the Capitan Rayas we were speaking. Well, it has this to do with him. The *salteadores* were all tapado, with black crape over their faces, their captain like the rest; but while he was engaged examining some papers he took from José, I caught a glance of his ugly countenance – just enough to know it again. If it wasn’t the same I saw the other day when I met this Rayas in the camp, then I don’t know *chingarito* from holy water. I’ll answer for it from the chin up to the eyes. Above that I didn’t see it, for the tapado was over it.”

“Bah!” exclaimed one of the men, who appeared to be of easy conscience himself; “what if the Capitan Rayas has done a little business on the road? There are officers in our army of higher rank than he who’ve cried out, ‘*Boca abajo!*’ – ay, some that are now generals!”

“Hush, camarade!” interrupted one who stood nearest the speaker. “See, the medico’s coming out. *Guardate, guardate!* it’s treason you’re talking!”

The interest with which I had listened to this singular palaver, had hindered me from entering the tent. The men had spoken loud enough for me to overhear every word – no doubt under the supposition that I did not understand their language – and to keep them in this belief, I had made pretence of being engaged in a whispering conversation with one of my own troopers who stood near.

As the return of the medico put an end to the talking of his attendants, I advanced to meet him, and inquired the condition of his patient.

“Thanks to your care, cavallero, he is out of danger from his wound. But from what he has confided to me – and to you also, I believe – he will be in danger of another kind by remaining in this place.”

I could tell from this speech that Calros had communicated to the surgeon the incidents of the preceding night.

“How long do you keep guard here?” inquired the Mexican, with an abstracted air.

“I am under orders to strike tents and march – exactly at noon.”

“To Jalapa, I presume?”

“To Jalapa.”

“In that case this young fellow must be carried back to the village of El Plan. A body of your troops will likely remain there for some time?”

“I believe that is the intention of our commander-in-chief.”

“Then the invalid would be safer there. It will do him no harm, if taken upon a stretcher. I must lend him half-a-dozen of my assistants, or pick up some stragglers to perform this service.”

“He would be safer in Jalapa?” I suggested, interrogatively. “Besides, the climate of Jalapa is much more favourable to the healing of wounds – is it not?”

“That is true,” answered the man of science; “but Jalapa is distant. We have not a single ambulance in our army. Who is to carry him there – a poor soldier?”

“A fine young fellow, notwithstanding. My men would not mind the trouble of taking him, if you think –”

I looked round, in hopes that the proposal might be heard and approved by another.

The Jarocha was standing in the entrance of the tent, her face beaming with gratitude. No doubt it was due to the assurance which the surgeon had given her of her brother’s speedy recovery; but I fancied I could perceive, in the sparkle of her beautiful eyes, a smile indicative of consent to what I had proposed.

The surgeon comprehended not the cause of my friendly interest in the welfare of the wounded Jarochito.

Did Lola comprehend it? Did she suspect it? Endowed with the keen, delicate instincts of her race, it was probable she did; at least, I fancied so, from the kindly look with which she had listened to my suggestion.

After all, it might have been gratitude for my friendly intentions, and nothing more.

“I see no objection to his going up the road,” said the surgeon, after having spent some little time in considering, “It is very kind on your part, cavallero,” added he – “a stranger and an enemy.” Here the medico smiled. “It is only a continuation of your humane exertions during the past night.”

A smile, almost imperceptible, accompanied this last observation, together with the slightest raising of his eyes towards the Jarocha.

“Suppose,” said he, continuing his speech, and relieving me from some little embarrassment, “suppose we consult the wishes of the invalid himself. What say you, señorita?”

“*Gracias, ñores,*” replied the girl. “I shall ask brother Calros.”

“Calros!” she called out, turning her face towards the tent. “The young officer who has been so kind to you proposes to have you carried up the road to Jalapa. Would you like to go there? The medico says the air of Jalapa will be better for you than this place.”

With a fast-beating pulse I listened for the response of the invalid.

It was delayed. Calros appeared to be considering.

“Why?” I asked myself.

“*Ay de mi!*” broke in the voice of his sister, in a tone of ingenuous reflection. “It is very hot at El Plan.”

“Thanks, sweet Lola!” I mentally exclaimed, and listened for the decision of Calros, as a criminal waiting for his verdict.

