

FICTION

Vicente Blasco Ibanez

Luna Benamor

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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LUNA BENAMOR
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JOHN W. LUCE & COMPANY

BOSTON 1919

CONTENTS

LUNA BENAMOR
I, II, III, IV
THE TOAD
COMPASSION
LUXURY
RABIES
THE WINDFALL
THE LAST LION

LUNA BENAMOR

I

3 AGUIRRE had been living in Gibraltar for about a month. He had arrived with the intention of sailing at once upon a

L vessel bound for Oceanica, where he was to assume his post as a consul to Australia. It was the first important voyage of his diplomatic career. Up to that time he had served in Madrid, in the offices of the Ministry, or in various consulates of southern France, elegant summery places where for half the year life was a continuous holiday. The son of a family that had been dedicated to diplomacy by tradition, he enjoyed the protection of influential persons. His parents were dead, but he was helped by his relatives and the prestige of a name that for a century had figured in the archives of the nation. Consul at the age of twenty-five, he was about to set sail with the illusions of a student who goes out into the world for the first time, feeling that all previous trips have been insignificant.

Gibraltar, incongruous and exotic, a mixture of races and languages, was to him the first sign of the far-off world in quest of which he was journeying. He doubted, in his first surprise, if this rocky land jutting into the open sea and under a foreign flag, could be a part of his native peninsula. When he gazed out from the sides of the cliff across the vast blue bay with its rose-colored mountains dotted by the bright settlements of La Linea, San Roque and Algeciras,—the cheery whiteness of Andalusian towns,—he felt convinced that he was still in Spain. But great difference distinguished the human groups camped upon the edge of this horseshoe of earth that embraced the bay. From the headland of Tarifa to the gates of Gibraltar, a monotonous unity of race; the happy warbling of the Andalusian dialect; the broad-brimmed hat; the *mantilla* about the women's bosoms and the glistening hair adorned with flowers. On the huge mountain topped by the British flag and enclosing the oriental part of the bay, a seething cauldron of races, a confusion of tongues, a carnival of costume: Hindus, Mussulmen, English, Hebrews, Spanish smugglers, soldiers in red coats, sailors from every nation, living within the narrow limits of the fortifications, subjected to military discipline, beholding the gates of the cosmopolitan sheepfold open with the signal at sunrise and close at the booming of the sunset gun. And as the frame of this picture, vibrant with its mingling of color and movement, a range of peaks, the highlands of Africa, the Moroccan mountains, stretched across the distant horizon, on the opposite shore of the strait; here is the most crowded of the great marine boulevards, over whose blue highway travel incessantly the heavily laden ships of all nationalities and of all flags; black transatlantic steamers that plow the main in search of the seaports of the poetical Orient, or cut through the Suez Canal and are lost in the isle-dotted immensities of the Pacific.

To Aguirre, Gibraltar was a fragment of the distant Orient coming forward to meet him; an Asiatic port wrenched from its continent and dragged through the waves to run aground on the coast of Europe, as a sample of life in remote countries.

He was stopping at a hotel on Royal Street, a thoroughfare that winds about the mountain,—that vertebral column of the city to which lead, like thin threads, the smaller streets in ascending or descending slope. Every morning he was startled from his sleep by the noise of the sunrise gun,—a dry, harsh discharge from a modern piece, without the reverberating echo of the old cannon. The walls trembled, the floors shook, window panes and curtains palpitated, and a few moments later a noise was heard in the street, growing gradually louder; it was the sound of a hurrying flock, the dragging of thousands of feet, the buzz of conversations carried on in a low voice along the closed and silent buildings. It was the Spanish day laborers arriving from La Linea ready for week at the arsenal; the farmhands from San Roque and Algeciras who supplied the people of Gibraltar with vegetables and fruits.

It was still dark. On the coast of Spain perhaps the sky was blue and the horizon was beginning to be colored by the rain of gold from the glorious birth of the sun. In Gibraltar the sea fogs condensed around the heights of the cliff, forming a sort of blackish umbrella that covered the city, holding it in a damp penumbra, wetting the streets and the roofs with impalpable rain. The inhabitants despaired beneath this persistent mist, wrapped about the mountain tops like a mourning hat. It seemed like the spirit of Old England that had flown across the seas to watch over its conquest; a strip of London fog that had insolently taken up its place before the warm coasts of Africa, the very home of the sun.

The morning advanced, and the glorious, unobstructed light of the bay, yellow blue, at last succeeded in penetrating the settlement of Gibraltar, descending into the very depths of its narrow streets, dissolving the fog that had settled upon the trees of the Alameda and the foliage of the pines that extended along the coast so as to mask the fortifications at the top, drawing forth from the shadows the gray masses of the cruisers anchored in the harbor and the black bulk of the cannon that formed the shore batteries, filtering into the lugubrious embrasures pierced through the cliff, cavernous mouths revealing the mysterious defences that had been wrought with mole-like industry in the heart of the rock.

When Aguirre went down to the entrance of the hotel, after having given up all attempt to sleep during the commotion in the street, the thoroughfare was already in the throes of its regular commercial hurly-burly, a multitude of people, the inhabitants of the entire town plus the crews and the passengers of the vessels anchored in the harbor. Aguirre plunged into the bustle of this cosmopolitan population, walking from the section of the waterfront to the palace of the governor. He had become an Englishman, as he smilingly asserted. With the innate ability of the Spaniard to adapt himself to the customs of all foreign countries he imitated the manner of the English inhabitants of Gibraltar.

He had bought himself a pipe, wore a traveling cap, turned up trousers and a swagger stick. The day on which he arrived, even before night-fall, they already knew throughout Gibraltar who he was and whither he was bound. Two days later the shopkeepers greeted him from the doors of their shops, and the idlers, gathered on the narrow square before the Commercial Exchange, glanced at him with those affable looks that greet a stranger in a small city where nobody keeps his secret.

He walked along in the middle of the street, avoiding the light, canvas-topped carriages. The tobacco stores flaunted many-colored signs with designs that served as the trade-mark of their products. In the show windows the packages of tobacco were heaped up like so many bricks, and monstrous unsmokable cigars, wrapped in tinfoil as if they were sausages, glitteringly displayed their absurd size; through the doors of the Hebrew shops, free of any decoration, could be seen the shelves laden with rolls of silk and velvet, or the rich silk laces hanging from the ceiling. The Hindu bazaars overflowed into the street with their exotic, polychrome rarities: clothes embroidered with terror-inspiring divinities and chimerical animals; carpets in which the lotus-flower was adapted to the strangest designs; kimonos of delicate, indefinable tints; porcelain jars with monsters that belched fire; amber-colored shawls, as delicate as woven sighs; and in the small windows that had been converted into display cases, all the trinkets of the extreme Orient, in silver, ivory or ebony; black elephants with white tusks, heavy-paunched Buddhas, filigree jewels, mysterious amulets, daggers engraved from hilt to point. Alternating with these establishments of a free port that lives upon contraband, there were confectioneries owned by Jews, cafes and more cafes, some of the Spanish type with round, marble-topped tables, the clicking of dominoes, smoke-laden atmosphere and high-pitched discussions accompanied by vehement gestures; others resembling more the English bar, crowded with motionless, silent customers, swallowing one cocktail after another, without any other sign of emotion than a growing redness of the nose.

Through the center of the street there passed by, like a masquerade, the variety of types and costumes that had surprised Aguirre as a spectacle distinct from that furnished by other European cities. There were Moroccans, some with a broad, hooded cape, white or black, the cowl lowered as if they were friars; others wearing balloon trousers, their calves exposed to the air and with no other protection for the feet than their loose, yellow slippers; their heads covered by the folds of their turbans. They were Moors from Tangier who supplied the place with poultry and vegetables, keeping their money in the embroidered leather wallets that hung from their girdled waists. The Jews of Morocco, dressed in oriental fashion with silk kirtle and an ecclesiastical calotte, passed by leaning upon sticks, as if thus dragging along their bland, timid obesity. The soldiers of the garrison,—tall, slender, rosy-complexioned—made the ground echo with the heavy cadence of their boots. Some were dressed in khaki, with the sobriety of the soldier in the field; others wore the regular red jacket. White helmets, some lined with yellow, alternated with the regulation caps; on the breasts of the sergeants shone the red stripe; other soldiers carried in their armpits the thin cane that is the emblem of authority. Above the collar of many coats rose the extraordinarily thin British neck, high, giraffe-like, with a pointed protuberance in front. Soon the further end of the street was filled with white; an avalanche of snowy patches seemed to advance with rhythmic step. It was the caps of the sailors. The cruisers in the Mediterranean had given their men shore leave and the thoroughfare was filled with ruddy, cleanshaven boys, with faces bronzed by the sun, their chests almost bare within the blue collar, their trousers wide at the bottom, swaying from side to side like an elephant's trunk, fellows with small heads and childish features, with their huge hands hanging at the ends of their arms as if the latter could hardly sustain their heavy bulk. The groups from the fleet separated, disappearing into the various side streets in search of a tavern. The policeman in the white helmet followed with a resigned look, certain that he would have to meet some of them later in a tussle, and beg the favor of the king when, at the sound of the sunset gun, he would bring them back dead drunk to their cruiser.

Mingling with these fighters were gypsies with their loose belts, their long staffs and their dark faces; old and repulsive creatures, who no sooner stopped before a shop than the owners became uneasy at the mysterious hiding-places of their cloaks and skirts; Jews from the city, too, with broad frocks and shining silk hats, dressed for the celebration of one of their holidays; negroes from the English possessions; coppery Hindus with drooping mustache and white trousers, so full and short that they looked like aprons; Jewesses from Gibraltar, dressed in white with all the correctness of the Englishwomen; old Jewesses from Morocco, obese, puffed out, with a many-colored kerchief knotted about their temples; black cassocks of Catholic priests, tight frocks of Protestant priests, loose gowns of venerable rabbis, bent, with flowing beards, exuding grime and sacred wisdom.. And all this multifarious world was enclosed in the limits of a fortified town, speaking many tongues at the same time, passing without any transition in the course of the conversation from English to a Spanish pronounced with the strong Andalusian accent.

Aguirre wondered at the moving spectacle of Royal Street; at the continuously renewed variety of its multitude. On the great boulevards of Paris, after sitting in the same café for six days in succession, he knew the majority of those who passed by on the sidewalk. They were always the same. In Gibraltar, without leaving the restricted area of its central street, he experienced surprises every day. The whole country seemed to file by between its two rows of houses. Soon the street was filled with bearskin caps worn by ruddy, green-eyed, flat-nosed persons. It was a Russian

invasion. There had just anchored in the harbor a transatlantic liner that was bearing this cargo of human flesh to America. They scattered throughout the place; they crowded the cafes and the shops, and under their invading wave they blotted out the normal population of Gibraltar. At two o'clock it had resumed its regular aspect and there reappeared the helmets of the police, the sailors' caps, the turbans of the Moors, the Jews and the Christians. The liner was already at sea after having taken on its supply of coal; and thus, in the course of a single day, there succeeded one another the rapid and uproarious invasions of all the races of the continent, in this city that might be called the gateway of Europe, by the inevitable passage through which one part of the world communicates with the Orient and the other with the Occident.

As the sun disappeared, the flash of a discharge gleamed from the top of the mountain, and the boom of the sunset gun warned strangers without a residence permit that it was time to leave the city. The evening patrol paraded through the streets, with its military music of fifes and drums grouped about the beloved national instrument of the English, the bass drum, which was being pounded with both hands by a perspiring athlete, whose rolled-up sleeves revealed powerful biceps. Behind marched Saint Peter, an official with escort, carrying the keys to the city. Gibraltar was now out of communication with the rest of the world; doors and gates were closed. Thrust upon itself it turned to its devotions, finding in religion an excellent pastime to precede supper and sleep. The Jews lighted the lamps of their synagogues and sang to the glory of Jehovah; the Catholics counted their rosaries in the Cathedral; from the Protestant temple, built in the Moorish style as if it were a mosque, rose, like a celestial whispering, the voices of the virgins accompanied by the organ; the Mussulmen gathered in the house of their consul to whine their interminable and monotonous salutation to Allah. In the temperance restaurants, established by Protestant piety for the cure of drunkenness, sober soldiers and sailors, drinking lemonade or tea, broke forth into harmonious hymns to the glory of the Lord of Israel, who in ancient times had guided the Jews through the desert and was now guiding old England over the seas, that she might establish her morality and her merchandise.

Religion filled the existence of these people, to the point of suppressing nationality. Aguirre knew that in Gibraltar he was not a Spaniard; he was a Catholic. And the others, for the most part English subjects, scarcely recalled this status, designating themselves by the name of their creed.

In his walks through Royal Street Aguirre had one stopping place: the entrance to a Hindu bazaar ruled over by a Hindu from Madras named Khiamull. During the first days of his stay he had bought from the shopkeeper various gifts for his first cousins in Madrid, the daughters of an old minister plenipotentiary who helped him in his career. Ever since then Aguirre would stop for a chat with Khiamull, a shrivelled old man, with a greenish tan complexion and mustache of jet black that bristled from his lips like the whiskers of a seal. His gentle, watery eyes--those of an antelope or of some humble, persecuted beast--seemed to caress Aguirre with the softness of velvet. He spoke to the young man in Spanish, mixing among his words, which were pronounced with an Andalusian accent, a number of rare terms from distant tongues that he had picked up in his travels. He had journeyed over half the world for the company by whom he was now employed. He spoke of his life at the Cape, at Durban, in the Philippines, at Malta, with a weary expression. Sometimes he looked young; at others his features contracted with an appearance of old age. Those of his race seem to be ageless. He recalled his far-off land of the sun, with the melancholy voice of an exile; his great sacred river, the flower-crowned Hindu virgins, slender and gracefully curved, showing from between the thick jewelled jacket and their linen folds a bronze stomach as beautiful as that of a marble figure. Ah!... When he would accumulate the price of his return thither, he would certainly join his lot to that of a maiden with large eyes and a breath of roses, scarcely out of childhood. Meanwhile he lived like an ascetic fakir amongst the Westerners, unclean folks with whom he was willing to transact business but with whom he avoided all unnecessary contact. Ah, to return yonder! Not to die far from the sacred river!... And as he expressed his intimate wishes to the inquisitive Spaniard who questioned him concerning the distant lands of light and mystery, the Hindu coughed painfully, his face becoming darker than ever, as if the blood that was circulating beneath the bronze of his skin had turned green.

At times Aguirre, as if waking from a dream, would ask himself what he was doing there in Gibraltar. Since he had arrived with the intention of sailing at once, three large vessels had passed the strait bound for the Oceanic lands. And he had allowed them to sail on, pretending not to know of their presence, never being able to learn the exact conditions of his voyage, writing to Madrid, to his influential uncle, letters in which he spoke of vague ailments that for the moment delayed his departure. Why?... Why?...

Upon arising, the day following his arrival at Gibraltar, Aguirre looked through the window curtains of his room with all the curiosity of a newcomer. The heavens were clouded; it was an October sky; but it was warm,--a muggy, humid warmth that betrayed the proximity of the African coast.

Upon the flat roof of a neighboring house he noticed a strange construction,--a large arbor made of woven reeds and thatched with green branches. Within this fragile abode, he was able to make out through its bright curtains a long table, chairs, and an old-fashioned lamp hanging from the top... What a queer whim of these people who, having a

house, chose to live upon the roof!

A hotel attendant, while he put Aguirre's room in order, answered all his inquiries. The Jews of Gibraltar were celebrating a holiday, the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the most important observances of the year. It was in memory of the long wandering of the Israelites through the desert. In commemoration of their sufferings the Jews were supposed to eat in the open air, in a tabernacle that resembled the tents and huts of their forefathers. The more fanatic of them, those most attached to ancient customs, ate standing, with a staff in their hands, as if ready to resume their journey after the last mouthful. The Hebrew merchants of the central street erected their structures on the roof; those of the poor quarters built theirs in a yard or corral, wherever they could catch a glimpse of the open sky. Those who, because of their extreme poverty, lived in a shanty, were invited to dine in company with the more fortunate, with that fraternity of a race compelled by hatred and persecution to preserve a firm solidarity.

The tabernacle Aguirre saw was that of old Aboab and his son, brokers who kept their establishment on the selfsame Royal Street, just a few doors below. And the servant pronounced the name Aboab (father and son) with that mingling of superstitious awe and hatred which is inspired in the poor by wealth that is considered unjustly held. All Gibraltar knew them; it was the same in Tangier, and the same in Rabat and Casablanca. Hadn't the gentleman heard of them? The son directed the business of the house, but the father still took part, presiding over all with his venerable presence and that authority of old age which is so infallible and sacred among Hebrew families.

"If you could only see the old man!" added the attendant, with his Andalusian accent. "A white beard that reaches down to his waist, and if you'd put it into hot water it would yield more than a pitcherful of grease. He's almost as greasy as the grand Rabbi, who's the bishop among them... But he has lots of money. Gold ounces by the fistful, pounds sterling by the shovel; and if you'd see the hole he has in the street for his business you'd be amazed. A mere poor man's kitchen. It seems impossible that he can store so much there!"

After breakfast, when Aguirre went back to his room in search of his pipe, he saw that the Aboab tabernacle was occupied by the whole family. At the back, which was in semi-obscurity, he seemed to make out a white head presiding over the table and on each side elbows leaning upon the tablecloth, and the skirts and trousers of persons who were for the most part invisible.

Two women came out on the roof; they were both young, and after glancing for a moment at the inquisitive fellow in the hotel window, turned their gaze in a different direction, as if they had not noticed him. To Aguirre these Aboab daughters were not very impressive, and he wondered whether the much vaunted beauty of Jewesses was but another of the many lies admitted by custom, consecrated by time and accepted without investigation. They had large eyes, of bovine beauty; moist and dilated, but with the addition of thick, prominent eyebrows, as black and continuous as daubs of ink. Their nostrils were wide and the beginnings of obesity already threatened to submerge their youthful slenderness in corpulence.

They were followed by another woman, doubtless the mother, who was so fat that her flesh shook as she moved. Her eyes, too, were attractive, but were spoiled by the ugly eyebrows. Her nose, her lower lip and the flesh of her neck hung loosely; in her there was already completed the fatal maturity which was beginning to appear in her daughters. All three possessed the yellowish pallor characteristic of Oriental races. Their thick lips, faintly blue, revealed something of the African element grafted upon their Asiatic origin.

"Hola! What's this!" murmured Aguirre with a start.

A fourth woman had come out from the depths of the tabernacle. She must be English; the Spaniard was certain of this. Yes, she was an English brunette, with a bluish cast to her dark skin and a slim, athletic figure whose every movement was graceful. A creole from the colonies, perhaps, born of some Oriental beauty and a British soldier.

She looked without any bashfulness toward the window of the hotel, examining the Spaniard with the leisurely glance of a bold boy, meeting the shock of his eyes without flinching. Then she wheeled about on her heel as if beginning a dancing figure, turned her back to the Spaniard and leaned against the shoulders of the two other young ladies, thrusting them aside and taking pleasure, to the accompaniment of loud outbursts of laughter, in pushing their unwieldy persons with her vigorous, boyish arms.

When all the women returned to the interior of the tabernacle, Aguirre abandoned his lookout, more and more convinced of the exactness of his observations. Decidedly, she was not a Jewess. And the better to convince himself, he talked at the door with the manager of the hotel, who knew all Gibraltar. After a few words this man guessed to whom Aguirre was referring.

"That's Luna... Lunita Benamor, old Aboab's granddaughter. What a girl, eh? The belle of Gibraltar! And rich! Her dowry is at least one hundred thousand *duros*."

A Jewess!... She was a Jewess! From that time Aguirre began to meet Luna frequently in the narrow limits of a city where people could hardly move without encountering one another. He saw her on the roof of her house; he came across her on Royal Street as she entered her grandfather's place; he followed her, sometimes in the vicinity of the Puerta del Mar and at others from the extreme end of the town, near the Alameda. She was usually unaccompanied, like all the young ladies of Gibraltar, who are brought up in conformity with English customs. Besides, the town was in a manner a common dwelling in which all knew one another and where woman ran no risk.

Whenever Aguirre met her they would exchange casual glances, but with the expression of persons who have seen each other very often. The consul still experienced the astonishment of a Spaniard influenced by centuries of prejudice. A Jewess! He would never have believed that the race could produce such a woman. Her outward appearance, correct and elegant as that of an Englishwoman, gave no other indication of her foreign origin than a marked predilection for silk clothes of bright hues, especially strawberry color, and a fondness for sparkling jewelry. With the gorgeousness of an American who pays no attention to hours, she would go out early in the morning with a thick necklace of pearls hanging upon her bosom and two flashing pendants in her ears. A picture hat with costly plumes, imported from London, concealed the ebony beauty of her hair.

Aguirre had acquaintances in Gibraltar, idlers, whom he had met in the cafes, young, obsequious, courteous Israelites who received this Castilian official with ancestral deference, questioning him about affairs of Spain as if that were a remote country.

Whenever passed by them during her constant walks along Royal Street,--taken with no other purpose than to kill time--they spoke of her with respect. "More than a hundred thousand *duros*." Everybody knew the amount of the dowry. And they acquainted the consul with the existence of a certain Israelite who was the girl's affianced husband. He was now in America to complete his fortune. He was rich, but a Jew must labor to add to the legacy of his fathers. The families had arranged the union without even consulting them, when she was twelve years old and he already a man corrupted by frequent changes of residence and traveling adventures. Luna had been waiting already ten years for the return of her fiance from Buenos Aires, without the slightest impatience, like the other maidens of her race, certain that everything would take its regular course at the appointed hour.

"These Jewish girls," said a friend of Aguirre, "are never in a hurry. They're accustomed to biding their time. Just see how their fathers have been awaiting the Messiah for thousands of years without growing tired."

One morning, when the Feast of Tabernacles had ended and the Jewish population of the town returned to its normal pursuits, Aguirre entered the establishment of the Aboabs under the pretext of changing a quantity of money into tender of English denomination. It was a rectangular room without any other light than that which came in through the doorway, its walls kalsomined and with a wainscoting of white, glazed tiles. A small counter divided the shop, leaving a space for the public near the entrance and reserving the rest of the place for the owners and a large iron safe. Near the door a wooden charity-box, inscribed in Hebrew, awaited the donations of the faithful for the philanthropic activities of the community. The Jewish customers, in their dealings with the house, deposited there the extra *centimos* of their transactions. Behind the counter were the Aboabs, father and son. The patriarch, Samuel Aboab, was very aged and of a greasy corpulence. As he sat there in his armchair his stomach, hard and soft at the same time, had risen to his chest. His shaven upper lip was somewhat sunken through lack of teeth; his patriarchal beard, silver white and somewhat yellow at the roots, fell in matted locks, with the majesty of the prophets. Old age imparted to his voice a whimpering quaver, and to his eyes a tearful tenderness. The least emotion brought tears; every word seemed to stir touching recollections. Tears and tears oozed from his eyes, even when he was silent, as if they were fountains whence escaped the grief of an entire people, persecuted and cursed through centuries upon centuries.

His son Zabulon was already old, but a certain black aspect lingered about him, imparting an appearance of virile youth. His eyes were dark, sweet and humble, but with an occasional flash that revealed a fanatic soul, a faith as firm as that of ancient Jerusalem's people, ever ready to stone or crucify the new prophets; his beard, too, was black and firm as that of a Maccabean warrior; black, also, was his curly hair, which looked like an astrakhan cap. Zabulon figured as one of the most active and respected members of the Jewish community,--an individual indispensable to all beneficent works, a loud singer in the synagogue and a great friend of the Rabbi, whom he called "our spiritual chief," an assiduous attendant at all homes where a fellow-religionist lay suffering, ready to accompany with his prayers the gasps of the dying man and afterwards lave the corpse according to custom with a profusion of water that ran in a stream into the street. On Saturdays and special holidays Zabulon would leave his house for the synagogue, soberly arrayed in his frock and his gloves, wearing a silk hat and escorted by three poor co-religionists who lived upon the crumbs of his business and were for these occasions dressed in a style no less sober and fitting than that of their protector.

"All hands on deck!" the wits of Royal Street would cry. "Make way, for here comes a cruiser with four

smokestacks!"

And the four smokestacks of well brushed silk sailed between the groups, bound for the synagogue, looking now to this side and now to that so as to see whether any wicked Hebrew was lounging about the streets instead of attending synagogue; this would afterwards be reported to the "spiritual head."

Aguirre, who was surprised at the poverty of the establishment, which resembled a kitchen, was even more surprised at the facility with which money rolled across the narrow counter. The packets of silver pieces were quickly opened, passing rapidly through the shaggy, expert hands of Zabulon; the pounds fairly sang, as they struck the wood, with the merry ring of gold; the bank-notes, folded like unstitched folios, flashed for a moment before concealing the colors of their nationality in the safe: the simple, monotonous white of the English paper, the soft blue of the Bank of France, the green and red mixture of the Spanish Bank. All the Jews of Gibraltar flocked hither, with that same commercial solidarity which leads them to patronize only establishments owned by members of their race; Zabulon, all by himself, without the aid of clerks, and without allowing his father (the venerable fetich of the family's fortune) to leave his seat, directed this dance of money, conducting it from the hands of the public to the depths of the iron safe, or fetching it forth to spread it, with a certain sadness, upon the counter. The ridiculous little room seemed to grow in size and acquire beauty at the sound of the sonorous names that issued from the lips of the banker and his customers. London! Paris! Vienna!... The house of Aboab had branches everywhere. Its name and its influence extended not only to the famous world centers, but even to the humblest corners, wherever one of their race existed. Rabat, Casablanca, Larache, Tafilete, Fez, were African towns into which the great banks of Europe could penetrate only with the aid of these auxiliaries, bearing an almost famous name yet living very poorly.

Zabulon, as he changed Aguirre's money, greeted him as if he were a friend. In that city every one knew every body else within twenty-four hours.

Old Aboab pulled himself together in his chair, peering out of his weak eyes with a certain surprise at not being able to recognize this customer among his habitual visitors.

"It's the consul, father," said Zabulon, without raising his glance from the money that he was counting, guessing the reason for the movement of the old man behind him. "The Spanish consul who stops at the hotel opposite our house."

The patriarch seemed to be impressed and raised his hand to his hat with humble courtesy.

"Ah! The consul! The worthy consul!" he exclaimed, emphasizing the title as a token of his great respect for all the powers of the earth. "Highly honored by your visit, worthy consul."

And believing that he owed his visitor renewed expressions of flattery, he added with tearful sighs, imparting to his words a telegraphic conciseness, "Ah, Spain! Beautiful land, excellent country, nation of gentlemen!... My forefathers came from there, from a place called Espinosa de los Monteros."

His voice quivered, pained by recollections, and afterwards, as if he had in memory advanced to recent times, he added, "Ah! Castelar!... Castelar, a friend of the Jews, and he defended them. Of the *judeos*, as they say there!"

His flood of tears, ill restrained up to that moment, could no longer be held back, and at this grateful recollection it gushed from his eyes, inundating his beard.

"Spain! Beautiful country!" sighed the old man, deeply moved.

And he recalled everything that in the past of his race and his family had united his people with that country. An Aboab had been chief treasurer of the King of Castile; another had been a wonderful physician, enjoying the intimacy of bishops and cardinals. The Jews of Portugal and of Spain had been great personages,—the aristocracy of the race. Scattered now over Morocco and Turkey, they shunned all intercourse with the coarse, wretched Israelite population of Russia and Germany. They still recited certain prayers, in the synagogue, in old Castilian, and the Jews of London repeated them by heart without knowing either their origin or their meaning, as if they were prayers in a language of sacred mystery. He himself, when he prayed at the synagogue for the King of England, imploring for him an abundance of health and prosperity even as Jews the world over did for the ruler of whatever country they happened to inhabit, added mentally an entreaty to the Lord for the good fortune of beautiful Spain.

Zabulon, despite his respect for his father, interrupted him brusquely, as if he were an imprudent child. In his eyes there glowed the harsh expression of the impassioned zealot.

"Father, remember what they did to us. How they cast us out... how they robbed us. Remember our brothers who were burned alive."

"That's true, that's true," groaned the patriarch, shedding new tears into a broad handkerchief with which he wiped

his eyes. "It's true.... But in that beautiful country there still remains something that is ours. The bones of our ancestors."

When Aguirre left, the old man showered him with tokens of extreme courtesy. He and his son were at the consul's service. And the consul returned almost every morning to chat with the patriarch, while Zabulon attended to the customers and counted money.

Samuel Aboab spoke of Spain with tearful delight, as of a marvelous country whose entrance was guarded by terrible monsters with fiery swords. Did they still recall the *judeos* there? And despite Aguirre's assurances, he refused to believe that they were no longer called thus in Spain. It grieved the old man to die before beholding Espinosa de los Monteros; a beautiful city, without a doubt. Perhaps they still preserved there the memory of the illustrious Aboabs.

The Spaniard smilingly urged him to undertake the journey. Why did he not go there?...

"Go! Go to Spain!..." The old man huddled together like a timorous snail before the idea of this journey.

"There are still laws against the poor *judeos*. The decree of the Catholic Kings. Let them first repeal it!... Let them first call us back!"

Aguirre laughed at his listener's fears. Bah! The Catholic Kings! Much they counted for now!... Who remembered those good gentlemen?

But the old man persisted in his fears. He had suffered much. The terror of the expulsion was still in his bones and in his blood, after four centuries. In summer, when the heat forced them to abandon the torrid rock, and the Aboab family hired a little cottage on the seashore, in Spanish territory just beyond La Linea, the patriarch dwelt in constant restlessness, as if he divined mysterious perils in the very soil upon which he trod. Who could tell what might happen during the night? Who could assure him that he would not awake in chains, ready to be led like a beast to a port? This is what had happened to his Spanish ancestors, who had been forced to take refuge in Morocco, whence a branch of the family had moved to Gibraltar when the English took possession of the place.

Aguirre poked mild fun at the childish fears of the aged fellow, whereupon Zabulon intervened with his darkly energetic authority.

"My father knows what he is talking about. We will never go; we can't go. In Spain the old customs always return; the old is converted into the new. There is no security; woman has too much power and interferes in matters that she does not understand."

Woman! Zabulon spoke scornfully of the sex. They should be treated as the Jews treated them. The Jews taught them nothing more than the amount of religion necessary to follow the rites. The presence of women in the synagogue was in many instances not obligatory. Even when they came, they were confined to the top of a gallery, like spectators of the lowest rank. No. Religion was man's business, and the countries in which woman has a part in it cannot offer security.

Then the unsympathetic Israelite spoke enthusiastically of the "greatest man in the world," Baron Rothschild, lord over kings and governments--taking care never to omit the title of baron every time he pronounced the name--and he finally named all the great Jewish centers, which were ever increasing in size and population.

"We are everywhere," he asserted, blinking maliciously. "Now we are spreading over America. Governments change, peoples spread over the face of the earth, but we are ever the same. Not without reason do we await the Messiah. He will come, some day."

On one of his morning visits to the ill appointed bank Aguirre was introduced to Zabulon's two daughters,--Sol and Estrella,--and to his wife, Thamar. On another morning Aguirre experienced a tremor of emotion upon hearing behind him the rustle of silks and noticing that the light from the entrance was obscured by the figure of a person whose identity his nerves had divined. It was Luna, who had come, with all the interest that Hebrew women feel for their domestic affairs, to deliver an order to her uncle. The old man grasped her hands across the counter, caressing them tremblingly.

"This is my granddaughter, sir consul, my granddaughter Luna. Her father is dead, and my daughter too. She comes from Morocco. No one loves the poor girl as much as her grandfather does."

And the patriarch burst into tears, moved by his own words.

Aguirre left the shop with triumphant joy. They had spoken to each other; now they were acquainted. The moment he met her upon the street he would cling to her, taking advantage of some blessed customs that seemed to have been

made for lovers.

II

NEITHER could tell how, after several ordinary meetings, their friendly confidence grew, or which had been the first word to reveal the mystery of their thoughts.

They saw each other mornings when Aguirre would go to his window. The Feast of Tabernacles had come to an end, and the Aboabs had taken down the religious structure, but Luna continued to go to the roof under various pretexts, so that she might exchange a glance, a smile, a gesture of greeting with the Spaniard. They did not converse from these heights through fear of the neighbors, but afterwards they met in the street, and Luis, after a respectful salute, would join the young lady, and they would walk along as companions, like other couples they met on their way. All were known to one another in that town. Only by this knowledge could married couples be distinguished from simple friends.

Luna visited various shops on errands for the Aboabs, like a good Jewess who is interested in all the family affairs. At other times she wandered aimlessly through Royal Street, or walked in the direction of the Alameda, explaining the landmarks of the city to Aguirre at her side. In the midst of these walks she would stop at the brokers' shop to greet the patriarch, who smiled childishly as he contemplated the youthful and beautiful couple.

"Senor consul, senor consul," said Samuel one day, "I brought from my house this morning the family papers, for you to read. Not all of them. There are too many altogether! We Aboabs are very old; I wish to prove to the consul that we are *judeos* of Spain, and that we still remember the beautiful land."

And from underneath the counter he drew forth divers rolls of parchment covered with Hebrew characters. They were matrimonial documents, acts of union of the Aboabs with certain families of the Israelite community. At the head of all these documents figured on one side the coat of arms of England and on the other that of Spain, in bright colors and gold borders.

"We are English," declared the patriarch. "May the Lord preserve our king and send him much happiness; but we are Spaniards historically: Castilians, that is... Castilians."

He selected from the parchments one that was cleaner and fresher than the others, and bent over it his white, wavy beard and his tearful eyes.

"This is the wedding contract of Benamor with my poor daughter: Luna's parents. You can't understand it, for it's in Hebrew characters, but the language is Castilian, pure Castilian, as it was spoken by our ancestors."

And slowly, in an infantile voice, as if he relished the obsolete forms of the words, he read the terms of the contract that united the parties "in the custom of Old Castile." Then he enumerated the conditions of the marriage, the penalties either of the contracting parties might incur if the union were dissolved through his or her fault.

"Such party will pay," mumbled the patriarch, "'will pay... so many silver ounces.' Are there still silver ounces in Castile, senor consul?" ...

Luna, in her conversations with Aguirre, demonstrated an interest as keen as that of her old grandfather in the beautiful land, the far-off, remote, mysterious land,--in spite of the fact that its boundary was situated but a few steps away, at the very gates of Gibraltar. All she knew of it was a little fisherman's hamlet, beyond La Linea, whither she had gone with her family on their summer vacations.

"Cadiz! Seville! How enchanting they must be!... I can picture them to myself: I have often beheld them in my dreams, and I really believe that if I ever saw them they wouldn't surprise me in the least.... Seville! Tell me, Don Luis, is it true that sweethearts converse there through a grating? And is it certain that the maidens are serenaded with a guitar, and

the young men throw their capes before them as a carpet over which to pass? And isn't it false that men slay one another for them?... How charming! Don't deny all this. It's all so beautiful!..."

Then she would summon to memory all her recollections of that land of miracles, of that country of legends, in which her forebears had dwelt. When she was a child her grandmother, Samuel Aboab's wife, would lull her to sleep reciting to her in a mysterious voice the prodigious events that always had Castile as their background and always began the same: "Once upon a time there was a king of Toledo who fell in love with a beautiful and charming Jewess named Rachel..."

"Toledo!"... As she uttered this name Luna rolled her eyes as in the vagueness of a dream. The Spanish capital of Israel! The second Jerusalem! Her noble ancestors, the treasurer of the king and the miraculous physician, had dwelt there!

"You must have seen Toledo, Don Luis. You surely have been there. How I envy you!... Very beautiful, isn't it? Vast! Enormous!... Like London?... Like Paris? Of course not.... But certainly far larger than Madrid."

And carried away by the enthusiasm of her illusions she forgot all discretion, questioning Luis about his past. Indubitably he was of the nobility: his very bearing revealed that. From the very first day she had seen him, upon learning his name and his nationality, she had guessed that he was of high origin. A hidalgo such as she had imagined every man from Spain to be, with something Semitic in his face and in his eyes, but more proud, with an air of hauteur that was incapable of supporting humiliations and servility. Perhaps he had a uniform for festive occasions, a suit of bright colors, braided with gold... and a sword, a sword!

Her eyes shone with admiration in the presence of this hidalgo from the land of knights who was dressed as plainly as a shopkeeper of Gibraltar, yet who could transform himself into a glorious insect of brilliant hues, armed with a mortal sting. And Aguirre did not disturb her illusions, answering affirmatively, with all the simplicity of a hero. Yes; he had a golden costume, that of the consul. He possessed a sword, which went with his uniform, and which had never been unsheathed.

One sunny morning the pair, quite unconsciously, took the path to the Alameda. She made anxious inquiries about Aguirre's past, with indiscreet curiosity, as always happens between persons who feel themselves attracted to each other by a budding affection. Where had he been born? How had he spent his childhood? Had he loved many women?...

They passed beneath the arches of an old gate that dated back to the time of the Spanish possession, and which still preserved the eagles and the shields of the Austrian dynasty. In the old moat, now converted into a garden, there was a group of tombs,—those of the English sailors who had died at Trafalgar. They walked along an avenue in which the trees alternated with heaps of old bombs and cone-shaped projectiles, reddened by rust. Further on, the large cannon craned their necks toward the gray cruisers of the military harbor and the extensive bay, over whose blue plain, tremulous with gold, glided the white dots of some sailing vessels.

On the broad esplanade of the Alameda, at the foot of the mountain covered with pines and cottages, were groups of youths running and kicking a restless ball around. At that hour, as at every hour of the day, the huge ball of the English national game sped through the air over paths, fields and garrison yards. A concert of shouts and kicks, civil as well as military, rose into the air, to the glory of strong and hygienic England.

They mounted a long stairway, afterwards seeking rest in a shady little square, near the monument to a British hero, the defender of Gibraltar, surrounded by mortars and cannon. Luna, gazing across the blue sea that could be viewed through the colonnade of trees, at last spoke of her own past.

Her childhood had been sad. Born in Rabat, where the Jew Benamor was engaged in the exportation of Moroccan cloths, her life had flowed on monotonously, without any emotion other than that of fear. The Europeans of this African port were common folk, who had come thither to make their fortune. The Moors hated the Jews. The rich Hebrew families had to hold themselves apart, nourishing themselves socially upon their own substance, ever on the defensive in a country that lacked laws. The young Jewish maidens were given an excellent education, which they acquired with the facility of their race in adopting all progress. They astonished newcomers to Rabat with their hats and their clothes, similar to those of Paris and London; they played the piano; they spoke various languages, and yet, on certain nights of sleeplessness and terror, their parents dressed them in foul tatters and disguised them, staining their faces and their hands with moist ashes and lampblack, so that they might not appear to be Jewish daughters and should rather resemble slaves. There were nights in which an uprising of the Moors was feared, an invasion of the near-by Kabyles, excited in their fanaticism by the inroads of European culture. The Moroccans burned the houses of the Jews, plundered their treasures, fell like wild beasts upon the white women of the infidels, decapitating them with hellish sadism after subjecting them to atrocious outrages. Ah! Those childhood nights in which she dozed standing,

dressed like a beggar girl, since the innocence of her tender age was of no avail as a protection!... Perhaps it was these frights that were responsible for her dangerous illness,—an illness that had brought her near to death, and to this circumstance she owed her name Luna.