Story 1, Chapter XIII

A Group of Jarochos

Had the wounded man been left free to choose, he would in all probability have decided in favour of being taken to Jalapa – that sanatorium for invalids of the *tierra caliente*.

I know not whether he had resolved the matter in his mind, but if so, the resolution rose not to his lips; for, as I stood over his couch, venturing to add my solicitations to that *naïve* insinuation of his sister, I heard voices outside the tent – voices of men who had just come up – inquiring for “Calros Vergara.”

“Hola!” cried the Jarocho, recognising the voices, “those are our friends, sister – people from Lagarto. Run out, niña, and tell them I am here!”

Lola glided towards the entrance of the tent.

“Tis true, Calros,” she cried, as soon as she had looked out. “I see Vicente Vilagos, Ignacio Valdez, Rosario Trèss Villas, and the little Pablito!”

“Gracias a Dios!” exclaimed the invalid, raising himself on the *catre*. “I should not wonder if they’ve come to carry me home.”

“That’s just what we’ve come for,” responded a tall, stalwart specimen of a Jarocho, who at that moment stepped inside the tent, and who was hailed by the invalid as “Vicente Vilagos.” “Just that, Calros; and we’re glad to learn that the Yankee bullet has not quite stopped your breath. You’re all right, hombre! So the medico outside has been telling us; and you’ll be able, he says, to make the journey to Lagarto, where we’ll carry you as gingerly as a game cock; ay, and the niña, too, if she will only sit astride of my shoulders. Ha! ha! ha!”

By this time the other Jarochos, to the number of six or seven, had crowded inside the tent, and surrounded the *catre* in which lay their countryman – each grasping him by the hand on arriving within reach; and all saluting Lola with an air of *chevalresque* gracefulness worthy of the days of the Cid!

I stood aside – watching with curious interest this interchange of friendly feeling; which partook also of a *national* character: for it was evident that the visitors of Calros were all of the Jarocho race.

I had another motive for observing their movements, far stronger than that of mere curiosity. I looked to discover if among the new-comers I could recognise a rival!

I watched the countenance of Lola more than theirs, scrutinising it as each saluted her. I felt happy in having observed nothing – at least nothing that appeared like a glance of mutual intelligence. They were all thin, sinewy fellows, dark-skinned and dark-haired, having faces such as Salvator Rosa would have delighted to commit to canvas, and pointed chin-beards, like those painted by Vandyke.

None of them appeared to be over thirty years of age. Not one of them was ill-looking; and yet there was not one who inspired me with that unpleasant feeling too often the concomitant of love.

From all that I had yet seen, the rivalry of Rayas, Calros’s enemy, was more to be dreaded than that of any of his friends.

Vicente Vilagos was the oldest of the party, and evidently their leader *pro tem*.

It was no longer a question of carrying Calros to Jalapa. That, to his friends, would have appeared absurd – perhaps not the less so were Lola to urge it.

She said nothing, but stood apart. I fancied she was not too content at their coming, and the fancy was pleasant to me!

Surrounded by her enthusiastic friends, for a time I could not find an opportunity of speaking with her. I endeavoured to convey intelligence with my eyes.

The Jarochos are sharp fellows; skilled in courtesy, and thorough adepts in the art of love. I had reason to be careful. My peculiar position was against me, as it marked me out for their observation.

Their glances, however, were friendly. They had gathered some particulars of what had passed between their compatriot and myself.

“Come!” said Vilagos, after some minutes spent in arranging their plans. “’Tis time for us to take the road. ’Twill be sundown before we can rest under the palm-trees of Lagarto.”

The poetical phraseology did not surprise me: I knew it was *Jarocho*.

Calros had been placed upon a stretcher; and his bearers had already carried him outside the tent. Some broad leaves of the banana had been fixed over him as an awning, to shelter him from the rays of the sun.

“*Ñor deconocio*,” said Vilagos, coming up to me, and frankly extending his hand. “You’ve been kind to our *con-paisano*, though you be for the time our enemy. That, we hope, will soon pass; but whether it be in peace or in war, if you should ever stray to our little *rancheria* of Lagarto, you will find that a *Jarocho* can boast of two humble virtues — *gratitud y hospitalidad!* *Adios!*”

Each of the companions of Vilagos parted from me with an almost similar salutation.

I would have bidden a very different sort of adieu to Dolores, but was hindered by the presence of her friends, who clustered around.

I could find opportunity for only four words:

“*Lola! I love you!*”

There was no reply; not a word, not a whisper that reached me; but her large dark orbs, like the eyes of the *mazame*, flashed forth a liquid light that entered my soul, like fire from Cupid’s torch.

I was half delirious as I uttered the “*adios*.” I did not add the customary “*Va con Dios!*” nor yet the “*hasta luego*” – the “*au revoir*” of the Spanish, for which our boorish Saxon vocabulary has no synonym.

Notwithstanding the omission, I registered a mental vow — *to see Lola Vergara again*.

The beautiful *Jarocho* was gone from my sight!

“Shall I ever see her again?”

This was the interrogatory that came uppermost in my thoughts – not the less painful from my having perceived that she had lingered to look back.

Would she have preferred the road to Jalapa?

Whether or not, I had the vanity to think so.

Gone, without leaving me either promise or souvenir – only the remembrance of her voluptuous beauty – destined long to dwell within the shrine of my heart.

“Shall I ever see her again?”

Once – twice – thrice – involuntarily did I repeat the self-interrogation.

“Perhaps never!” was each time the equally involuntary reply.

In truth, the chances of my again meeting with her were very slight. To this conclusion came I, after a calm survey of the circumstances surrounding me. True, I had obtained the name of her native village – El Lagarto – and had registered a mental resolve to visit it.

What of that? A long campaign was before me, loading me in the opposite direction. The chances of being killed, and surviving it, were almost equally balanced in the scale. With such a prospect, when might I stray towards Lagarto?

There was but one answer to this question within my cognisance: *whenever I should find the opportunity*. With this thought I was forced to console myself.

I stood with my eyes fixed upon the turning of the road, where the overhanging branches of the acacias, with cruel abruptness, shrouded her departing figure from my sight. I watched the *grecque* bordering upon her petticoat, as the skirt swelled and sank, gradually narrowing towards the trees. I looked higher, and saw the fringed end of the *reboso* flirted suddenly outward, as if a hand, rather than the breeze, had caused the motion. I looked still higher. The face was hidden under the scarf. I could not see that, but the attitude told me that her head must be turned, and her eyes, “*mirando atras!*”

Kissing my hand, in answer to this final recognition, was an action instinctive and mechanical.

“I’ve been a fool to permit this parting – perhaps never to see her again!”

This was the reflection that followed. I entered the tent, and flung myself upon the *catre* lately occupied by the invalid.

A sleepless night, caused by excited passions, succeeding another passed equally without sleep, in which I had toiled, taking those useless howitzers up the steep slopes of El Plan – had rendered me somnolent to an extreme degree; and spite the chagrin of that unsatisfactory separation, I at length gave way to a god resistless as Cupid himself.

Story 1, Chapter XIV

An Infamous Epistle

There is an interest – will any man deny it? – in awaking from one’s slumber, and finding that the postman has *been*; the fact made manifest by the presence of an epistle tying proximate to your pillow, and within reach of your hand.

It is an interest of a peculiarly pleasant nature, if the epistle be perfumed, the envelope of limited dimensions, crested, cream-laid, and endorsed by a chirography of the “angular” type.

The effect, though sometimes as startling, is not quite so pleasant, when the “cover” is of a bluish tint, the superscription “clerkly,” and, instead of a crest enstamped upon the seal, you read the cabalistic words, “Debt, Dunn, and Co.”

As I awoke from my matutinal slumber – under canvas that had sheltered his Excellency Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna – my eyes looked upon a letter, or something that resembled one.

The sight inspired me neither with the thought which would have been suggested by a *billet-doux* nor a *dun*, but yet with an interest not much yielding to either; for in the superscription placed fair before my eyes I read the full cognomen and titles of the Mexican tyrant: —

“*Al excellentissimo Señor, Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, General en gefe del Ejercito Mexicano.*”

The presence of the epistle was easily explained, for I was lying on the camp-bedstead upon which, the night before, had reclined the despot of Anahuac – perhaps after sleeping less tranquilly than I. Protruding from under the leathern *catre* was the letter, where it had, in all probability, been deposited after perusal.