"At my birth I was named Horabuena, and a younger sister of mine received the name Asibuena. After a period of terror and an invasion of the Moroccans in which our house was burned down and we thought we were all doomed to slaughter, my sister and I fell ill with fever. Asibuena died; happily, I was saved."

And she described to Luis, who listened to her under a spell of horror, the incidents of this exotic, abnormal life,—all the sufferings of her mother in the poor house where they had taken refuge. Aboab's daughter screamed with grief and tore her black hair before the bed where her daughter lay overcome by the stupor of fever. Her poor Horabuena was going to die.

"Ay, my daughter! My treasure Horabuena, my sparkling diamond, my nest of consolation!... No more will you eat the tender chicken! No more will you wear your neat slippers on Saturdays, nor will your mother smile with pride when the Rabbi beholds you so graceful and beautiful!..."

The poor woman paced about the room lighted by a shaded lamp. In the shadows she could detect the presence of the hated *Huerco*, the demon, with a Spanish name who comes at the appointed hour to bear off human creatures to the darkness of death. She must battle against the evil one, must deceive the *Huerco*, who was savage yet stupid, just as her forefathers had deceived him many a time:

She repressed her tears and sighs, calmed her voice, and stretching out upon the floor spoke softly, with a sweet accent, as if she were receiving an important visit:

"*Huerco*, what have you come for?... Are you looking for Horabuena? Horabuena is not here; she has gone forever. She who is here is named... Luna. Sweet Lunita, beautiful Lunita. Off with you, *Huerco*, begone! She whom you seek is not here."

For some time she was calm, then her returning fears made her speak again to her importunate, lugubrious guest. There he was again! She could feel his presence.

"*Huerco*, I tell you you're mistaken! Horabuena is gone; look for her elsewhere. Only Luna is here. Sweet Lunita, precious Lunita."

And so great was her insistence that at last she succeeded in deceiving *Huerco* with her entreating, humble voice, although it is true that, to give an air of truth to the deceit, on the following day, at a synagogue ceremony, the name of Horabuena was changed to that of Luna.

Aguirre listened to these revelations with the same interest as that with which he would read a novel about a far-off, exotic land that he was never to behold.

It was on this same morning that the consul revealed the proposal which for several days he had guarded in his thoughts, afraid to express it. Why not love each other? Why not be sweethearts? There was something providential about the way the two had met; they should not fail to take advantage of the fate which had brought them together. To have become acquainted! To have met, despite the difference of countries and of races!...

Luna protested, but her protest was a smiling one. What madness! Sweethearts? Why? They could not marry; they were of different faiths. Besides, he had to leave. But Aguirre interrupted resolutely:

"Don't reason. Just close your eyes. In love there should be no reflection. Good sense and the conventionalities are for persons who don't love each other. Say yes, and afterwards time and our good luck will arrange everything."

Luna laughed, amused by Aguirre's grave countenance and the vehemence of his speech.

"Sweethearts in the Spanish fashion?... Believe me, I am tempted to assent. You will go off and forget me, just as you've doubtless forgotten others; and I'll be left cherishing the remembrance of you. Excellent. We'll see each other every day and will chat about our affairs. Serenades are not possible here, nor can you place your cape at my feet without being considered crazy. But that doesn't matter. We'll be sweethearts; I should love to see what it's like."

She laughed as she spoke, with her eyes closed, just like a child to whom a pleasant game has been proposed. Soon she opened her eyes wide, as if something forgotten had reawakened in her with a painful pressure. She was pale. Aguirre could guess what she was trying to say. She was about to tell him of her previous betrothal, of that Jewish fiance who was in America and might return. But after a brief pause of indecision she returned to her former attitude, without breaking the silence. Luis was grateful to her for this. She desired to conceal her past, as do all women in the

first moment of love.

"Agreed. We'll be sweethearts. Let's see, consul. Say pretty things to me, of the sort that you folks say in Spain when you come to the grating."

That morning Luna returned to her house somewhat late for the lunch hour. The family was awaiting her impatiently. Zabulon looked at his niece with a stern glance. Her cousins Sol and Estrella alluded to the Spaniard in a jesting manner. The patriarch's eyes grew moist as he spoke of Spain and its consul.

Meanwhile the latter had stopped at the door of the Hindu bazaar to exchange a few words with Khiamull. He felt the necessity of sharing his brimming happiness with another. The Hindu was greener than ever. He coughed frequently and his smile, which resembled that of a bronze child, was really a dolorous grimace.

"Khiamull, long live love! Believe me, for I know much about life. You are sickly and some day you'll die, without beholding the sacred river of your native land. What you need is a companion, a girl from Gibraltar... or rather, from La Linea; a half gypsy, with her cloak, pinks in her hair and alluring manners. Am I not right, Khiamull?..."

The Hindu smiled with a certain scorn, shaking his head. No. Every one to his own. He was of his race and lived in voluntary solitude among the whites. Man can do nothing against the sympathies and aversions of the blood. Brahma, who was the sum of divine wisdom, separated all creatures into castes.

"But, man!... friend Khiamull! It seems to me that a girl of the kind I've mentioned is by no means to be despised...."

The Hindu smiled once more at the speaker's ignorance. Every race has its own tastes and its sense of smell. To Aguirre, who was a good fellow, he would dare to reveal a terrible secret. Did he see those whites, the Europeans, so content with their cleanliness and their baths?... They were all impure, polluted by a natural stench which it was impossible for them to wipe out. The son of the land of the lotus and the sacred clay was forced to make an effort in order to endure contact with them... They all smelled of raw meat.

III

IT was a winter afternoon; the sky was overcast and the air was gray, but it was not cold. Luna and the Spaniard were walking slowly along the road that leads to Europa Point, which is the extreme end of the peninsula of Gibraltar. They had left behind them the Alameda and the banks of the Arsenal, passing through leafy gardens, along reddish villas inhabited by officers of army and navy, huge hospitals resembling small towns, and garrisons that seemed like convents, with numerous galleries in which swarms of children were scurrying about; here, too, clothes and tableware were being washed and cleaned by the soldiers' wives--courageous wanderers over the globe, as much at home in the garrisons of India as in those of Canada. The fog concealed from view the coast of Africa, lending to the Strait the appearance of a shoreless sea. Before the pair of lovers stretched the dark waters of the bay, and the promontory of Tarifa revealed its black outline faintly in the fog, resembling a fabulous rhinoceros bearing upon its snout, like a horn, the tower of the lighthouse. Through the ashen-gray clouds there penetrated a timid sunbeam--a triangle of misty light, similar to the luminous stream from a magic lantern--which traced a large shaft of pale gold across the green-black surface of the sea. In the center of this circle of anemic light there floated, like a dying swan, the white spot of a sailboat.

The two lovers were oblivious to their surroundings. They walked along, engrossed in that amorous egotism which concentrates all life in a glance, or in the delicate contact of the bodies meeting and grazing each other at every step. Of all Nature there existed for them only the dying light of the afternoon, which permitted them to behold each other, and the rather warm breeze which, murmuring among the cacti and the palms, seemed to serve as the musical accompaniment to their conversation. At their right rumbled the far-off roar of the sea striking against the rocks. On their left reigned pastoral peace--the melodious calm of the pines, broken from time to time only by the noise of the carts, which, followed by a platoon of soldiers in their shirt sleeves, wheeled up the roads of the mountain.

The two looked at each other with caressing eyes, smiling with the automatism of love; but in reality they were sad, with that sweet sadness which in itself constitutes a new voluptuousness. Luna, influenced by the positivism of her race, was gazing into the future, while Aguirre was content with the present moment, not caring to know what would be the end of this love. Why trouble oneself imagining obstacles!...

"I'm not like you, Luna. I have confidence in our lot. We'll marry and travel about the world. Don't let that frighten you. Remember how I came to know you. It was during the Feast of Tabernacles; you were eating almost on foot, like those gypsies that wander over the earth and resume their journey at the end of their meal. You come from a race of nomads which even today roams the world. I arrived just in time. We'll leave together; for I, too, am, because of my career, a wanderer. Always together! We will be able to find happiness in any land whatsoever. We'll carry springtime with us, the happiness of life, and will love each other deeply."

Luna, flattered by the vehemence of these words, nevertheless contracted her features into an expression of sadness.

"Child!" she murmured, with her Andalusian accent. "What sweet illusions... my precious consul! But only illusions, after all. How are we to marry? How can this be arranged?... Are you going to become a convert to my religion?"

Aguirre started with surprise and looked at Luna with eyes that betrayed his amazement.

"Man alive! I, turn Jew?..."

He was no model of pious enthusiasm. He had passed his days without paying much attention to religion. He knew that the world contained many creeds, but without doubt, as far as he was concerned, decent persons the world over were all Catholics. Besides, his influential uncle had warned him not to jest with these matters under penalty of hampering advancement in his career.

"No. No, I don't see the necessity of that.... But there must be some way of getting over the difficulty. I can't say what it is, but there surely must be one. At Paris I met very distinguished gentlemen who were married to women of your race. This can all be arranged. I assure you that it shall be. I have an idea! Tomorrow morning, if you wish, I'll go to see the chief Rabbi, your 'spiritual head,' as you call him. He seems to be a fine fellow; I've seen him several times upon the street; a well of wisdom, as your kind say. A pity that he goes about so unclean, smelling of rancid sanctity!... Now don't make such a wry face. It's a matter of minor importance! A little bit of soap can set it aright.... There, there, don't get angry. The gentleman really pleases me a great deal, with his little white goatee and his wee voice that seems to come from the other world!... I tell you I'm going to see him and say, 'Senor Rabbi, Luna and I adore each other and wish to marry; not like the Jews, by contract and with the right to change their minds, but for all our life, for centuries and centuries. Bind us from head to foot, so that there'll be none in heaven or on earth that can separate us. I can't change my religion because that would be base, but I swear to you, by all my faith as a Christian, that Luna will be more cared for, pampered and adored than if I were Methuselah, King David, the prophet Habakkuk or any other of the gallants that figure in the Scriptures.'"

"Silence, you scamp!" interrupted the Jewess with superstitious anxiety, raising one hand to his lips to prevent him from continuing. "Seal your lips, sinner!"

"Very well. I'll be silent, but it must be agreed that we'll settle this one way or another. Do you believe it possible for any one to sever us after such a serious love affair... and such a long one?"

"Such a long one!" repeated Luna like an echo, imparting a grave expression to his words.

Aguirre, in his silence, seemed to be given over to a difficult mental calculation.

"At least a month long!" he said at last, as if in wonder at the length of time that had flown by.

"No, not a month," protested Luna. "More, much more!"

He resumed his meditation.

"Positively; more than a month. Thirty-eight days, counting today.... And seeing each other every day! And falling deeper and deeper in love each day!..."

They walked along in silence, their gaze lowered, as if overwhelmed by the great age of their love. Thirty-eight days!... Aguirre recalled a letter that he had received the day before, bristling with surprise and indignation. He had been in Gibraltar already two months without sailing for Oceanica. What sort of illness was this? If he did not care to assume his post, he ought to return to Madrid. The instability of his present position and the necessity of solving this passion which little by little had taken possession of him came to his thoughts with agonizing urgency.

Luna strolled on, her eyes upon the ground, moving her fingers as if counting.

"Yes, that's it. Thirty-eight.... Exactly! It seems impossible that you could have loved me for so long. Me! An old woman!"

And in response to Aguirre's bewildered glance she added, sadly, "You already know. I don't hide it.... Twenty-two years old. Many of my race marry at fourteen."

Her resignation was sincere; it was the resignation of the Oriental woman, accustomed to behold youth only in the bud of adolescence.

"Often I find it impossible to explain your love for me. I feel so proud of you!... My cousins, to vex me, try to find defects in you, and can't!... No, they can't! The other day you passed by my house and I was behind the window-blinds with Miriam, who was my nurse; she's a Jewess from Morocco, one of those who wear kerchiefs and wrappers. 'Look, Miriam, at that handsome chap, who belongs to our neighborhood.' Miriam looked. 'A Jew? No. That can't be. He walks erect, with a firm step, and our men walk haltingly, with their legs doubled as if they were about to kneel. He has teeth like a wolf and eyes like daggers. He doesn't lower his head nor his gaze.' And that's how you are. Miriam was right. You stand out from among all the young men of my blood. Not that they lack courage; there are some as strong as the Maccabees; Massena, Napoleon's companion, was one of us, but the natural attitude of them all, before they are transformed by anger, is one of humility and submission. We have been persecuted so much!... You have grown up in a different environment."

Afterwards the young woman seemed to regret her words. She was a bad Jewess; she scarcely had any faith in her beliefs and in her people; she went to the synagogue only on the Day of Atonement and on the occasion of other solemn, unavoidable ceremonies.

"I believe that I've been waiting for you forever. Now I am sure that I knew you long before seeing you. When I saw you for the first time, on that day during the Feast of the Tabernacles, I felt that something grave and decisive had occurred in my life. When I learned who you were, I became your slave and hungered anxiously for your first word."

Ah, Spain!... She was like old Aboab; her thoughts had often flown to the beautiful land of her forefathers, wrapped in mystery. At times she recalled it only to hate it, as one hates a beloved person, for his betrayals and his cruelties, without ceasing to love him. At others, she called to mind with delight the tales she had heard from her grandmother's lips, the songs with which she had been lulled to sleep as a child,—all the legends of the old Castilian land, abode of treasures, enchantments and love affairs, comparable only to the Bagdad of the Arabs, to the wonderful city of the thousand and one nights. Upon holidays, when the Jews remained secluded in the bosom of the family, old Aboab or Miriam, her nurse, had many a time beguiled her with ancient ballads in the manner of old Castile, that had been transmitted from generation to generation; stories of love affairs between arrogant, knightly Christians and beautiful Jewesses with fair complexions, large eyes and thick, ebony tresses, just like the holy beauties of the Scriptures.

En la ciudad de Toledo,
en la ciudad de Granada,
hay un garrido mancebo
que Diego Leon se llama.
Namorose de Tamar,
que era hebrea castellana....

(In the city of Toledo, in the city of Granada, there is a handsome youth called Diego Leon. He fell in love with Tamar, who was a Spanish Jewess....)

There still echoed in her memory fragments of these ancient chronicles that had brought many a tremor to her dreamy childhood. She desired to be Tamar; she would have waited years and years for the handsome youth, who would be as brave and arrogant as Judas Maccabeus himself, the Cid of the Jews, the lion of Judea, the lion of lions; and now her hopes were being fulfilled, and her hero had appeared at last, coming out of the land of mystery, with his conqueror's stride, his haughty head, his dagger eyes, as Miriam said. How proud it made her feel! And instinctively, as if she feared that the apparition would vanish, she slipped her hand about Aguirre's arm, leaning against him with caressing humility.

They had reached Europa Point, the outermost lighthouse of the promontory. On an esplanade surrounded by military buildings there was a group of ruddy young men, their khaki trousers held in place by leather braces and their arms bare, kicking and driving a huge ball about. They were soldiers. They stopped their game for a moment to let the couple pass. There was not a single glance for Luna from this group of strong, clean-living youths, who had been trained to a cold sexuality by physical fatigue and the cult of brawn.

As they turned a corner of the promontory they continued their walk on the eastern side of the cliff. This part was unoccupied; here tempests and the raging winds from the Levant came to vent their fury. On this side were no other fortifications than those of the summit, almost hidden by the clouds which, coming from the sea, encountered the gigantic rampart of rock and scaled the peaks as if assaulting them.

The road, hewn out of the rough declivity, meandered through gardens wild with African exuberance. The pear trees extended, like green fences, their serried rows of prickle-laden leaves; the century-plants opened like a profusion of bayonets, blackish or salmon-red in color; the old agaves shot their stalks into the air straight as masts, which were topped by extended branches that gave them the appearance of telegraph poles. In the midst of this wild vegetation arose the lonely summer residence of the governor. Beyond was solitude, silence, interrupted only by the roar of the sea as it disappeared into invisible caves.

Soon the two lovers noticed, at a great distance, signs of motion amidst the vegetation of the slope. The stones rolled down as if some one were pushing them under his heel; the wild plants bent under an impulse of flight, and shrill sounds, as if coming from a child being maltreated, rent the air. Aguirre, concentrating his attention, thought he saw some gray forms jumping amid the dark verdure.

"Those are the monkeys of the Rock," said Luna calmly, as she had seen them many times.

At the end of the path was the famous Cave of the Monkeys. Now Aguirre could see them plainly, and they looked like agile, shaggy-haired bundles jumping from rock to rock, sending the loose pebbles rolling from under their hands and feet and showing, as they fled, the inflamed protuberances under their stiff tails.

Before coming up to the Cave of the Monkeys the two lovers paused. The end of the road was in sight a little further along abruptly cut off by a precipitous projection of the rock. At the other side, invisible, was the bay of the Catalanes with its town of fisherfolk,—the only dependency of Gibraltar. The cliff, in this solitude, acquired a savage grandeur. Human beings were as nothing; natural forces here had free range, with all their impetuous majesty. From the road could be seen the sea far, far below. The boats, diminished by the distance, seemed like black insects with antennae of smoke, or white butterflies with their wings spread. The waves seemed only light curls on the immense blue plain.

Aguirre wished to go down and contemplate at closer range the gigantic wall which the sea beat against. A rough, rocky path led, in a straight line, to an entrance hewn out of the stone, backed by a ruined wall, a hemispherical sentry-box and several shanties whose roofs had been carried off by the tempests. These were the debris of old fortifications,—perhaps dating back to the time in which the Spaniards had tried to reconquer the place.

As Luna descended, with uncertain step, supported by her lover's hand and scattering pebbles at every turn, the melodious silence of the sea was broken by a reverberating *raack!* as if a hundred fans had been brusquely opened. For a few seconds everything vanished from before their eyes; the blue waters, the red crags, the foam of the breakers,—under a flying cloud of grayish white that spread out at their feet. This was formed by hundreds of sea-gulls who had been frightened from their place of refuge and were taking to flight; there were old, huge gulls, as fat as hens, young gulls, as white and graceful as doves. They flew off uttering shrill cries, and as this cloud of fluttering wings dissolved, there came into view with all its grandeur, the promontory and the deep waters that beat against it in ceaseless undulation.

It was necessary to raise one's head and to lift one's eyes to behold in all its height this fortress of Nature, sheer, gray, without any sign of human presence other than the flagstaff visible at the summit, as small as a toy. Over all the extensive face of this enormous cliff there was no other projection than several masses of dark vegetation, clumps suspended from the rock. Below, the waves receded and advanced, like blue bulls that retreat a few paces so as to attack with all the greater force; as an evidence of this continuous assault, which had been going on for centuries and centuries, there were the crevices opened in the rock, the mouths of the caves, gates of ghostly suggestion and mystery through which the waves plunged with terror-inspiring roar. The debris of these openings, the fragments of the ageless assaults,—loosened crags, piled up by the tempests,—formed a chain of reefs between whose teeth the sea combed its foamy hair or raged with livid frothing on stormy days.

The lovers remained seated among the old fortifications, beholding at their feet the blue immensity and before their eyes the seemingly interminable wall that barred from sight a great part of the horizon. Perhaps on the other side of the cliff the gold of the sunset was still shining. On this side already the shades of night were gently falling. The sweethearts were silent, overwhelmed by the silence of the spot, united to each other by an impulse of fear, crushed by their insignificance in the midst of this annihilating vastness, even as two Egyptian ants in the shadow of the Great Pyramid.

Aguirre felt the necessity of saying something, and his voice took on a grave character, as if in those surroundings, impregnated with the majesty of Nature, it was impossible to speak otherwise.

"I love you," he began, with the incongruity of one who passes without transition from long meditation to the spoken word. "I love you, for you are of my race and yet you are not; because you speak my language and yet your blood is not my blood. You possess the grace and beauty of the Spanish woman, yet there is something more in you,--something exotic, that speaks to me of distant lands, of poetic things, of unknown perfumes that I seem to smell whenever I am near you.... And you, Luna. Why do you love me?"

"I love you," she replied, after a long silence, her voice solemn and veiled like that of an emotional soprano, "I love you because you, too, have something in your face that resembles those of my race, and yet you are as distinct from them as is the servant from the master. I love you... I don't know why. In me there dwells the soul of the ancient Jewesses of the desert, who went to the well in the oasis with their hair let down and their pitchers on their heads. Then came the Gentile stranger, with his camels, begging water; she looked at him with her solemn, deep eyes, and as she poured the water in between her white hands she gave him her heart, her whole soul, and followed him like a slave.... Your people killed and robbed mine; for centuries my forefathers wept in strange lands the loss of their new Zion, their beautiful land, their nest of consolation. I ought to hate you, but I love you; I am yours and will follow you wherever you go." The blue shadows of the promontory became deeper. It was almost night. The sea-gulls, shrieking, retired to their hiding-places in the rocks. The sea commenced to disappear beneath a thin mist. The lighthouse of Europe shone like a diamond from afar in the heavens above the Strait, which were still clear. A sweet somnolence seemed to arise from the dying day, enveloping all Nature. The two human atoms, lost in this immensity, felt themselves invaded by the universal tremor, oblivious to all that but a short time before had constituted their lives. They forgot the presence of the city on the other side of the mountain; the existence of humanity, of which they were infinitesimal parts.... Completely alone, penetrating each other through their pupils! Thus, thus forever! There was a crackling sound in the dark, like dry branches creaking before they break.

All at once a red flash sped through the air,--something straight and rapid as the flight of a fiery bird. Then the mountain trembled and the sea echoed under a dry thunder. The sunset gun!... A timely boom.

The two shuddered as though just awakening from a dream. Luna, as if in flight, ran down the path in search of the main road, without listening to Aguirre.... She was going to get home late; she would never visit that spot again. It was dangerous.

IV

THE consul wandered through Royal Street, his pipe out, his glance sad and his cane hanging from his arm. He was depressed. When, during his walking back and forth he stopped instinctively before Khamull's shop, he had to pass on. Khamull was not there. Behind the counter were only two clerks, as greenish in complexion as their employer. His poor friend was in the hospital, in the hope that a few days of rest away from the damp gloom of the shop would be sufficient to relieve him of the cough that seemed to unhinge his body and make him throw up blood. He came from the land of the sun and needed its divine caress.

Aguirre might have stopped at the Aboabs' establishment, but he was somewhat afraid. The old man whimpered with emotion, as usual, when he spoke to the consul, but in his kindly, patriarchal gestures there was something new that seemed to repel the Spaniard. Zabulon received him with a grunt and would continue counting money.

For four days Aguirre had not seen Luna. The hours that he spent at his window, vainly watching the house of the Aboabs! Nobody on the roof; nobody behind the blinds, as if the house were unoccupied. Several times he encountered on the street the wife and daughters of Zabulon, but they passed him by pretending not to see him, so solemn and haughty in their imposing obesity.

Luna was no more to be seen than as if she had left Gibraltar. One morning he thought he recognized her delicate hand opening the blinds; he imagined that he could distinguish, through the green strips of wood, the ebony crown of her hair, and her luminous eyes raised toward him. But it was a fleeting apparition that lasted only a second. When he

tried to make a gesture of entreaty, when he moved his arms imploring her to wait, Luna had already disappeared.

How was he to approach her, breaking through the guarded aloofness in which Jewish families dwell? To whom was he to go for an explanation of this unexpected change?... Braving the icy reception with which the Aboabs greeted him, he entered their place under various pretexts. The proprietors received him with frigid politeness, as if he were an unwelcome customer. The Jews who came in on business eyed him with insolent curiosity, as if but a short time before they had been discussing him.

One morning he saw, engaged in conversation with Zabulon, a man of about forty, of short stature, somewhat round shouldered with spectacles. He wore a high silk hat, a loose coat and a large golden chain across his waistcoat. In a somewhat sing-song voice he was speaking of the greatness of Buenos Aires, of the future that awaited those of his race in that city, of the good business he had done. The affectionate attention with which the old man and his son listened to the man suggested a thought to Aguirre that sent all the blood to his heart, at the same time producing a chill in the rest of his body. He shuddered with surprise. Could it be *he*?... And after a few seconds, instinctively, without any solid grounds, he himself gave the answer. Yes; it was he; there had been no mistake. Without a doubt he beheld before him Luna's promised husband, who had just returned from South America. And if he still had any doubts as to the correctness of his conjecture, he was strengthened in his belief by a rapid glance from the man,--a cold, scornful look that was cast upon him furtively, while the looker continued to speak with his relatives.

That night he saw him again on Royal Street. He saw him, but not alone. He was arm in arm with Luna, who was dressed in black; Luna, who leaned upon him as if he were already her husband; the two walked along with all the freedom of Jewish engaged couples. She did not see Aguirre or did not wish to see him. As she passed him by she turned her head, pretending to be engrossed in conversation with her companion.

Aguirre's friends, who were gathered in a group on the sidewalk before the Exchange, laughed at the meeting, with the light-heartedness of persons who look upon love only as a pastime.

"Friend," said one of them to the Spaniard, "they've stolen her away from you. The Jew's carrying her off.... It couldn't have been otherwise. They marry only among themselves... and that girl has lots of money."

Aguirre did not sleep a wink that night; he lay awake planning the most horrible deeds of vengeance. In any other country he knew what he would do; he would insult the Jew, slap him, fight a duel, kill him; and if the man did not respond to such provocation, he would pursue him until he left the field free.... But he lived here in another world; a country that was ignorant of the knightly procedure of ancient peoples. A challenge to a duel would cause laughter, like something silly and extravagant. He could, of course, attack his enemy right in the street, bring him to his knees and kill him if he tried to defend himself. But ah! English justice did not recognize love nor did it accept the existence of crimes of passion. Yonder, half way up the slope of the mountain, in the ruins of the castle that had been occupied by the Moorish kings of Gibraltar, he had seen the prison, filled with men from all lands, especially Spaniards, incarcerated for life because they had drawn the poniard under the impulse of love or jealousy, just as they were accustomed to doing a few metres further on, at the other side of the boundary. The whip worked with the authorization of the law; men languished and died turning the wheel of the pump. A cold, methodical cruelty, a thousand times worse than the fanatic savagery of the Inquisition, devoured human creatures, giving them nothing more than the exact amount of sustenance necessary to prolong their torture.... No. This was another world, where his jealousy and his fury could find no vent. And he would have to lose Luna without a cry of protest, without a gesture of manly rebellion!... Now, upon beholding himself parted from her, he felt for the first time the genuine importance of his love; a love that had been begun as a pastime, through an exotic curiosity, and which was surely going to upset his entire existence... What was he to do?

He recalled the words of one of those inhabitants of Gibraltar who had accompanied him on Royal Street,--a strange mixture of Andalusian sluggishness and British apathy.

"Take my word for it, friend, the chief Rabbi and those of the synagogue have a hand in this. You were scandalizing them; everybody saw you making love in public. You don't realize how important one of these fellows is. They enter the homes of the faithful and run everything, giving out orders that nobody dares to disobey."

The following day Aguirre did not leave his street, and either walked up and down in front of the Aboabs' house or stood motionless at the entrance to his hotel, without losing sight for a moment of Luna's dwelling. Perhaps she would come out! After the meeting of the previous day she must have lost her fear. They must have a talk. Here it was three months since he had come to Gibraltar, forgetting his career, in danger of ruining it, abusing the influence of his relatives. And was he going to leave that woman without exchanging a final word, without knowing the cause for the sudden overturn?...

Toward night-fall Aguirre experienced a strange shudder of emotion, similar to that which he had felt in the brokers'

shop upon beholding the Jew that had just returned from South America. A woman came out of the Aboabs' house; she was dressed in black. It was Luna, just as he had seen her the day before.

She turned her head slowly and Aguirre understood that she had seen him,—that perhaps she had been watching him for a long time hidden behind the blinds. She began to walk hastily, without turning her head, and Aguirre followed her at a certain distance, on the opposite sidewalk, jostling through the groups of Spanish workmen who, with their bundles in their hands, were returning from the Arsenal to the town of La Linea, before the sunset gun should sound and the place be closed. Thus he shadowed her along Royal Street, and as she arrived at the Exchange, Luna continued by way of Church Street, passing by the Catholic Cathedral. Here there were less people about and the shops were fewer; except at the corners of the lanes where there were small groups of men that had formed on coming from work. Aguirre quickened his gait so as to catch up with Luna, while she, as if she had guessed his intention, slackened her step. As they reached the rear of the Protestant church, near the opening called Cathedral Square, the two met.

"Luna! Luna!..."

She turned her glance upon Aguirre, and then instinctively they made for the end of the square, fleeing from the publicity of the street. They came to the Moorish arcades of the evangelist temple, whose colors were beginning to grow pale, vanishing into the shade of dusk. Before either of them could utter a word they were enveloped in a wave of soft melody,—music that seemed to come from afar, stray chords from the organ, the voices of virgins and children who were chanting in English with bird-like notes the glory of the Lord.

Aguirre was at a loss for words. All his angry thoughts were forgotten. He felt like crying, like kneeling and begging something of that God, whoever He might be, who was at the other side of the walls, lulled by the hymn from the throat of the mystic birds with firm and virginal voices:

"Luna!... Luna!"

He could say nothing else, but the Jewess, stronger than he and less sensitive to that music which was not hers, spoke to him in a low and hurried voice. She had stolen out just to see him; she must talk with him, say good-bye. It was the last time they would meet.

Aguirre heard her without fully understanding her words. All his attention was concentrated upon her eyes, as if the five days in which they had not met were the same as a long voyage, and as if he were seeking in Luna's countenance some effect of the extended lapse of time that had intervened. Was she the same?... Yes it was she. But her lips were somewhat pale with emotion; she pressed her lids tightly together as if every word cost her a prodigious effort, as if every one of them tore out part of her soul. Her lashes, as they met, revealed in the corner of her eyes lines that seemed to indicate fatigue, recent tears, sudden age.

The Spaniard was at last able to understand what she was saying. But was it all true?... To part! Why? Why?... And as he stretched his arms out to her in the vehemence of his entreaty Luna became paler still, huddling together timidly, her eyes dilated with fear.

It was impossible for their love to continue. She must look upon all the past as a beautiful dream; perhaps the best of her life... but the moment of waking had come. She was marrying, thus fulfilling her duty toward her family and her race. The past had been a wild escapade, a childish flight of her exalted and romantic nature. The wise men of her people had clearly pointed out to her the dangerous consequences of such frivolity. She must follow her destiny and be as her mother had been,—like all the women of her blood. Upon the following day she was going to Tangier with her promised husband, Isaac Nunez. He himself and her relatives had counselled her to have one last interview with the Spaniard, so as to put an end to an equivocal situation that might compromise the honor of a good merchant and destroy the tranquility of a peaceful man. They would marry at Tangier, where her fiance's family lived; perhaps they would remain there; perhaps they would journey to South America and resume business there. At any rate, their love, their sweet adventure, their divine dream, was ended forever.

"Forever!" murmured Luis in a muffled voice. "Say it again. I hear it from your lips, yet I can't believe my ears. Say it once more. I wish to make sure."

His voice was filled with supplication but at the same time his clenched hand and his threatening glance terrified Luna, who opened her eyes wide and pressed her lips tightly together, as if restraining a sob. The Jewess seemed to grow old in the shadows.

The fiery bird of twilight flashed through the air with its fluttering of red wings. Closely following came a thunderclap that made the houses and ground tremble.... The sunset gun! Aguirre, in his agony, could see in his mind's eye a high wall of crags, flying gulls, the foamy, roaring sea, a misty evening light, the same as that which now enveloped them.

"Do you remember, Luna? Do you remember?"...

The roll of drums sounded from a near-by street, accompanied by the shrill notes of the fife and the deep boom of the bass drum, drowning with its belligerent sound the mystic, ethereal chants that seemed to filter through the walls of the temple. It was the evening patrol on its way to close the gates of the town. The soldiers, clad in uniforms of greyish yellow, marched by, in time with the tune from their instruments, while above their cloth helmets waved the arms of the gymnast who was deafening the street with his blows upon the drum head.

The two waited for the noisy patrol to pass. As the soldiers disappeared in the distance the melodies from the celestial choir inside the church returned slowly to the ears of the listeners.

The Spaniard was abject, imploring, passing from his threatening attitude to one of humble supplication.

"Luna... Lunita! What you say is not true. It cannot be. To separate like this? Don't listen to any of them. Follow the dictates of your heart. There is still a chance for us to be happy. Instead of going off with that man whom you do not love, whom you surely cannot love, flee with me."

"No," she replied firmly, closing her eyes as though she feared to weaken if she looked at him. "No. That is impossible. Your God is not my God. Your people, not my people."

In the Catholic Cathedral, near by, but out of sight, the bell rang with a slow, infinitely melancholy reverberation. Within the Protestant Church the choir of virgins was beginning a new hymn, like a flock of joyous birds winging about the organ. A far, gradually becoming fainter and fainter and losing itself in the streets that were covered by the shadows of night, sounded the thunder of the patrol and the playful lisp of the fifes, hymning the universal power of England to the tune of circus music.

"Your God! Your people!" exclaimed the Spaniard sadly. "Here, where there are so many Gods! Here, where everybody is of your people!... Forget all that. We are all equals in life. There is only one truth: Love."

"Ding, dong!" groaned the bell aloft in the Catholic Cathedral, weeping the death of day. "Lead Kindly Light!" sang the voices of the virgins and the children in the Protestant temple, resounding through the twilight silence of the square.

"No," answered Luna harshly, with an expression that Aguirre had never seen in her before; she seemed to be another woman. "No. You have a land, you have a nation, and you may well laugh at races and religions, placing love above them. We, on the other hand, wherever we may be born, and however much the laws may proclaim us the equals of others, are always called Jews, and Jews we must remain, whether we will or no. Our land, our nation, our only banner, is the religion of our ancestors. And you ask me to desert it,--to abandon my people?... Sheer madness!"

Aguirre listened to her in amazement.

"Luna, I don't recognize you.... Luna, Lunita, you are another woman altogether.... Do you know what I'm thinking of at this moment? I'm thinking of your mother, whom I did not know."

He recalled those nights of cruel uncertainty, when Luna's mother tore her jet-black hair before the bed in which her child lay gasping; how she tried to deceive the demon, the hated *Huerco*, who came to rob her of her beloved daughter.

"Ah! I, too, Luna, feel the simple faith of your mother,--her innocent credulity. Love and despair simplify our souls and remove from them the proud tinsel with which we clothe them in moments of happiness and pride; love and despair render us by their mystery, timid and respectful, like the simplest of creatures. I feel what your poor mother felt during those nights. I shudder at the presence of the *Huerco* in our midst. Perhaps it's that old fellow with the goat's whiskers who is at the head of your people here; all of you are a materialistic sort, without imagination, incapable of knowing true love; it seems impossible that you can be one of them.... You, Luna! You! Don't laugh at what I say. But I feel a strong desire to kneel down here before you, to stretch out upon the ground and cry: '*Huerco*, what do you wish? Have you come to carry off my Luna?... Luna is not here. She has gone forever. This woman here is my beloved, my wife. She has no name yet, but I'll give her one.' And to seize you in my arms, as your mother did, to defend you against the black demon, and then to see you saved, and mine forever; to confirm your new name with my caresses, and to call you... my Only One, yes, my Only One. Do you like the name?... Let our lives be lived together, with the whole world as our home."

She shook her head sadly. Very beautiful. One dream more. A few days earlier these words would have moved her and would have made her weep. But now!... And with cruel insistence she repeated "No, no. My God is not your God. My race is not your race. Why should we persist in attempting the impossible?..."

When her people had spoken indignantly about the love affair that was being bruited all about town; when the

spiritual head of her community came to her with the ire of an ancient prophet; when accident, or perhaps the warning of a fellow Jew, had brought about the return of her betrothed, Isaac Nunez, Luna felt awaking within her something that had up to that time lain dormant. The dregs of old beliefs, hatreds and hopes were stirred in the very depths of her thought, changing her affections and imposing new duties. She was a Jewess and would remain faithful to her race. She would not go to lose herself in barren isolation among strange persons who hated the Jew through inherited instinct. Among her own kind she would enjoy the influence of the wife that is listened to in all family councils, and when she would become old, her children would surround her with a religious veneration. She did not feel strong enough to suffer the hatred and suspicion of that hostile world into which love was trying to drag her,—a world that had presented her people only with tortures and indignities. She wished to be loyal to her race, to continue the defensive march that her nation was realizing across centuries of persecution.

Soon she was inspired with compassion at the dejection of her former sweetheart, and she spoke to him more gently. She could no longer feign calmness or indifference. Did he think that she could ever forget him? Ah! Those days had been the sweetest in all her existence; the romance of her life, the blue flower that all women, even the most ordinary, carry within their memories like a breath of poesy.

"Do you imagine that I don't know what my lot is going to be like?... You were the unexpected, the sweet disturbance that beautifies life, the happiness of love which finds joy in all that surrounds it and never gives thought to the morrow. You are a man that stands out from all the rest; I know that. I'll have many children,—many!—for our race is inexhaustible, and at night my husband will talk to me for hour after hour about what we earned during the day. You... you are different. Perhaps I would have had to suffer, to be on my guard lest I'd lose you, but with all that you are happiness, you are illusion."

"Yes, I am all that," said Aguirre "I am all that because I love you.... Do you realize what you are doing, Luna? It is as if they laid thousands and thousands of silver pounds upon the counter before Zabulon, and he turned his back upon them, scorning them and preferring the synagogue. Do you believe such a thing possible?... Very well, then. Love is a fortune. It is like beauty, riches, power; all who are born have a chance of acquiring one of these boons, but very few actually attain to them. All live and die believing that they have known love, thinking it a common thing, because they confuse it with animal satisfaction; but love is a privilege, love is a lottery of fate, like wealth, like beauty, which only a small minority enjoy.... And when love comes more than half way to meet you, Luna, Lunita,—when fate places happiness right in your hands, you turn your back upon it and walk off!... Consider it well! There is yet time! Today, as I walked along Royal Street I saw the ship notices. Tomorrow there's a boat sailing for Port Said. Courage! Let us flee!... We'll wait there for a boat to take us to Australia."

Luna raised her head proudly. Farewell to her look of compassion! Farewell to the melancholy mood in which she had listened to the youth!... Her eyes shone with a steely glance; her voice was cruel and concise.

"Goodnight!"

And she turned her back upon him, beginning to walk as if taking flight. Aguirre hastened after her, soon reaching her side.