On perceiving it, my feeling was one of curiosity – perhaps something more. I was, of course, curious to peruse the correspondence of an individual, in my way of thinking, more notorious than distinguished. At the same time a vague hope had entered my mind, that the envelope enclosed some private despatch, the knowledge of which might be of service to the Commander-in-chief of the American army.

I had no scruples about reading the epistle – not the slightest. There was no seal to be broken; and if there had been, I should have broken it without a moment’s hesitation.

The letter was addressed – in no very fair hand – to an enemy, not only of my nation, but, as I deemed him, an enemy of mankind.

I drew the sheet from its cover – a piece of coarse foolscap, folded note fashion. The writing was in pencil, and just legible.

“*Excellentissimo Señor! – La niña se huye del campamento. Es cierto que la ha mandado el hermano. Ha recibido la putita las propuestas de V.E. con muchas señales de civilidad. No tenga V. cuidado. Yo soy alerte. En buen tiempo, dormira ella en la tienda y los brazos de V.E. o no esta mia nombre.*”

“Ramon Ratas.”

Literal translation: —

“*Most Excellent Sire! – The young girl has disappeared from the camp – assuredly by the command of her brother. The ‘putita’ (a word not to be translated) listened to the proposal of your Excellency with much show of complaisance. Don’t have any disquietude about the result. I am on the alert. In good time she shall sleep in the tent and arms of your Excellency, or my name isn’t.*”

“Ramon Ratas.”

Whatever of sleep was left in my body or brain, was at once dispelled by the reading of this disgusting epistle. I had not the slightest doubt as to whom it referred. “La niña” could be no other than Dolores Vergara.

There might be other niñas following the Mexican army who had brothers, but the communication of Rayas pointed to one who had lately disappeared from the camp – a circumstance identifying her with the sister of Calros.

Besides, what other was likely to have tempted the cupidity of the tyrant – his lust (for it was clearly such a passion), which his pander had promised to gratify?

I was less surprised by the contents of the epistle than by the circumstances under which I had found it, and the peculiar coincidences that rendered its contents so easy of interpretation.

The character of Santa Anna – well known to me as to others – was in exact keeping with what might be inferred from the communication of his correspondent. Lascivious to an extreme degree, his amatory intrigues have been as numerous as his political machinations. At least half the leisure of his life has been devoted to dallying with the Delilahs of his land, of whom there is no scarcity.

Even the loss of his leg – shot off at the siege of Vera Cruz by Joinville – failed to cure him of his erotic propensities. At the time of which I speak – nearly ten years after having parted with his limb – he was still the same gay wooer of women; though now, in his mature age, occasionally standing in need of the *alcohuete*, as well as the exercise of other vile influences.

Among these last, the bestowal of military commissions was well known to be one of his most common means of corruption; and many a young *alferes* owed his *inglorious epaulette* – many a captain his command – to the questionable merit of possessing a pretty sister.

Such was Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, Dictator of Mexico, and “generalissimo” of her armies.

With this knowledge of his character, I felt but little surprised at the contents of that “confidential” epistle. Nor was my contempt for him to whom it was directed so strong as it might have been, had my conscience been clear. In the impurity of my own thoughts, I was neither qualified to judge, nor privileged to condemn, the iniquities of another.

I could scarcely conceive how any one could look upon Lola Vergara without being inspired with a wish to become either her husband or her lover; and as *El Cojo* – already *wived* – could not be the former, it was but natural for such a man, placed in his all-commanding position, to indulge in the hopeful anticipation of being accepted as the latter.

With shame I confess it, I felt but little surprise at the discovery of this intrigue; and if I felt contempt, it was less for the sin itself, than for the way in which it was intended to be committed. With this sort of despte I was sufficiently inspired, extending equally to the patron and the panderer.

“Cowardly wretches!” I involuntarily exclaimed, crushing the piece of paper between my fingers; “both villains alike! And the brute Rayas! who talked of loving – of becoming *himself* her husband! Ha! No doubt would he do so: to obtain a better price for his precious commodity. Double dastard! It is difficult to believe in such infamy!”

For some time I strode backward and forward across the floor of the tent, muttering such speeches, and giving way to such thoughts.