"And that's how you leave me!" he exclaimed. "Like this, never to meet again... Can a love that was our very life end in such a manner?..."

The hymn had ceased in the evangelical temple; the Catholic bell was silent; the military music had died out at the other end of the town. A painful silence enveloped the two lovers. To Aguirre it seemed as if the world were deserted, as if the light had died forever, and that in the midst of the chaos and the eternal darkness he and she were the only living creatures.

"At least give me your hand; let me feel it in mine for the last time.... Don't you care to?"

She seemed to hesitate, but finally extended her right hand. How lifeless it was! How icy!

"Good-bye, Luis," she said curtly, turning her eyes away so as not to see him.

She spoke more, however. She felt that impulse of giving consolation which animates all women at times of great grief. He must not despair. Life held sweet hopes in store for him. He was going to see the world; he was still young....

Aguirre spoke from between clenched teeth, to himself, as if he had gone mad. Young! As if grief paid attention to ages! A week before he had been thirty years old; now he felt as old as the world.

Luna made an effort to release herself, trembling for herself, uncertain of her will power.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!"

This time she really departed, and he allowed her to leave, lacking the strength with which to follow her.

Aguirre passed a sleepless night, seated at the edge of his bed, gazing with stupid fixity at the designs upon the wall-paper. To think that this could have happened! And he, no stronger than a mere child, had permitted her to leave him forever!... Several times he was surprised to catch himself speaking aloud.

"No. No. It cannot be.... It *shall* not be!"

The light went out, of its own accord, and Aguirre continued to soliloquize, without knowing what he was saying. "It shall not be! It shall not be!" he murmured emphatically. But passing from rage to despair he asked himself what he could do to retain her, to end his torture.

Nothing! His misfortune was irreparable. They were going to resume the course of their lives, each on a different road; they were going to embark on the following day, each to an opposite pole of the earth, and each would carry away nothing of the other, save a memory; and this memory, under the tooth of time, would become ever smaller, more fragile, more delicate. And this was the end of such a great love! This was the finale of a passion that had been born to fill an entire existence! And the earth did not tremble, and nobody was moved, and the world ignored this great sorrow, even as it would ignore the misfortunes of a pair of ants. Ah! Misery!...

He would roam about the world carrying his recollections with him, and perhaps some day he would come to forget them, for one can live only by forgetting; but when his grief should dissolve with the years he would be left an empty man, like a smiling automaton, incapable of any affections other than material ones. And thus he would go on living until he should grow old and die. And she, the beautiful creature, who seemed to scatter music and incense at every step,--the incomparable one, the only one,--would likewise grow old, far from his side. She would be one more Jewish wife, an excellent mother of a family, grown stout from domestic life, flabby and shapeless from the productivity of her race, with a brood of children about her, preoccupied at all hours with the earnings of the family, a full moon, cumbrous, yellow, without the slightest resemblance to the springtime star that had illuminated the fleeting and best moments of his life. What a jest of fate!... Farewell forever, Luna!... No, not Luna. Farewell, Horabuena!

On the next day he took passage on the ship that was leaving for Port Said. What was there for him to do in Gibraltar?... It had been for three months a paradise, at the side of the woman who beautified his existence; now it was an intolerable city, cramped and monotonous; a deserted castle; a damp, dark prison. He telegraphed to his uncle, informing him of his departure. The vessel would weigh anchor at night, after the sunset gun, when it had taken on its supply of coal.

The hotel people brought him news. Khiamull had died at the hospital, in the full possession of his mental faculties as is characteristic of consumptives, and had spoken of the distant land of the sun, of its virgins, dark and slender as bronze statues, crowned with the lotus flower. A hemorrhage had put an end to his hopes. All the town was talking about his burial. His compatriots, the Hindu shopkeepers, had sent a delegation to the governor and made arrangements for the funeral rites. They were going to cremate the body on the outskirts of the town, on the beach that faced the East. His remains must not rot in impure soil. The English governor, deferent toward the creeds of his various subjects, presented them with the necessary wood. At night-fall they would dig a hollow on the beach, fill it with shavings and faggots; then they would put in large logs, and the corpse; on top of this, more wood, and after the pyre had ceased to burn for lack of fuel Khiamull's religious brethren would gather the ashes and bear them off in a boat to scatter them at sea.

Aguirre listened coldly to these details. Happy Khiamull, who was departing thus! Fire, plenty of fire! Would that he could burn the town, and the near-by lands, and finally the whole world!...

At ten o'clock the transatlantic liner raised anchor. The Spaniard, leaning over the rail, saw the black mountain and the huge Rock, its base speckled with rows of lights, grow small as if sinking into the horizon. Its obscure ridge was silhouetted against the sky like a crouching monster toying with a swarm of stars between its paws.

The vessel rounded Europa Point and the lights disappeared. Now the cliff was visible from its Eastern face, black, imposing, bare, with no other light than that of the lighthouse at its extreme end.

Suddenly a new light arose,--a red line, a perpendicular flame,--at the foot of the mountain, as if it came out of the sea. Aguirre guessed what it was. Poor Khiamull! The flames were beginning to consume his body upon the beach. The bronze-faced men were at this moment gathered about the pyre, like priests of a remote civilization, hastening the disposal of their companion's remains.

Farewell, Khiamull! He had died with his hope placed in the Orient,--the land of love and perfumes, the abode of delights,--without having been able to realize his dreams. And here was Aguirre traveling thither with an empty heart, a

paralyzed soul, wearied and bereft of strength, as if he had just emerged from the most terrible of ordeals.

"Farewell, melancholy and gentle Hindu, poor poet who dreamed of light and love as you sold your trinkets in that damp hole!..." His remains, purified by flame, were going to be lost in the bosom of the great mother. Perhaps his delicate, bird-like soul would survive in the sea-gulls that fluttered about the cliff; perhaps he would sing in the roaring foam of the submarine caverns, as an accompaniment to the vows of other lovers who would come there in their turn, on the impulse of the deceptive illusion, the sweet lie of love that gives us new strength to continue on our way.

END

THE TOAD

"I WAS spending the summer at Nazaret," said my friend Orduna, "a little fishermen's town near Valencia. The women went to the city to sell the fish, the men sailed about in their boats with triangular sails, or tugged at their nets on the beach; we summer vacationists spent the day sleeping and the night at the doors of our houses, contemplating the phosphorescence of the waves or slapping ourselves here and there whenever we heard the buzz of a mosquito,--that scourge of our resting hours.

"The doctor, a hardy and genial old fellow, would come and sit down under the bower before my door, and we'd spend the night together, with a jar or a watermelon at our side, speaking of his patients, folks of land or sea, credulous, rough and insolent in their manners, given over to fishing or to the cultivation of their fields. At times we laughed as he recalled the illness of Visanteta, the daughter of *la Soberana*, an old fishmonger who justified her nickname of *the Queen* by her bulk and her stature, as well as by the arrogance with which she treated her market companions, imposing her will upon them by right of might.... The belle of the place was this Visanteta: tiny, malicious, with a clever tongue, and no other good looks than that of youthful health; but she had a pair of penetrating eyes and a trick of pretending timidity, weakness and interest, which simply turned the heads of the village youths. Her sweetheart was *Carafosca*, a brave fisherman who was capable of sailing on a stick of wood. On the sea he was admired by all for his audacity; on land he filled everybody with fear by his provoking silence and the facility with which he whipped out his aggressive sailor's knife. Ugly, burly and always ready for a fight, like the huge creatures that from time to time showed up in the waters of Nazaret devouring all the fish, he would walk to church on Sunday afternoons at his sweetheart's side, and every time the maiden raised her head to speak to him, amidst the simple talk and lispings of a delicate, pampered child, *Carafosca* would cast a challenging look about him with his squinting eyes, as if defying all the folk of the fields, the beach and the sea to take his Visanteta away from him.

"One day the most astounding news was bruited about Nazaret. The daughter of *la Soberana* had an animal inside of her. Her abdomen was swelling; the slow deformation revealed itself through her underskirts and her dress; her face lost color, and the fact that she had swooned several times, vomiting painfully, upset the entire cabin and caused her mother to burst into desperate lamentations and to run in terror for help. Many of her neighbors smiled when they heard of this illness. Let them tell it to *Carafosca*!... But the incredulous ones ceased their malicious talk and their suspicions when they saw how sad and desperate *Carafosca* became at his sweetheart's illness, praying for her recovery with all the fervor of a simple soul, even going so far as to enter the little village church,--he, who had always been a pagan, a blasphemer of God and the saints.

"Yes, it was a strange and horrible sickness. The people, in their predisposition to believe in all sorts of extraordinary and rare afflictions, were certain that they knew what this was. Visanteta had a toad in her stomach. She had drunk from

a certain spot of the near-by river, and the wicked animal, small and almost unnoticeable, had gone down into her stomach, growing fast. The good neighbors, trembling with stupefaction, flocked to *la Soberana's* cabin to examine the girl. All, with a certain solemnity, felt the swelling abdomen, seeking in its tightened surface the outlines of the hidden creature. Some of them, older and more experienced than the rest, laughed with a triumphant expression. There it was, right under their hand. They could feel it stirring, moving about.... Yes, it was moving! And after grave deliberation, they agreed upon remedies to expel the unwelcome guest. They gave the girl spoonfuls of rosemary honey, so that the wicked creature inside should start to eat it gluttonously, and when he was most preoccupied in his joyous meal, whizzing an inundation of onion juice and vinegar that would bring him out at full gallop. At the same time they applied to her stomach miraculous plasters, so that the toad, left without a moment's rest, should escape in terror; there were rags soaked in brandy and saturated with incense; tangles of hemp dipped in the calking of the ships; mountain herbs; simple bits of paper with numbers, crosses and Solomon's seal upon them, sold by the miracle-worker of the city. Visanteta thought that all these remedies that were being thrust down her throat would be the death of her. She shuddered with the chills of nausea, she writhed in horrible contortions as if she were about to expel her very entrails, but the odious toad did not deign to show even one of his legs, and *la Soberana* cried to heaven. Ah, her daughter!... Those remedies would never succeed in casting out the wretched animal; it was better to let it alone, and not torture the poor girl; rather give it a great deal to eat, so that it wouldn't feed upon the strength of Visanteta who was glowing paler and weaker every day.

"And as *la Soberana* was poor, all her friends, moved by the compassionate solidarity of the common people, devoted themselves to the feeding of Visanteta so that the toad should do her no harm. The fisherwomen, upon returning from the square brought her cakes that were purchased in city establishments, that only the upper class patronized; on the beach, when the catch was sorted, they laid aside for her a dainty morsel that would serve for a succulent soup; the neighbors, who happened to be cooking in their pots over the fire would take out a cupful of the best of the broth, carrying it slowly so that it shouldn't spill, and bring it to *la Soberana's* cabin; cups of chocolate arrived one after the other every afternoon.

"Visanteta rebelled against this excessive kindness. She couldn't swallow another drop! She was full! But her mother stuck out her hairy nose with an imperious expression. 'I tell you to eat!' She must remember what she had inside of her... And she began to feel a faint, indefinable affection for that mysterious creature, lodged in the entrails of her daughter. She pictured it to herself; she could see it; it was her pride. Thanks to it, the whole town had its eyes upon the cabin and the trail of visitors was unending, and *la Soberana* never passed a woman on her way without being stopped and asked for news.

"Only once had they summoned the doctor, seeing him pass by the door; but not that they really wished him, or had any faith in him. What could that helpless man do against such a tenacious animal!... And upon hearing that, not content with the explanations of the mother and the daughter and his own audacious tapping around her clothes, he recommended an internal examination, the proud mother almost showed him the door. The impudent wretch! Not in a hurry was he going to have the pleasure of seeing her daughter so intimately! The poor thing, so good and so modest, who blushed merely at the thought of such proposals!...

"On Sunday afternoons Visanteta went to church, figuring at the head of the daughters of Mary. Her voluminous abdomen was eyed with admiration by the girls. They all asked breathlessly after the toad, and Visanteta replied wearily. It didn't bother her so much now. It had grown very much because she ate so well; sometimes it moved about, but it didn't hurt as it used to. One after the other the maidens would place their hands upon the afflicted one and feel the movements of the invisible creature, admiring as they did so the superiority of their friend. The curate, a blessed chap of pious simplicity, pretended not to notice the feminine curiosity, and thought with awe of the things done by God to put His creatures to the test. Afterwards, when the afternoon drew to a close, and the choir sang in gentle voice the praises of Our Lady of the Sea, each of the virgins would fall to thinking of that mysterious beast, praying fervently that poor Visanteta be delivered of it as soon as possible.

"*Carafosca*, too, enjoyed a certain notoriety because of his sweetheart's affliction. The women accosted him, the old fishermen stopped him to inquire about the animal that was torturing his girl. 'The poor thing! The poor thing!' he would groan, in accents of amorous commiseration. He said no more; but his eyes revealed a vehement desire to take over as soon as possible Visanteta and her toad, since the latter inspired a certain affection in him because of its connection with her.

"One night, when the doctor was at my door, a woman came in search of him, panting with dramatic horror. *La Soberana's* daughter was very sick; he must run to her rescue. The doctor shrugged his shoulders 'Ah, yes! The toad!' And he didn't seem at all anxious to stir. Then came another woman, more agitated than the first. Poor Visanteta! She was dying! Her shrieks could be heard all over the street. The wicked beast was devouring her entrails....

"I followed the doctor, attracted by the curiosity that had the whole town in a commotion. When we came to *la Soberana's* cabin we had to force our way through a compact group of women who obstructed the doorway, crowding into the house. A rending shriek, a rasping wail came from the innermost part of the dwelling, rising above the heads of the curious or terrified women. The hoarse voice of *la Soberana* answered with entreating accents. Her daughter! Ah, Lord, her poor daughter!...

"The arrival of the physician was received by a chorus of demands on the part of the old women. Poor Visanteta was writhing furiously, unable to bear such pain; her eyes bulged from their sockets and her features were distorted. She must be operated upon; her entrails must be opened and the green, slippery demon that was eating her alive must be expelled.

"The doctor proceeded upon his task, without paying any attention to the advice showered upon him, and before I could reach his side his voice resounded through the sudden silence, with ill-humored brusqueness:

"But good Lord, the only trouble with this girl is that she's going to...!"

"Before he could finish, all could guess from the harshness of his voice what he was about to say. The group of women yielded before *la Soberana's* thrusts even as the waves of the sea under the belly of a whale. She stuck out her big hands and her threatening nails, mumbling insults and looking at the doctor with murder in her eyes. Bandit! Drunkard! Out of her house!...It was the people's fault, for supporting such an infidel. She'd eat him up! Let them make way for her!... And she struggled violently with her friends, fighting to free herself and scratch out the doctor's eyes. To her vindictive cries were joined the weak bleating of Visanteta, protesting with the breath that was left her between her groans of pain. It was a lie! Let that wicked man be gone! What a nasty mouth he had! It was all a lie!...

"But the doctor went hither and thither, asking for water, for bandages, snappy and imperious in his commands, paying no attention whatsoever to the threats of the mother or the cries of the daughter, which were becoming louder and more heart-rending than ever. Suddenly she roared as if she were being slaughtered, and there was a bustle of curiosity around the physician, whom I couldn't see. 'It's a lie! A lie! Evil-tongued wretch! Slanderer!...' But the protestations of Visanteta were no longer unaccompanied. To her voice of an innocent victim begging justice from heaven was added the cry of a pair of lungs that were breathing the air for the first time.

"And now the friends of *la Soberana* had to restrain her from falling upon her daughter. She would kill her! The bitch! Whose child was that?... And terrified by the threats of her mother, the sick woman, who was still sobbing 'It's a lie! A lie!' at last spoke. It was a young fellow of the *huerta* whom she had never seen again... an indiscretion committed one evening... she no longer remembered. No, she could not remember!... And she insisted upon this forgetfulness as if it were an incontrovertible excuse.

"The people now saw through it all. The women were impatient to spread the news. As we left, *la Soberana*, humiliated and in tears, tried to kneel before the doctor and kiss his hand. 'Ay, Don Antoni!... Don Antoni!' She asked pardon for her insults; she despaired when she thought of the village comments. What they would have to suffer now!... On the following day the youths that sang as they arranged their nets would invent new verses. The song of the toad! Her life would become impossible!... But even more than this, the thought of *Carafosca* terrified her. She knew very well what sort of brute that was. He would kill poor Visanteta the first time she appeared on the street; and she herself would meet the same fate for being her mother and not having guarded her well. 'Ay, Don Antoni!' She begged him, upon her knees, to see *Carafosca*. He, who was so good and who knew so much, could convince the fellow with his reasoning, and make him swear that he would not do the women any harm,—that he would forget them.

"The doctor received these entreaties with the same indifference as he had received the threats, and he answered sharply. He would see about it; it was a delicate affair. But once in the street, he shrugged his shoulders with resignation. 'Let's go and see that animal.'

"We pulled him out of the tavern and the three of us began to walk along the beach through the darkness. The fisherman seemed to be awed at finding himself between two persons of such importance. Don Antonio spoke to him of the indisputable superiority of men ever since the earliest days of creation; of the scorn with which women should be regarded because of their lack of seriousness; of their immense number and the ease with which we could pick another if the one we had happened to displease us... and at last, with brutal directness, told what had happened.

"*Carafosca* hesitated, as if he had not understood the doctor's words very well. Little by little the certainty dawned upon his dense comprehension. 'By God! By God!' And he scratched himself fearfully under his cap, and brought his hands to his sash as if he were seeking his redoubtable knife.

"The physician tried to console him. He must forget Visanteta; there would be no sense or advantage in killing her. It wasn't worth while for a splendid chap like him to go to prison for slaying a worthless creature like her. The real culprit

was that unknown laborer; but... and she! And how easily she... committed the indiscretion, not being able to recall anything afterwards!...

"For a long time we walked along in painful silence, with no other novelty than *Carafosca's* scratching of his head and his sash. Suddenly he surprised us with the roar of his voice, speaking to us in Castilian, thus adding solemnity to what he said:

"Do you want me to tell you something?... Do you want me to tell you something?"

"He looked at us with hostile eyes, as if he saw before him the unknown culprit of the *huerta*, ready to pounce upon him. It could be seen that his sluggish brain had just adopted a very firm resolution.... What was it? Let him speak.

"Well, then,' he articulated slowly, as if we were enemies whom he desired to confound, 'I tell you... that now I love the girl more than ever.'

"In our stupefaction, at a loss for reply, we shook hands with him."

END

COMPASSION

AT TEN o'clock in the evening Count de Sagreda walked into his club on the Boulevard des Capucins. There was a bustle among the servants to relieve him of his cane, his highly polished hat and his costly fur coat, which, as it left his shoulders revealed a shirt-bosom of immaculate neatness, a gardenia in his lapel, and all the attire of black and white, dignified yet brilliant, that belongs to a gentleman who has just dined.

The story of his ruin was known by every member of the club. His fortune, which fifteen years before had caused a certain commotion in Paris, having been ostentatiously cast to the four winds, was exhausted. The count was now living on the remains of his opulence, like those shipwrecked seamen who live upon the debris of the vessel, postponing in anguish the arrival of the last hour. The very servants who danced attendance upon him like slaves in dress suits, knew of his misfortune and discussed his shameful plight; but not even the slightest suggestion of insolence disturbed the colorless glance of their eyes, petrified by servitude. He was such a nobleman! He had scattered his money with such majesty!... Besides, he was a genuine member of the nobility, a nobility that dated back for centuries and whose musty odor inspired a certain ceremonious gravity in many of the citizens whose fore-bears had helped bring about the Revolution. He was not one of those Polish counts who permit themselves to be entertained by women, nor an Italian marquis who winds up by cheating at cards, nor a Russian personage of consequence who often draws his pay from the police; he was genuine *hidalgo*, a grandee of Spain. Perhaps one of his ancestors figured in the *Cid*, in *Ruy Blas* or some other of the heroic pieces in the repertory of the Comedie Francaise.

The count entered the salons of the club with head erect and a proud gait, greeting his friends with a barely discernible smile, a mixture of hauteur and light-heartedness.

He was approaching his fortieth year, but he was still the *beau* Sagreda, as he had long been nicknamed by the noctambulous women of Maxim's and the early-rising Amazons of the Bois. A few gray hairs at his temples and a triangle of faint wrinkles at the corner of his brows, betrayed the effects of an existence that had been lived at too rapid a pace, with the vital machinery running at full speed. But his eyes were still youthful, intense and melancholy; eyes

that caused him to be called "the Moor" by his men and women friends. The Viscount de la Tresminiere, crowned by the Academy as the author of a study on one of his ancestors who had been a companion of Conde, and highly appreciated by the antique dealers on the left bank of the Seine, who sold him all the bad canvases they had in store, called him *Velazquez*, satisfied that the swarthy, somewhat olive complexion of the count, his black, heavy mustache and his grave eyes, gave him the right to display his thorough acquaintance with Spanish art.

All the members of the club spoke of Sagreda's ruin with discreet compassion. The poor count! Not to fall heir to some new legacy. Not to meet some American millionairess who would be smitten with him and his titles!... They must do something to save him.

And he walked amid this mute and smiling pity without being at all aware of it, encased in his pride, receiving as admiration that which was really compassionate sympathy, forced to have recourse to painful simulations in order to surround himself with as much luxury as before, thinking that he was deceiving others and deceiving only himself.

Sagreda cherished no illusions as to the future. All the relatives that might come to his rescue with a timely legacy had done so many years before, upon making their exit from the world's stage. None that might recall his name was left beyond the mountains. In Spain he had only some distant relatives, personages of the nobility united to him more by historic bonds than by ties of blood. They addressed him familiarly, but he could expect from them no help other than good advice and admonitions against his wild extravagance.... It was all over. Fifteen years of dazzling display had consumed the supply of wealth with which Sagreda one day arrived in Paris. The granges of Andalusia, with their droves of cattle and horses, had changed hands without ever having made the acquaintance of this owner, devoted to luxury and always absent. After them, the vast wheat fields of Castilla and the ricefields of Valencia, and the villages of the northern provinces, had gone into strange hands,—all the princely possessions of the ancient counts of Sagreda, plus the inheritances from various pious spinster aunts, and the considerable legacies of other relatives who had died of old age in their ancient country houses.

Paris and the elegant summer seasons had in a few years devoured this fortune of centuries. The recollection of a few noisy love affairs with two actresses in vogue; the nostalgic smile of a dozen costly women of the world; the forgotten fame of several duels; a certain prestige as a rash, calm gambler, and a reputation as a knightly swordsman, intransigent in matters of honor, were all that remained to the *beau* Sagreda after his downfall.

He lived upon his past, contracting new debts with certain providers who, recalling other financial crises, trusted to a re-establishment of his fortune. "His fate was settled," according to the count's own words. When he could do no more, he would resort to a final course. Kill himself?... never. Men like him committed suicide only because of gambling debts or debts of honor. Ancestors of his, noble and glorious, had owed huge sums to persons who were not their equals, without for a moment considering suicide on this account. When the creditors should shut their doors to him, and the money-lenders should threaten him with a public court scandal, Count de Sagreda, making a heroic effort, would wrench himself away from the sweet Parisian life. His ancestors had been soldiers and colonizers. He would join the foreign legion of Algeria, or would take passage for that America which had been conquered by his forefathers, becoming a mounted shepherd in the solitudes of Southern Chile or upon the boundless plains of Patagonia.

Until the dreaded moment should arrive, this hazardous, cruel existence that forced him to live a continuous lie, was the best period of his career. From his last trip to Spain, made for the purpose of liquidating certain remnants of his patrimony, he had returned with a woman, a maiden of the provinces who had been captivated by the prestige of the nobleman; in her affection, ardent and submissive at the same time, there was almost as much admiration as love. A woman!... Sagreda for the first time realized the full significance of this word, as if up to then he had not understood it. His present companion was a woman; the nervous, dissatisfied females who had filled his previous existence, with their painted smiles and voluptuous artifices, belonged to another species.

And now that the real woman had arrived, his money was departing forever!... And when misfortune appeared, love came with it!... Sagreda, lamenting his lost fortune struggled hard to maintain his pompous outward show. He lived as before, in the same house, without retrenching his budget, making his companion presents of value equal to those that he had lavished upon his former women friends, enjoying an almost paternal satisfaction before the childish surprise and the ingenuous happiness of the poor girl, who was overwhelmed by the brilliant life of Paris.

Sagreda was drowning,—drowning!—but with a smile on his lips, content with himself, with his present life, with his sweet dream, which was to be the final one and which was lasting miraculously long. Fate, which had maltreated him in the past few years, consuming the remainders of his wealth at Monte Carlo, at Ostend and in the notable clubs of the Boulevard, seemed now to stretch out a helping hand, touched by his new existence. Every night, after dining with his companion at a fashionable restaurant, he would leave her at the theatre and go to his club, the only place where luck awaited him. He did not plunge heavily. Simple games of ecarte with intimate friends, chums of his youth, who continued their happy career with the aid of great fortunes, or who had settled down after marrying wealth, retaining

among their farmer habits the custom of visiting the honorable circle.

Scarcely did the count take his seat, with his cards in his hand, opposite one of these friends, when Fortune seemed to hover over his head, and his friends did not tire of playing, inviting him to a game every night, as if they stood in line awaiting their turn. His winnings were hardly enough to grow wealthy upon; some nights ten *louis*; others twenty-five; on special occasions Sagreda would retire with as many as forty gold coins in his pocket. But thanks to this almost daily gain he was able to fill the gaps of his lordly existence, which threatened to topple down upon his head, and he maintained his lady companion in surroundings of loving comfort, at the same time recovering confidence in his immediate future. Who could tell what was in store for him?...

Noticing Viscount de la Tresminiere in one of the salons he smiled at him with an expression of friendly challenge.

"What do you say to a game?"

"As you wish, my dear *Velazquez*."

"Seven francs per five points will be sufficient. I'm sure to win. Luck is with me."

The game commenced under the soft light of the electric bulbs, amid the soothing silence of soft carpets and thick curtains.

Sagreda kept winning, as if his kind fate was pleased to extricate him from the most difficult passes. He won without half trying. It made no difference that he lacked trumps and that he held bad cards; those of his rival were always worse, and the result would be miraculously in harmony with his previous games.

Already, twenty-five golden *louis* lay before him. A club companion, who was wandering from one salon to the other with a bored expression, stopped near the players interested in the game. At first he remained standing near Sagreda; then he took up his position behind the viscount, who seemed to be rendered nervous and perturbed at the fellow's proximity.

"But that's awful silly of you!" the inquisitive newcomer soon exclaimed. "You're not playing a good game, my dear viscount. You're laying aside your trumps and using only your bad cards. How stupid of you!"

He could say no more. Sagreda threw his cards upon the table. He had grown terribly white, with a greenish pallor. His eyes, opened extraordinarily wide, stared at the viscount. Then he rose.

"I understand," he said coldly. "Allow me to withdraw."

Then, with a quivering hand, he thrust the heap of gold coins toward his friend.

"This belongs to you."

"But, my dear *Velazquez*.... Why, Sagreda!... Permit me to explain, dear count!..."

"Enough, sir. I repeat that I understand."

His eyes flashed with a strange gleam, the selfsame gleam that his friends had seen upon various occasions, when after a brief dispute or an insulting word, he raised his glove in a gesture of challenge.

But this hostile glance lasted only a moment. Then he smiled with glacial affability.

"Many thanks, Viscount. These are favors that are never forgotten.... I repeat my gratitude."

And he saluted, like a true noble, walking off proudly erect, the same as in the most smiling days of his opulence.

With his fur coat open, displaying his immaculate shirt bosom, Count de Sagreda promenades along the boulevard. The crowds are issuing from the theatres; the women are crossing from one sidewalk to the other; automobiles with lighted interiors roll by, affording a momentary glimpse of plumes, jewels and white bosoms; the news-vendors shout their wares; at the top of the buildings huge electrical advertisements blaze forth and go out in rapid succession.

The Spanish grandee, the *hidalgo*, the descendant of the noble knights of the *Cid* and *Ruy Blas*, walks against the current, elbowing his way through the crowd, desiring to hasten as fast as possible, without any particular objective in

view.

To contract debts!... Very well. Debts do not dishonor a nobleman. But to receive alms?... In his hours of blackest thoughts he had never trembled before the idea of incurring scorn through his ruin, of seeing his friends desert him, of descending to the lowest depths, being lost in the social substratum. But to arouse compassion....

The comedy was useless. The intimate friends who smiled at him in former times had penetrated the secret of his poverty and had been moved by pity to get together and take turns at giving him alms under the pretext of gambling with him. And likewise his other friends, and even the servants who bowed to him with their accustomed respect as he passed by, were in the secret. And he, the poor dupe, was going about with his lordly airs, stiff and solemn in his extinct grandeur, like the corpse of the legendary chieftain, which, after his death, was mounted on horseback and sallied forth to win battles.

Farewell, Count de Sagreda! The heir of governors and viceroys can become a nameless soldier in a legion of desperadoes and bandits; he can begin life anew as an adventurer in virgin lands, killing that he may live; he can even watch with impassive countenance the wreck of his name and his family history, before the bench of a tribunal.... But to live upon the compassion of his friends!...

Farewell forever, final illusions! The count has forgotten his companion, who is waiting for him at a night restaurant. He does not think of her; it is as if he never had seen her; as if she had never existed. He thinks not at all of that which but a few hours before had made life worth living. He walks along, alone with his disgrace, and each step of his seems to draw from the earth a dead thing; an ancestral influence, a racial prejudice, a family boast, dormant hauteur, honor and fierce pride, and as these awake, they oppress his breast and cloud his thoughts.

How they must have laughed at him behind his back, with condescending pity!... Now he walks along more hurriedly than ever, as if he has at last made up his mind just where he is going, and his emotion leads him unconsciously to murmur with irony, as if he is speaking to somebody who is at his heels and whom he desires to flee.

"Many thanks! Many thanks!"

Just before dawn two revolver shots astound the guests of a hotel in the vicinity of the *Gare Saint-Lazare*,--one of those ambiguous establishments that offers a safe shelter for amorous acquaintances begun on the thoroughfare.

The attendants find in one of the rooms a gentleman dressed in evening clothes, with a hole in his head, through which escape bloody strips of flesh. The man writhes like a worm upon the threadbare carpet.

His eyes, of a dull black, still glitter with life. There is nothing left in them of the image of his sweet companion. His last thought, interrupted by death, is of friendship, terrible in its pity; of the fraternal insult of a generous, light-hearted compassion.

END

LUXURY

"HAD her on my lap," said my friend Martinez, "and the warm weight of her healthy body was beginning to tire me.

"The scene... same as usual in such places. Mirrors with blemished surfaces, and names scratched across them, like

spiders' webs; sofas of discolored velvet, with springs that creaked atrociously; the bed decorated with theatrical hangings, as clean and common as a sidewalk, and on the walls, pictures of bull-fighters and cheap chromos of angelic virgins smelling a rose or languorously contemplating a bold hunter.

"The scenery was that of the favorite cell in the convent of vice; an elegant room reserved for distinguished patrons; and she was a healthy, robust creature, who seemed to bring a whiff of the pure mountain air into the heavy atmosphere of this closed house, saturated with cheap cologne, rice powder and the vapor from dirty washbasins.

"As she spoke to me she stroked the ribbons of her gown with childish complacency; it was a fine piece of satin, of screaming yellow, somewhat too tight for her body, a dress which I recalled having seen months before on the delicate charms of another girl, who had since died, according to reports, in the hospital.

"Poor girl! She had become a sight! Her coarse, abundant hair, combed in Greek fashion, was adorned with glass beads; her cheeks, shiny from the dew of perspiration, were covered with a thick layer of cosmetic; and as if to reveal her origin, her arms, which were firm, swarthy and of masculine proportions, escaped from the ample sleeves of her chorus-girl costume.

"As she saw me follow with attentive glance all the details of her extravagant array, she thought that I was admiring her, and threw her head back with a petulant expression.

"And such a simple creature!... She hadn't yet become acquainted with the customs of the house, and told the truth,--all the truth--to the men who wished to know her history. They called her Flora; but her real name was Mari-Pepa. She wasn't the orphan of a colonel or a magistrate, nor did she concoct the complicated tales of love and adventure that her companions did, in order to justify their presence in such a place. The truth; always the truth; she would yet be hanged for her frankness. Her parents were comfortably situated farmers in a little town of Aragon; owned their fields, had two mules in the barn, bread, wine, and enough potatoes for the year round; and at night the best fellows in the place came one after the other to soften her heart with serenade upon serenade, trying to carry off her dark, healthy person together with the four orchards she had inherited from her grandfather.

"But what could you expect, my dear fellow?... I couldn't bear those people. They were too coarse for me. I was born to be a lady. And tell me, why can't I be? Don't I look as good as any of them?..."

"And she snuggled her head against my shoulder, like the docile sweetheart she was,--a slave subjected to all sorts of caprices in exchange for being clothed handsomely.

"Those fellows," she continued, "made me sick. I ran off with the student,--understand?--the son of the town magistrate, and we wandered about until he deserted me, and I landed here, waiting for something better to turn up. You see, it's a short tale.... I don't complain of anything. I'm satisfied."

"And to show how happy she was, the unhappy girl rode astride my legs, thrust her hard fingers through my hair, rumpling it, and sang a tango in horrible fashion, in her strong, peasant voice.

"I confess that I was seized with an impulse to speak to her 'in the name of morality,'--that hypocritical desire we all possess to propagate virtue when we are sated and desire is dead.

"She raised her eyes, astonished to see me look so solemn, preaching to her, like a missionary glorifying chastity with a prostitute on his knees; her gaze wandered continually from my austere countenance to the bed close by. Her common sense was baffled before the incongruity between such virtue and the excesses of a moment before.

"Suddenly she seemed to understand, and an outburst of laughter swelled her fleshy neck.

"The deuce!... How amusing you are! And with what a face you say all these things! Just like the priest of my home town..."

"No, Pepa, I'm serious. I believe you're a good girl; you don't realize what you've gone into, and I'm warning you. You've fallen very low, very low. You're at the bottom. Even within the career of vice, the majority of women resist and deny the caresses that are required of you in this house. There is yet time for you to save yourself. Your parents have enough for you to live on; you didn't come here under the necessity of poverty. Return to your home, and the past will be forgotten; you can tell them a lie, invent some sort of tale to justify your flight, and who knows?... One of the fellows that used to serenade you will marry you, you'll have children and you'll be a respectable woman.

"The girl became serious when she saw that I was speaking in earnest. Little by little she began to slip from my knees until she was on her feet, eyeing me fixedly, as if she saw before her some strange person and an invisible wall had arisen between the two.

"Go back to my home!" she exclaimed in harsh accents. 'Many thanks. I know very well what that means. Get up before dawn, work like a slave, go out in the fields, ruin your hands with callouses. Look, see how my hands still show them.'

"And she made me feel the rough lumps that rose on the palms of her strong hands.

"And all this, in exchange for what? For being respectable?... Not a bit of it! I'm not that crazy. So much for respectability!"

"And she accompanied these words with some indecent motions that she had picked up from her companions.

"Afterwards, humming a tune, she went over to the mirror to survey herself, and smilingly greeted the reflection of her powdered hair, covered with false pearls, which shone out of the cracked mirror. She contracted her lips, which were rouged like those of a clown.

"Growing more and more firm in my virtuous role, I continued to sermonize her from my chair, enveloping this hypocritical propaganda in sonorous words. She was making a bad choice; she must think of the future. The present could not be worse. What was she? Less than a slave; a piece of furniture; they exploited her, they robbed her, and afterwards... afterwards it would be still worse; the hospital, repulsive diseases....

"But again her harsh laughter interrupted me.

"Quit it, boy. Don't bother me.'

"And planting herself before me she wrapped me in a gaze of infinite compassion.

"Why my dear fellow, how silly you are! Do you imagine that I can go back to that dog's life, after having tasted this one?... No, sir! I was born for luxury.'

"And, with devoted admiration sweeping her glance across the broken chairs, the faded sofa, and that bed which was a public thoroughfare, she began to walk up and down, revelling in the rustle of her train as it dragged across the room, and caressing the folds of that gown which seemed still to preserve the warmth of the other girl's body."

END

RABIES

FROM all the countryside the neighbors of the *huerta* flocked to *Caldera's* cabin, entering it with a certain meekness, a mingling of emotion and fear.

How was the boy? Was he improving?... Uncle Pascal, surrounded by his wife, his daughters-in-law and even the most distant relatives, who had been gathered together by misfortune, received with melancholy satisfaction this interest of the entire vicinity in the health of his son. Yes, he was getting better. For two days he had not been attacked by that horrible *thing* which set the cabin in commotion. And *Caldera's* laconic farmer friends, as well as the women, who were vociferous in the expression of their emotions, appeared at the threshold of the room, asking timidly, "How do you feel?"

The only son of *Caldera* was in there, sometimes in bed, in obedience to his mother, who could conceive of no

illness without the cup of hot water and seclusion between the bed-sheets; at other times he sat up, his jaws supported by his hands, gazing obstinately into the furthest corner of the room. His father, wrinkling his shaggy white brows, would walk about when left alone, or, through force of habit, take a look at the neighboring fields, but without any desire to bend over and pluck out any of the weeds that were beginning to sprout in the furrows. Much this land mattered to him now,—the earth in whose bowels he had left the sweat of his body and the strength of his limbs!... His son was all he had,—the fruit of a late marriage,—and he was a sturdy youth, as industrious and taciturn as his father; a soldier of the soil, who required neither orders nor threat to fulfil his duties; ready to awake at midnight when it was his turn to irrigate his land and give the fields drink under the light of the stars; quick to spring from his bed on the hard kitchen bench, throwing off the covers and putting on his hemp sandals at the sound of the early rooster's reveille.

Uncle Pascal had never smiled. He was the Latin type of father; the fearful master of the house, who, on returning from his labors, ate alone, served by his wife, who stood by with an expression of submission. But this grave, harsh mask of an omnipotent master concealed a boundless admiration for his son, who was his best work. How quickly he loaded a cart! How he perspired as he managed the hoe with a vigorous forward and backward motion that seemed to cleave him at the waist! Who could ride a pony like him, gracefully jumping on to his back by simply resting the toe of a sandal upon the hind legs of the animal?... He didn't touch wine, never got mixed up in a brawl, nor was he afraid of work. Through good luck he had pulled a high number in the military draft, and when the feast of San Juan came around he intended to marry a girl from a near-by farm,—a maiden that would bring with her a few pieces of earth when she came to the cabin of her new parents. Happiness; an honorable and peaceful continuation of the family traditions; another *Caldera*, who, when Uncle Pascal grew old, would continue to work the lands that had been fructified by his ancestors, while a troop of little *Calderitas*, increasing in number each year, would play around the nag harnessed to the plow, eyeing with a certain awe their grandpa, his eyes watery from age and his words very concise, as he sat in the sun at the cabin door.