Mingling with my disgust for the tyrant and his pimp, there was another feeling that caused me acute pain. Had the wretch any right to apply that vile epithet “putita?” Was there any truth in his statement that she had listened *with complaisance* to the proposals of V.E. – proposals of the nature of which there could be no misconception?

Notwithstanding the source from which the insinuation came, I will not deny that, at the moment it caused me suspicions, and something more – something very like *chagrin*.

It was less the knowledge of Lola’s character – of which I could know but little – than that of her countrywomen, that inspired me with this suspicion. Moreover, it was difficult to conceive how one so lovely and loveable could have lived to her age under the burning skies of the *tierra caliente*, without having loved.

That she *had been loved*, there could be little doubt. As little, that her lovers were legion. Could it be doubted that of some one of them she had reciprocated the passion? After the age of twelve the heart of a Jarocha rarely remains unimpressed. Lola appeared to be sixteen.

The disquietude of my thoughts admonished me that I too loved this Mexican maiden. The very pain of my suspicions told me I could not help loving her, *even if assured that they were true!*

My passion, if impure, was also powerful. The imputation cast upon its object in the letter of the *alcohuete*, instead of stifling, served only to fan it to a fiercer flame; and under the impression that the slanderer might have spoken the truth, I only blamed myself for having behaved towards the beautiful Jarocha with a respect that might, after all, in her eyes have seemed superfluous.

I was not so wicked as to give way to these gross ideas for any continued length of time; and as my memory dwelt upon her fair face; on her eyes of angelic expression; on the modest gracefulness of demeanour that marked her every movement; above all, on the devoted fondness of which her brother was the object, I could not think that Lola Vergara was otherwise than what she seemed – an angel of innocence; and that her brutal asperser was exactly what *he* seemed – a demon of the darkest dye.

Under the influence of these less degrading reflections, my spirits became calmer; and I could ponder with less bitterness upon the contents of that infamous epistle.

Infamy it revealed of the deepest character, on the part of both writer and recipient, but nothing to compromise the character of the Jarocha: for the insinuation of Rayas might have been made either to flatter the vanity, or soothe the impatience, of his patron; and in all likelihood one or the other – perhaps both – was its true purpose.

One fact, made evident by the communication, gave me disquietude of another kind. Whether the heart of Lola Vergara was still safe, certain it was that her *honour* was in danger. The brutal ruffian who would have murdered her brother, his old school-mate, on the field of battle, was not likely to stick at trifles of any kind, as I knew neither would he who was to reward him for the procuration. The assassin in intent, if not in reality, was not likely to be deterred by an abduction.

I could not help feeling serious apprehension for the safety of the girl, having only her invalid brother, a mere youth, to protect her. With the robber at large, and the patron still retaining a certain degree of power, the life of the brother was scarcely more secure than the chastity of the sister.

It was true that the arch-contriver, now a fugitive from the field, was likely for some time to have his hands full of other and very different work, than that of effecting the ruin of a peasant girl. But the subordinate would still be upon the spot; and even without the cheering presence of his employer, or the prospect of speedy reward, he might have views of his own, equally affecting the welfare of Lola Vergara.

I was so much disquieted by these apprehensions, that I had ordered my horse, with the design of galloping down the road, if possible overtaking the cortège which accompanied the invalid, and making known both to him and to his sister the scheme I had so unexpectedly discovered!

They had been gone some four or five hours; but, from the slow progress a stretcher must make, they would not likely have been more than as many miles beyond the bridge of El Plan. There could be no difficulty in overtaking them.

After all, what good could come of it? I might put them on their guard; but surely they had received warning already – sufficient to stimulate them to the utmost caution?

Moreover, the Jarochos would be in his own village, surrounded by his friends – I saw he had friends. What danger, then, either to himself or to his sister?

My apprehensions were unreasonable; and perhaps my horse had been saddled as much from another motive which I need not declare.

She might comprehend it, and to my prejudice – perhaps deem me importunate? She must have known all that I could tell her – perhaps more! Ah! true. She might not thank me for my interference.

As I stood hesitating between these two conflicting emotions, I was admonished that the hour was nigh, at which we had been ordered to strike tents, and march to join the head-quarters of the American army, by this time established in the town of Jalapa.

My troopers were forming on the field, preparatory to taking the route; and this among other motives decided my course of action.