Christ! And how man's illusions vanish!... One Saturday, as Pascualet was coming home from his sweetheart's house, along one of the paths of the *huerta*, about midnight, a dog had bitten him; a wretched, silent animal that jumped out from behind a sluice; as the young man crouched to throw a stone at it, the dog bit into his shoulder. His mother, who used to wait for him on the nights when he went courting, burst into wailing when she saw the livid semicircle, with its red stain left by the dog's teeth, and she bustled about the hut preparing poultices and drinks.

The youth laughed at his mother's fears.

"Quiet, mother, quiet!" It wasn't the first time that a dog had bitten him. His body still showed faint signs of bites that he had received in childhood, when he used to go through the *huerta* throwing stones at the dogs. Old *Caldera* spoke to him from bed, without displaying any emotion. On the following day he was to go to the veterinary and have his flesh cauterized by a burning iron. So he ordered, and there was nothing further to be said about the matter. The young man submitted without flinching to the operation, like a good, brave chap of the Valencian *huerta*. He had four days' rest in all, and even at that, his fondness for work caused him new sufferings and he aided his father with pain-tortured arm. Saturdays, when he came to his sweetheart's farmhouse, she always asked after his health. "How's the bite getting along?" He would shrug his shoulders gleefully before the eyes of the maiden and the two would finally sit down in a corner of the kitchen, remaining in mute contemplation of each other, or speaking of the clothes and the bed for their future home, without daring to come close to each other; there they sat erect and solemn, leaving between their bodies a space "wide enough for a sickle to pass through," as the girl's father smilingly put it.

More than a month passed by. *Caldera's* wife was the only one that did not forget the accident. She followed her son about with anxious glances. Ah, sovereign queen! The *huerta* seemed to have been abandoned by God and His holy mother. Over at Templat's cabin a child was suffering the agonies of hell through having been bitten by a mad dog. All the *huerta* folk were running in terror to have a look at the poor creature; a spectacle that she herself did not dare to gaze upon because she was thinking of her own son. If her Pascualet, as tall and sturdy as a tower, were to meet with the same fate as that unfortunate child!...

One day, at dawn, *Caldera's* son was unable to arise from his kitchen bench, and his mother helped him walk to the large nuptial bed, which occupied a part of the *estudi*, the best room in the cabin. He was feverish, and complained of acute pain in the spot where he had been bitten; an awful chill ran through his whole body, making his teeth chatter and veiling his eyes with a yellowish opacity. Don Jose, the oldest doctor in the *huerta*, came on his ancient mare, with his eternal recipe of purgatives for every class of illness, and bandages soaked in salt water for wounds. Upon examining the sick man he made a wry face. Bad! Bad! This was a more serious matter; they would have to go to the solemn doctors in Valencia, who knew more than he. *Caldera's* wife saw her husband harness the cart and compel Pascualet to get into it. The boy, relieved of his pain, smiled assent, saying that now he felt nothing more than a slight twinge. When they returned to the cabin the father seemed to be more at ease. A doctor from the city had pricked Pascualet's sore. He was a very serious gentleman, who gave Pascualet courage with his kind words, looking intently at

him all the while, and expressing regret that he had waited so long before coming to him. For a week the two men made a daily trip to Valencia, but one morning the boy was unable to move. That crisis which made the poor mother groan with fear had returned with greater intensity than before. The boy's teeth knocked together, and he uttered a wail that stained the corners of his mouth with froth; his eyes seemed to swell, becoming yellow and protruding like huge grape seeds; he tried to pull himself together, writhing from the internal torture, and his mother hung upon his neck, shrieking with terror; meanwhile *Caldera*, grimly silent, seized his son's arms with tranquil strength, struggling to prevent his violent convulsions.

"My son! My son!" cried the mother. Ah, her son! Scarcely could she recognize him as she saw him in this condition. He seemed like another, as if only his former exterior had remained,—as if an infernal monster had lodged within and was martyring this flesh that had come out of her own womb, appearing at his eyes with livid flashes.

Afterwards came calm stupor, and all the women of the district gathered in the kitchen and deliberated upon the lot of the sick youth, cursing the city doctor and his diabolical incisions. It was his fault that the boy now lay thus; before the boy had submitted to the cure he had felt much better. The bandit! And the government never punished these wicked souls!... There were no other remedies than the old, true and tried ones,—the product of the experience of people who had lived years ago and thus knew much more. One of the neighbors went off to hunt up a certain witch, a miraculous doctor for dog-bites, serpent bites and scorpion-stings. Another brought a blind old goatherd, who could cure by the virtue of his mouth, simply by making some crosses of saliva over the ailing flesh. The drinks made of mountain herbs and the moist signs of the goatherd were looked upon as tokens of immediate cure, especially when they beheld the sick youth lie silent and motionless for several hours, looking at the ground with a certain amazement, as if he could feel within him the progress of something strange that grew and grew, gradually overpowering him. Then, when the crisis reoccurred, the doubt of the women began to rise, and new remedies were discussed. The youth's sweetheart came, with her large black eyes moistened by tears, and she advanced timidly until she came near to the sick boy. For the first time she dared to take his hand, blushing beneath her cinamon-colored complexion at this audacious act. "How do you feel?"... And he, so loving in other days, recoiled from her tender touch, turning his eyes away so that he should not see her, as if ashamed of his plight. His mother wept. Queen of heaven! He was very low; he was going to die. If only they could find out what dog it was that had bitten him, and cut out its tongue, using it for a miraculous plaster, as experienced persons advised!...

Throughout the *huerta* it seemed that God's own wrath had burst forth. Some dogs had bitten others; now nobody knew which were the dangerous ones and which the safe. All mad! The children were secluded in the cabins, spying with terrified glances upon the vast fields, through the half-open doors; mothers journeyed over the winding paths in close groups, uneasy, trembling, hastening their step whenever a bark sounded from behind the sluices of the canals; men eyed the domestic dogs with fear, intently watching their slavering mouths as they gasped or their sad eyes; the agile greyhound, their hunting companion,—the barking cur, guardian of the home,—the ugly mastiff who walked along tied to the cart, which he watched over during the master's, absence,—all were placed under their owners' observation or coldly sacrificed behind the walls of the corral, without any display of emotion whatever.

"Here they come! Here they come!" was the shout passed along from cabin to cabin, announcing the patter of a pack of dogs, howling, ravenous, their bodies covered with mud, running about without finding rest, driven on day and night, with the madness of persecution in their eyes. The *huerta* seemed to shudder, closing the doors of all the houses and suddenly bristling with guns. Shots rang out from the sluices, from the high corn-fields, from cabin windows, and when the wanderers, repelled and persecuted on every side, in their mad gallop dashed toward the sea, as if they were attracted by the moist, invigorating air that was washed by the waves, the revenue-guards camped on the wide strip of beach brought their mausers to their cheek and received them with a volley. The dogs retreated, escaping among the men who were approaching them musket in hand, and one or another of them would be stretched out at the edge of a canal. At night, the noisy gloom of the plain was broken by the sight of distant flashes and the sound of discharges. Every shape that moved in the darkness was the target for a bullet; the muffled howls that sounded in the vicinity of the cabins were answered by shots. The men were afraid of this common terror, and avoided meeting.

No sooner did night fall than the *huerta* was left without a light, without a person upon the roads, as if death had taken possession of the dismal plain, so green and smiling under the sun. A single red spot, a tear of light, trembled in this obscurity. It was *Caldera's* cabin, where the women, squatting upon the floor, around the kitchen lamp, sighed with fright, anticipating the strident shriek of the sick youth,—the chattering of his teeth, the violent contortions of his body whenever he was seized with convulsions, struggling to repel the arms that tried to quiet him.

The mother hung upon the neck of that raving patient who struck terror to men. She scarcely knew him; he was somebody else, with those eyes that popped out of their sockets, his livid or blackish countenance, his writhings, like that of a tortured animal, showing his tongue as he gasped through bubbles of froth in the agonies of an insatiable thirst. He begged for death in heart-rending shrieks; he struck his head against the wall; he tried to bite; but even so,

he was her child and she did not feel the fear experienced by the others. His menacing mouth withdrew before the wan face that was moistened with tears. "Mother! Mother!" He recognized her in his lucid moments. She need not fear him; he would never bite her. And as if he must sink his teeth into something or other to glut his rage, he bit into his arms until the blood came.

"My son! My son!" moaned the mother and she wiped the deadly froth from his lips, afterwards carrying the handkerchief to her eyes, without fear of contagion. *Caldera*, in his solemn gravity, paid no heed to the sufferer's threatening eyes, which were fixed upon him with an impulse of attack. The boy had lost his awe of his father.

That powerful man, however, facing the peril of his son's mouth, thrust him back into bed whenever the madman tried to flee, as if he must spread everywhere the horrible affliction that was devouring his entrails.

No longer were the crises followed by extended intervals of calm. They became almost continuous, and the victim writhed about, clawed and bleeding from his own bites, his face almost black, his eyes tremulous and yellow, looking like some monstrous beast set apart from all the human species. The old doctor had stopped asking about the youth. What was the use? It was all over. The women wept hopelessly. Death was certain. They only bewailed the long hours, perhaps days, of horrible torture that poor Pascualet would have to undergo.

Caldera was unable to find among his relatives or friends any men brave enough to help him restrain the sufferer in his violent moments. They all looked with terror at the door to the *estudi*, as if behind it were concealed the greatest of dangers. To go shooting through roads and canals was man's work. A stab could be returned; one bullet could answer another; but ah! that frothing mouth which killed with a bite!... that incurable disease which made men writhe in endless agony, like a lizard sliced by a hoe!

He no longer knew his mother. In his final moments of lucidity he had thrust her away with loving brusqueness. She must go!... Let him not see her again!... He feared to do her harm! The poor woman's friends dragged her out of the room, forcing her to remain motionless, like her son, in a corner of the kitchen. *Caldera*, with a supreme effort of his dying will, tied the agonizing youth to the bed. His beetling brows trembled and the tears made him blink as he tied the coarse knots of the rope, fastening the youth to the bed upon which he had been born. He felt as if he were preparing his son for burial and had begun to dig his grave. The victim twisted in wild contortions under the father's strong arms; the parent had to make a powerful effort to subdue him under the rope that sank into his flesh.... To have lived so many years only to behold himself at last obliged to perform such a task! To give life to a creature, only to pray that it might be extinguished as soon as possible, horrified by so much useless pain!... Good God in heaven! Why not put an end to the poor boy at once, since his death was now inevitable?...

He closed the door of the sick room, fleeing from the rasping shriek that set everybody's hair on end; but the madman's panting continued to sound in the silence of the cabin, accompanied by the lamentations of the mother and the weeping of the other women grouped around the lamp, that had just been lighted.

Caldera stamped upon the floor. Let the women be silent! But for the first time he beheld himself disobeyed, and he left the cabin, fleeing from this chorus of grief.

Night descended. His gaze wandered toward the thin yellow band that was visible on the horizon, marking the flight of day. Above his head shone the stars. From the other homes, which were scarcely visible, resounded the neighing of horses, barking and the clucking of fowl,--the last signs of animal life before it sank to rest. That primitive man felt an impression of emptiness amid the Nature which was insensible and blind to the sufferings of its creatures. Of what concern to the points of light that looked down upon him from above could be that which he was now going through?... All creatures were equal; the beasts that disturbed the silence of dusk before falling asleep, and that poor youth similar to him, who now lay fettered, writhing in the worst of agony. How many illusions his life had contained!... And with a mere bite, a wretched animal kicked about by all men could finish them all. And no remedy existed in heaven or upon earth!...

Once again the distant shriek of the sufferer came to his ears from the open window of the *estudi*. The tenderness of his early days of paternity emerged from the depths of his soul. He recalled the nights he had spent awake in that room, walking up and down, holding in his arms the little child that was crying from the pains of infancy's illness. Now he lay crying, too, but without hope, in the agonies of a hell that had come before its time, and at last... death. His countenance grew frightened, and he raised his hands to his forehead as if trying to drive away a troublesome thought. Then he appeared to deliberate.... Why not?...

"To end his suffering... to end his suffering!"

He went back to the cabin, only to come out at once with his old double-barrelled musket, and he hastened to the little window of the sick room as if he feared to lose his determination; he thrust the gun through the opening.

Again he heard the agonizing panting, the chattering of teeth, the horrible shriek, now very near, as if he were at the victim's bedside. His eyes, accustomed to the darkness saw the bed at the back of the gloomy room, and the form that lay writhing in it,--the pale spot of the face, appearing and disappearing as the sick man twisted about desperately.

The father was frightened at the trembling of his hands and the agitation of his pulse; he, the son of the *huerta*, without any other diversion than the hunt, accustomed to shoot down birds almost without aiming at them.

The wailing of the poor mother brought back to his memory other groans of long long ago,--twenty-two years before--when she was giving birth to her only son upon that same bed.

To come to such an end!... His eyes, gazing heavenward, saw a black sky, intensely black, with not a star in sight, and obscured by his tears....

"Lord! To end his sufferings! To end his sufferings!"

And repeating these words he pressed the musket against his shoulder, seeking the lock with a tremulous finger... Bang! Bang!

END

THE WINDFALL

"**I**SIR," said *Magdalena*, the bugler of the prison, "am no saint; I've been jailed many times for robberies; some of them that really took place and others that I was simply suspected of. Compared to you, who are a gentleman, and are in prison for having written things in the papers, I'm a mere wretch.... But take my word for it, this time I'm here for good."

And raising one hand to his breast as he straightened his head with a certain pride, he added, "Petty thefts, that's all I'm not brave; I haven't shed a drop of blood."

At break of day, *Magdalena's* bugle resounded through the spacious yard, embroidering its reveille with scales and trills. During the day, with the martial instrument hanging from his neck, or caressing it with a corner of his smock so as to wipe off the vapor with which the dampness of the prison covered it, he would go through the entire edifice,--an ancient convent in whose refectories, granaries and garrets there were crowded, in perspiring confusion, almost a thousand men.

He was the clock that governed the life and the activities of this mass of male flesh perpetually seething with hatred. He made the round of the cells to announce, with sonorous blasts, the arrival of the worthy director, or a visit from the authorities; from the progress of the sun along the white walls of the prison-yard he could tell the approach of the visiting hours,--the best part of the day,--and with his tongue stuck between his lips he would await orders impatiently, ready to burst into the joyous signal that sent the flock of prisoners scampering over the stairways in an anxious run toward the locutories, where a wretched crowd of women and children buzzed in conversation; his insatiable hunger kept him pacing back and forth in the vicinity of the old kitchen, in which the enormous stews filled the atmosphere with a nauseating odor, and he bemoaned the indifference of the chef, who was always late in giving the order for the mess-call.

Those imprisoned for crimes of blood, heroes of the dagger who had killed their man in a fierce brawl or in a dispute

over a woman and who formed an aristocracy that disdained the petty thieves, looked upon the bugler as the butt for pranks with which to while away their boredom.

"Blow!" would come the command from some formidable fellow, proud of his crimes and his courage.

And *Magdalena* would draw himself up with military rigidity, close his mouth and inflate his cheeks, momentarily expecting two blows, delivered simultaneously by both hands, to expel the air from the ruddy globe of his face. At other times these redoubtable personages tested the strength of their arms upon *Magdalena's* pate, which was bare with the baldness of repugnant diseases, and they would howl with laughter at the damage done to their fists by the protuberances of the hard skull. The bugler lent himself to these tortures with the humility of a whipped dog, and found a certain revenge in repeating, afterwards, those words that were a solace to him:

"I'm good; I'm not a brave fellow. Petty thefts, that's all.... But as to blood, not a single drop."

Visiting time brought his wife, the notorious *Peluchona*, a valiant creature who inspired him with great fear. She was the mistress of one of the most dangerous bandits in the jail. Daily she brought that fellow food, procuring these dainties at the cost of all manner of vile labors. The bugler, upon beholding her, would leave the locutory, fearing the arrogance of her bandit mate, who would take advantage of the occasion to humiliate him before his former companion. Many times a certain feeling of curiosity and tenderness got the better of his fear, and he would advance timidly, looking beyond the thick bars for the head of a child that came with *la Peluchona*.

"That's my son, sir," he said, humbly. "My Tonico, who no longer knows me or remembers me. They say that he doesn't resemble me at all. Perhaps he's not mine.... You can imagine, with the life his mother has always led, living near the garrisons, washing the soldiers' clothes!... But he was born in my home; I held him in my arms when he was ill, and that's a bond as close as ties of blood."

Then he would resume his timid lurking about the locutory, as if preparing one of his robberies, to see his Tonico; and when he could see him for a moment, the sight was enough to extinguish his helpless rage before the full basket of lunch that the evil woman brought to her lover.

Magdalena's whole existence was summed up in two facts; he had robbed and he had travelled much. The robberies were insignificant; clothes or money snatched in the street, because he lacked courage for greater deeds. His travels had been compulsory,—always on foot, over the roads of Spain, marching in a chain gang of convicts, between the polished or white three-cornered hats that guarded the prisoners.

After having been a "pupil" among the buglers of a regiment, he had launched upon this life of continuous imprisonment, punctuated by brief periods of freedom, in which he lost his bearings, not knowing what to do with himself and wishing to return as soon as possible to jail. It was the perpetual chain, but finished link by link, as he used to say.

The police never organized a round-up of dangerous persons but what *Magdalena* was found among them,—a timorous rat whose name the papers mentioned like that of a terrible criminal. He was always included in the trail of vagrant suspects who, without being charged with any specific crime, were sent from province to province by the authorities, in the hope that they would die of hunger along the roads, and thus he had covered the whole peninsula on foot, from Cadiz to Santander, from Valencia to La Coruna. With what enthusiasm he recalled his travels! He spoke of them as if they were joyous excursions, just like a wandering charity-student of the old *Tuna* converting his tales into courses in picturesque geography. With hungry delight he recollected the abundant milk of Galicia, the red sausages of Extramadura, the Castilian bread, the Basque apples, the wines and ciders of all the districts he had traversed, with his luggage on his shoulder. Guards were changed every day,—some of them kind or indifferent, others ill-humored and cruel, who made all the prisoners fear a couple of shots fired beyond the ruts of the road, followed by the papers justifying the killing as having been caused by an attempt at flight. With a certain nostalgia he evoked the memory of mountains covered with snow or reddened and striped by the sun; the slow procession along the white road that was lost in the horizon, like an endless ribbon; the highlands, under the trees, in the hot noon hours; the storms that assailed them upon the highways; inundated ravines that forced them to camp out in the open; the arrival, late at night, at certain town prisons, old convenes or abandoned churches, in which every man hunted up a dry corner, protected from draughts, where he could stretch his mat; the endless journey with all the calm of a purposeless procession; the long halts in spots where life was so monotonous that the presence of a group of prisoners was an event; the urchins would come running up to the bars to speak with them, while the girls, impelled by morbid curiosity, would approach within a short distance, to hear their songs and their obscene language.

"Some mighty interesting travels, sir," continued the robber. "For those of us who had good health and didn't drop by the roadside it was the same as a strolling band of students. Now and then a drubbing, but who pays any attention to such things!... They don't have these *conductions* now; prisoners are transported by railroad, caged up in the cars.

Besides, I am held for a criminal offense, and I must live inside the walls... jailed for good."

And again he began to lament his bad luck, relating the final deed that had landed him in jail.

It was a suffocating Sunday in July; an afternoon in which the streets of Valencia seemed to be deserted, under the burning sun and a wind like a furnace blast that came from the baked plains of the interior. Everybody was at the bull-fight or at the seashore. *Magdalena* was approached by his friend *Chamorra*, an old prison and traveling companion, who exercised a certain influence over him. That *Chamorra* was a bad soul! A thief, but of the sort that go the limit, not recoiling before the necessity of shedding blood and with his knife always handy beside his skeleton-keys. It was a matter of cleaning out a certain house, upon which this fearful fellow had set his eye. *Magdalena* modestly excused himself. He wasn't made for such things; he couldn't go so far. As for gliding up to a roof and pulling down the clothes that had been hung out to dry, or snatching a woman's purse with a quick pull and making off with it... all right. But to break into a house, and face the mystery of a dwelling, in which the people might be at home?...

But *Chamorra's* threatening look inspired him with greater fear than did the anticipation of such an encounter, and he finally consented. Very well; he would go as an assistant,—to carry the spoils, but ready to flee at the slightest alarm. And he refused to accept an old jack-knife that his companion offered him. He was consistent.

"Petty thefts aplenty; but as to blood, not a single drop."

Late in the afternoon they entered the narrow vestibule of a house that had no janitor, and whose inhabitants were all away. *Chamorra* knew his victim; a comfortably fixed artisan who must have a neat little pile saved up. He was surely at the beach with his wife or at the bull-fight. Above, the door of the apartment yielded easily, and the two companions began to work in the gloom of the shuttered windows.

Chamorra forced the locks of two chiffoniers and a closet. There was silver coin, copper coin, several bank-notes rolled up at the bottom of a fan-case, the wedding-jewelry, a clock. Not a bad haul. His anxious looks wandered over the place, seeking to make off with everything that could be carried. He lamented the uselessness of *Magdalena*, who, restless with fear and with his arms hanging limp at his sides, was pacing to and fro without knowing what to do.

"Take the quilts," ordered *Chamorra*, "We're sure to get something for the wool."

And *Magdalena*, eager to finish the job as soon as possible, penetrated into the dark alcove, gropingly passing a rope underneath the quilts and the bed-sheets. Then, aided by his friend, he hurriedly made a bundle of everything, casting the voluminous burden upon his shoulders.

They left without being detected, and walked off in the direction of the outskirts of the town, towards a shanty of Arrancapinos, where *Chamorra* had his haunt. The latter walked ahead, ready to run at the first sign of danger; *Magdalena* followed, trotting along, almost hidden beneath the tremendous load, fearing to feel at any moment the hand of the police upon his neck.

Upon examining the proceeds of the robbery in the remote corral, *Chamorra* exhibited the arrogance of a lion, granting his accomplice a few copper coins. This must be enough for the moment. He did this for *Magdalena's* own good, as *Magdalena* was such a spendthrift. Later he would give more.

Then they untied the bundle of quilts, and *Chamorra* bent over, his hands on his hips, exploding with laughter. What a find!... What a present!

Magdalena likewise burst into guffaws, for the first time that afternoon. Upon the bed-clothes lay an infant, dressed only in a little shirt, its eyes shut and its face purple from suffocation, but moving its chest with difficulty at feeling the first caress of fresh air. *Magdalena* recalled the vague sensation he had experienced during his journey hither,—that of something alive moving inside the thick load on his back. A weak, suffocated whining pursued him in his flight.... The mother had left the little one asleep in the cool darkness of the alcove, and they, without knowing it, had carried it off together with the bed-clothes.

Magdalena's frightened eyes now looked questioningly at his companion. What were they to do with the child?... But that evil soul was laughing away like a very demon.

"It's yours; I present it to you.... Eat it with potatoes."

And he went off with all the spoils. *Magdalena* was left standing in doubt, while he cradled the child in his arms. The poor little thing!... It looked just like his own Tono, when he sang him to sleep; just like him when he was ill and leaned his little head upon his father's bosom, while the parent wept, fearing for the child's life. The same little soft, pink feet; the same downy flesh, with skin as soft as silk.... The infant had ceased to cry, looking with surprised eyes at the robber, who was caressing it like a nurse.

"Lullaby, my poor little thing! There, there, my little king... child Jesus! Look at me. I'm your uncle."

But *Magdalena* stopped laughing, thinking of the mother, of her desperate grief when she would return to the house. The loss of her little fortune would be her least concern. The child! Where was she to find her child?... He knew what mothers were like. *Peluchona* was the worst of women, yet he had seen even her weep and moan before her little one in danger.

He gazed toward the sun, which was beginning to sink in a majestic summer sunset. There was still time to take the infant back to the house before its parents would return. And if he should encounter them, he would lie, saying that he had found the infant in the middle of the street; he would extricate himself as well as he could. Forward; he had never felt so brave.

Carrying the infant in his arms he walked at ease through the very streets over which he had lately hastened with the anxious gait of fear. He mounted the staircase without encountering anybody. Above, the same solitude. The door was still open, the bolt forced. Within, the disordered rooms, the broken furniture, the drawers upon the floor, the overturned chairs and clothes strewn about, filled him with a sensation of terror similar to that which assails the assassin who returns to contemplate the corpse of his victim some time after the crime.

He gave a last fond kiss to the child and left it upon the bed.

"Good-bye, my pet!"

But as he approached the head of the staircase he heard footsteps, and in the rectangle of light that entered through the open door there bulked the silhouette of a corpulent man. At the same time there rang out the shrill shriek of a female voice, trembling with fright:

"Robbers!... Help!"

Magdalena tried to escape, opening a passage for himself with his head lowered, like a cornered rat; but he felt himself seized by a pair of Cyclopean arms, accustomed to beating iron, and with a mighty thrust he was sent rolling down the stairs.

On his face there were still signs of the bruises he had received from contact with the steps, and from the blows rained upon him by the infuriated neighbors.

"In sum, sir. Breaking and entering. I'll get out in heaven knows how many years.... All for being kind-hearted. To make matters worse, they don't even give me any consideration, looking upon me as a clever criminal. Everybody knows that the real thief was *Chamorra* whom I haven't seen since.... And they ridicule me for a silly fool."

END

THE LAST LION

SCARCELY had the meeting of the honorable guild of *blanquers* come to order within its chapel near the towers of Serranos, when Senor Vicente asked for the floor. He was the oldest tanner in Valencia. Many masters recalled their apprentice days and declared that he was the same now as then, with his white, brush-like mustache, his face that looked like a sun of wrinkles, his aggressive eyes and cadaverous thinness, as if all the sap of his life had

been consumed in the daily motions of his feet and hands about the vats of the tannery.

He was the only representative of the guild's glories, the sole survivor of those *blanquers* who were an honor to Valencian history. The grandchildren of his former companions had become corrupted with the march of time; they were proprietors of large establishments, with thousands of workmen, but they would be lost if they ever had to tan a skin with their soft, business-man's hands. Only he could call himself a *blanquer* of the old school, working every day in his little hut near the guild house; master and toiler at the same time, with no other assistants than his sons and grandchildren; his workshop was of the old kind, amid sweet domestic surroundings, with neither threats of strikes nor quarrels over the day's pay.

The centuries had raised the level of the street, converting Senor Vicente's shop into a gloomy cave. The door through which his ancestors had entered had grown smaller and smaller from the bottom until it had become little more than a window. Five stairs connected the street with the damp floor of the tannery, and above, near a pointed arch, a relic of medieval Valencia, floated like banners the skins that had been hung up to dry, wafting about the unbearable odor of the leather. The old man by no means envied the *moderns*, in their luxuriously appointed business offices. Surely they blushed with shame on passing through his lane and seeing him, at breakfast hour, taking the sun,—his sleeves and trousers rolled up, showing his thin arms and legs, stained red,—with the pride of a robust old age that permitted him to battle daily with the hides.

Valencia was preparing to celebrate the centenary of one of its famous saints, and the guild of *blanquers*, like the other historic guilds, wished to make its contribution to the festivities. Senor Vicente, with the prestige of his years, imposed his will upon all the masters. The *blanquers* should remain what they were. All the glories of their past, long sequestered in the chapel, must figure in the procession. And it was high time they were displayed in public! His gaze, wandering about the chapel, seemed to caress the guild's relics; the sixteenth century drums, as large as jars, that preserved within their drumheads the hoarse cries of revolutionary Germania; the great lantern of carved wood, torn from the prow of a galley; the red silk banner of the guild, edged with gold that had become greenish through the ages.

All this must be displayed during the celebration, shaking off the dust of oblivion; even the famous lion of the *blanquers*!

The *moderns* burst into impious laughter. The lion, too?... Yes, the lion, too. To Senor Vicente it seemed a dishonor on the part of the guild to forget that glorious beast. The ancient ballads, the accounts of celebrations that might be read in the city archives, the old folks who had lived in the splendid epoch of the guilds with their fraternal camaraderie,—all spoke of the *blanquers'* lion; but now nobody knew the animal, and this was a shame for the trade, a loss to the city.

Their lion was as great a glory as the silk mart or the well of San Vicente. He knew very well the reason for this opposition on the part of the *moderns*. They feared to assume the role of the lion. Never fear, my young fellows! He, with his burden of years, that numbered more than seventy, would claim this honor. It belonged to him in all justice; his father, his grandfather, his countless ancestors, had all been lions, and he felt equal to coming to blows with anybody who would dare dispute his right to the role of the lion, traditional in his family.

With what enthusiasm Senor Vicente related the history of the lion and the heroic *blanquers*! One day the Barbary pirates from Bujia had landed at Torreblanca, just beyond Castellon, and sacked the church, carrying off the Shrine. This happened a little before the time of Saint Vicente Ferrer, for the old tanner had no other way of explaining history than by dividing it into two periods; before and after the Saint... The population, which was scarcely moved by the raids of the pirates, hearing of the abduction of pale maidens with large black eyes and plump figures, destined for the harem, as if this were an inevitable misfortune, broke into cries of grief upon learning of the sacrilege at Torreblanca.

The churches of the town were draped in black; people went through the streets wailing loudly, striking themselves as a punishment. What could those dogs do with the blessed Host? What would become of the poor, defenseless Shrine?... Then it was that the valiant *blanquers* came upon the scene. Was not the Shrine at Bujia? Then on to Bujia in quest of it! They reasoned like heroes accustomed to beating hides all day long, and they saw nothing formidable about beating the enemies of God. At their own expense they fitted out a galley and the whole guild went aboard, carrying along their beautiful banner; the other guilds, and indeed the entire town, followed this example and chartered other vessels.

The Justice himself cast aside his scarlet gown and covered himself with mail from head to foot; the worthy councilmen abandoned the benches of the Golden Chamber, shielding their paunches with scales that shone like those of the fishes in the gulf; the hundred archers of la Pluma, who guarded *la Senera* filled their quivers with arrows, and the Jews from the quarter of la Xedrea did a rushing business, selling all their old iron, including lances, notched swords and rusty corselets, in exchange for good, ringing pieces of silver.

And off sped the Valencian galleys, with their jib-sails spread to the wind, convoyed by a shoal of dolphins, which sported about in the foam of their prows!... When the Moors beheld them approaching, the infidels began to tremble, repenting of their irreverence toward the Shrine. And this, despite the fact that they were a set of hardened old dogs. Valencians, headed by the valiant *blanquers*! Who, indeed, would dare face them!

The battle raged for several days and nights, according to the tale of Senor Vicente. Reinforcements of Moors arrived, but the Valencians, loyal and fierce, fought to the death. And they were already beginning to feel exhausted from the labor of disembowelling so many infidels, when behold, from a neighboring mountain a lion comes walking down on his hind paws, for all the world like a regular person, carrying in his forepaws, most reverently, the Shrine,—the Shrine that had been stolen from Torreblanca! The beast delivered it ceremoniously into the hands of one of the guild, undoubtedly an ancestor of Senor Vicente, and hence for centuries his family had possessed the privilege of representing that amiable animal in the Valencian processions.

Then he shook his mane, emitted a roar, and with blows and bites in every direction cleared the field instantly of Moors.

The Valencians sailed for home, carrying the Shrine back like a trophy. The chief of the *blanquers* saluted the lion, courteously offering him the guild house, near the towers of Serranos, which he could consider as his own. Many thanks; the beast was accustomed to the sun of Africa and feared a change of climate.

But the trade was not ungrateful, and to perpetuate the happy recollection of the shaggy-maned friend whom they possessed on the other shore of the sea, every time the guild banner floated in the Valencian celebrations, there marched behind it an ancestor of Senor Vicente, to the sound of drums, and he was covered with hide, with a mask that was the living image of the worthy lion, bearing in his hands a Shrine of wood, so small and poor that it caused one to doubt the genuine value of Torreblanca's own Shrine.

Perverse and irreverent persons even dared to affirm, to the great indignation of Senor Vicente, that the whole story was a lie. Sheer envy! Ill will of the other trades, which couldn't point to such a glorious history! There was the guild chapel as proof, and in it the lantern from the prow of the vessel, which the conscienceless wretches declared dated from many centuries after the supposed battle; and there were the guild drums, and the glorious banner; and the moth-eaten hide of the lion, in which all his predecessors had encased themselves, lay now forgotten behind the altar, covered with cobwebs and dust, but it was none the less as authentic and worthy of reverence as the stones of el Miguelete.^[1]

And above all there was his faith, ardent and incontrovertible, capable of receiving as an affront to the family the slightest irreverence toward the African lion, the illustrious friend of the guild.

The procession took place on an afternoon in June. The sons, the daughters-in-law and the grandsons of Senor Vicente helped him to get into the costume of the lion, perspiring most uncomfortably at the mere touch of that red-stained wool. "Father, you're going to roast."—"Grandpa, you'll melt inside of this costume."

The old man, however, deaf to the warnings of the family, shook his moth-eaten mane with pride, thinking of his ancestors; then he tried on the terrifying mask, a cardboard arrangement that imitated, with a faint resemblance, the countenance of the wild beast.

What a triumphant afternoon! The streets crowded with spectators; the balconies decorated with bunting, and upon them rows of variegated bonnets shading fair faces from the sun; the ground covered with myrtle, forming a green, odorous carpet whose perfume seemed to expand the lungs.

The procession was headed by the standard-bearers, with beards of hemp, crowns and striped dalmatics, holding aloft the Valencian banners adorned with enormous bats and large L's beside the coat of arms; then, to the sound of the flageolet, the retinue of brave Indians, shepherds from Belen, Catalans and Mallorcans; following these passed the dwarfs with their monstrously huge heads, clicking the castanets to the rhythm of a Moorish march; behind these came the giants of the Corpus and at the end, the banners of the guilds; an endless row of red standards, faded with the years, and so tall that their tops reached higher than the first stories of the buildings.

Flom! Rotoplom! rolled the drums of the *blanquers*,—instruments of barbarous sonority, so large that their weight forced the drummers to bow their necks. Flom! Rotoplom! they resounded, hoarse and menacing, with savage solemnity, as if they were still marking the tread of the revolutionary German regiments, sallying forth to the encounter with the emperor's young leader,—that Don Juan of Aragon, duke of Segorbe, who served Victor Hugo as the model for his romantic personage *Hernani*! Flom! Rotoplom! The people ran for good places and jostled one another to obtain a better view of the guild members, bursting into laughter and shouts. What was that? A monkey?... A wild man?... Ah! The faith of the past was truly laughable.

The young members of the trade, their shirts open at the neck and their sleeves rolled up, took turns at carrying the heavy banner, performing feats of jugglery, balancing it on the palms of their hands or upon their teeth, to the rhythm of the drums.

The wealthy masters had the honor of holding the cords of the banner, and behind them marched the lion, the glorious lion of the guild, who was now no longer known. Nor did the lion march in careless fashion; he was dignified, as the old traditions bade him be, and as Senor Vicente had seen his father march, and as the latter had seen his grandfather; he kept time with the drums, bowing at every step, to right and to left, moving the Shrine fan-wise, like a polite and well-bred beast who knows the respect due to the public.

The farmers who had come to the celebration opened their eyes in amazement; the mothers pointed him out with their fingers so that the children might see him; but the youngsters, frowning, tightened their grasp upon their mothers' necks, hiding their faces to shed tears of terror.

When the banner halted, the glorious lion had to defend himself with his hind paws against the disrespectful swarm of gamins that surrounded him, trying to tear some locks out of his moth-eaten mane. At other times the beast looked up at the balconies to salute the pretty girls with the Shrine; they laughed at the grotesque figure. And Senor Vicente did wisely; however much of a lion one may be, one must be gallant toward the fair sex.

The spectators fanned themselves, trying to find a momentary coolness in the burning atmosphere; the *horchateros*^[2] bustled among the crowds shouting their wares, called from all directions at once and not knowing whither to go first; the standard-bearers and the drummers wiped the sweat off their faces at every restaurant door, and at last went inside to seek refreshment.

But the lion stuck to his post. His mask became soft; he walked with a certain weariness, letting the Shrine rest upon his stomach, having by this time lost all desire to bow to the public.

Fellow tanners approached him with jesting questions.

"How are things going, *so Visent*?"

And *so Visent* roared indignantly from the interior of his cardboard disguise. How should things go? Very well. He was able to keep it up, without failing in his part, even if the parade continued for three days. As for getting tired, leave that to the young folks. And drawing himself proudly erect, he resumed his bows, marking time with his swaying Shrine of wood.

The procession lasted three hours. When the guild banner returned to the Cathedral night was beginning to fall.

Plom! Retoplom! The glorious banner of the *blanquers* returned to its guild house behind the drums. The myrtle on the streets had disappeared beneath the feet of the paraders. Now the ground was covered with drops of wax, rose leaves and strips of tinsel. The liturgic perfume of incense floated through the air. Plom! Retoplom! The drums were tired; the strapping youths who had carried the standards were now panting, having lost all desire to perform balancing tricks; the rich masters clutched the cords of the banner tightly, as if the latter were towing them along, and they complained of their new shoes and their bunions; but the lion, the weary lion (ah, swaggering beast!), who at times seemed on the point of falling to the ground, still had strength left to rise on his hind paws and frighten the suburban couples, who pulled at a string of children that had been dazzled by the sights.

A lie! Pure conceit! Senor Vicente knew what it felt like to be inside of the lion's hide. But nobody is obliged to take the part of the lion, and he who assumes it must stick it out to the bitter end.

Once home, he sank upon the sofa like a bundle of wool; his sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren hastened to remove the mask from his face. They could scarcely recognize him, so congested and scarlet were his features, which seemed to spurt water from every line of his wrinkles.

They tried to remove his skins; but the beast was oppressed by a different desire, begging in a suffocated voice. He wished a drink; he was choking with the heat. The family, warning against illness, protested in vain. The deuce! He desired a drink right away. And who would dare resist an infuriated lion?...

From the nearest cafe they brought him some ice-cream in a blue cup; a Valencian ice cream, honey-sweet and grateful to the nostrils, glistening with drops of white juice at the conical top.

But what are ice creams to a lion! *Haaam!* He swallowed it at a single gulp, as if it were a mere trifle! His thirst and the heat assailed him anew, and he roared for other refreshment.

The family, for reasons of economy, thought of the *horchata* from a near-by restaurant. They would see; let a full jar

of it be brought. And Senor Vicente drank and drank until it was unnecessary to remove the skins from him. Why? Because an attack of double pneumonia finished him inside of a few hours. The glorious, shaggy-haired *uniform* of the family served him as a shroud.

Thus died the lion of the *blanquers*,--the last lion of Valencia.

And the fact is that *horchata* is fatal for beasts.... Pure poison!

END

FOOTNOTES:

A belfry in Valencia.

Vendors of *horchata*, iced orgeat.