Just as the sun had reached his meridian height, the bugler sounded the “*forward!*” and riding at the head of my little troop, I bade adieu to Cerro Gordo, now sacred to the god of war, but in my mind to remain hallowed as the spot upon which I had worshipped a far more agreeable divinity.

Story 1, Chapter XV

Two Old Acquaintances

Up the road from Cerro Gordo we travelled upon the track of a routed army.

All had not made good their retreat, as was evidenced by many a sad spectacle that came under our eyes as we went onward.

Here lay the dead horse, sunblown to enormous dimensions, with one leg – a hind one – stiffly projecting into the air.

Not far off might be seen the corpse of his quondam rider, in like manner swollen – bloated to the very tips of the fingers – so that the latter scarcely protruded from the palms, that more resembled boxing-gloves than the hands of a human being!

Though only thirty hours had elapsed from the time that life had left them, this curious transformation had become complete. It was owing to the tropical sun, which for the whole of the previous day had been fiercely glaring upon the bodies.

I noted, as we passed, that our slain enemies had not been unheeded. All appeared, since death, to have been visited, and attended to – not for the purpose of interment, but of plunder.

Everything of value found upon the corpses had been stripped off; in the case of some, even to their vestments.

A few were stark naked – their swollen shining skins displaying the gore-encircled *embouchure* of sabre or shot-wound; and it was only those whose torn uniforms were saturated with black blood, who had been permitted to retain the rags that enveloped them – now stretched to such a tight fit, that it would have been an impossibility to have completed the process of stripping.

To the credit of the pursuing army be it told, that this ruthless spoliation was not the work of the American soldier. A part of it may have been performed by the stragglers of that army – in nine cases out of ten a European hireling – French, Irish, or German. Myself an Irishman, I can scarcely be charged with partiality in this statement. Alas! for the land of my nativity – whose moral sense has too long suffered from the baneful taint of monarchical tyranny! I but set forth the facts as I saw them.

It was no great consolation to know, that much of that spoliation had been done by Mexicans themselves – the patrolled prisoners, who had gone up the road before us.

The same deteriorating influence had been at work upon *their* moral principles for a like period of time; and the intermittent glimpses they had got of a republic, had been too evanescent to have left behind much trace of its civilising power.

As we rode onward among the unburied dead, I was impressed by a singular circumstance. The corpse of no Mexican appeared to have suffered mutilation; while that of an American soldier, who had fallen by some stray shot, was stripped of its flesh – almost to the making a skeleton of it!

It was the work of wolves – we had no doubt about that. We several times saw the coyotes skulking under the edge of the chapparal, and at a greater distance the gaunt form of the large Mexican wolf. We saw great holes eaten in the hips of horses and mules; but not a scratch upon the corpse of a Mexican soldier!

“Why is it?” I asked of a singular personage who was riding immediately behind me, unattached to my troop, and whose experience over Texan and New Mexican battlefields I presumed would help me to an explanation. “Why is it that the wolves have left *their* bodies untouched?”

“Wagh!” exclaimed the individual thus interrogated, with an expression of scornful *disgust* suddenly overspreading his features. “Wolves eat ’em! No – nor coyot’s neyther. A coyot won’t eat skunk; an’ I reck’n thur karkidges aint less bitterer than the meat o’ a skunk.”

“You think there’s something in their flesh that the wolves don’t relish – something different from that of other people?”

“Think! I’m sartin sure o’t. I’ve see’d ’em die whar we killed ’em – when the Texans made their durned foolish expedishun northart to Santa Fé. I’ve seed ’em lyin’ out in the open paraira, for hul weeks at a time, till they had got dry as punk – jest like them things they bring from somewhar way out t’other side of the world. Durn it, I dis-remember the name o’ the place, an’ the things themselves. You know what I’m trackin’ up, Bill Garey? We seed ’em last time we wur at Sant Looey – in that ere queery place, whur they’d got Ingun things, an’ stuffed bufflers, an’ the like.”

“Mummeries?” replied the person thus appealed to, another unattached member of the corps of *rifle-rangers*. “Are that what you’re arter, old Rube?”

“Preezackly, Bill Mum’ries; ay, the name war that – I reccolex it. They gits the critters out o’ large stone buildin’s, shaped same as the rockly islands we seed, when we were trappin’ that lake out t’ords California.”

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