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AT THE MISSION OF SAN CARMEL.

PROLOGUE.

It was noon of the 10th of August, 1838. The monotonous coast line between Monterey and San Diego had set its hard outlines against the steady glare of the Californian sky and the metallic glitter of the Pacific Ocean. The weary succession of rounded, dome-like hills obliterated all sense of distance; the rare whaling vessel or still rarer trader, drifting past, saw no change in these rusty undulations, barren of distinguishing peak or headland, and bald of wooded crest or timbered ravine. The withered ranks of wild oats gave a dull procession of uniform color to the hills, unbroken by any relief of shadow in their smooth, round curves. As far as the eye could reach, sea and shore met in one bleak monotony, flecked by no passing cloud, stirred by no sign of life nor motion. Even sound was absent; the Angelus rung from the invisible Mission tower, far inland, was driven back again by the steady northwest trades that for half the year had swept the coast line, and left it abraded of all umbrage and color.

But even this monotony soon gave way to a change, and another monotony as uniform and depressing. The western horizon, slowly contracting before a wall of vapor, by 4 o'clock had become a mere cold, steely strip of sea, into which gradually the northern trend of the coast faded and was lost. As the fog stole with soft step southward, all distance, space, character, and locality again vanished; the hills upon which the sun still shone bore the same monotonous outlines as those just wiped into space. Last of all, before the red sun sank like the descending Host, it gleamed upon the sails of a trading vessel close in shore. It was the last object visible. A damp breath breathed upon it, a soft hand passed over the slate, the sharp pencilling of the picture faded and became a confused gray cloud.

The wind and waves, too, went down in the fog; the now invisible and hushed breakers occasionally sent the surf over the sand in a quick whisper, with grave intervals of silence, but with no continuous murmur as before. In a curving bight of the shore the creaking of oars in their rowlocks began to be distinctly heard, but the boat itself, although apparently only its length from the sands, wasin visible.

"Steady, now; way enough." The voice came from the sea, and was low, as if unconsciously affected by the fog. "Silence!"

The sound of a keel grating the sand was followed by the order, "Stern all!" from the invisible speaker.

"Shall we beach her?" asked another vague voice.

"Not yet. Hail again, and all together."

"Ah hoy—oi—oi—oy!"

There were four voices, but the hail appeared weak and ineffectual, like a cry in a dream, and seemed to hardly reach beyond the surf before it was suffocated in the creeping cloud. A silence followed, but no response.

"It's no use to beach her and go ashore until we find the boat," said the first voice, gravely; "and we'll do that if the current has brought her here. Are you sure you've got the right bearings?"

"As near as a man could off a shore with not a blasted pint to take his bearings by."

There was a long silence again, broken only by the occasional dip of oars, keeping the invisible boat head to the sea.

"Take my word for it, la is, it's the last we'll see of that boat again, or of Jack Cranch, or the Captain's baby."

"It *does* look mighty quaer that the painter should slip. Jack Cranch ain't the man to tie a granny knot."

"Silence!" said the invisible leader. "Listen."

A hail, so faint and uncertain that it might have been the long-deferred far-off echo of their own, came from the sea abreast of them.

"It's the Captain. He hasn't found anything or he couldn't be so far north. Hark!"

The hail was repeated again faintly, dreamily. To the seamen's trained ears it seemed to have an intelligent significance, for the first voice gravely responded, "Aye, aye!" and then said, softly, "Oars."

The word was followed by a splash. The oars clicked sharply and simultaneously in the rowlocks, then more faintly, then still fainter, and then passed out into the darkness.

The silence and shadow both fell together; for hours sea and shore were impenetrable. Yet at times the air was softly moved and troubled. The surrounding gloom was faintly lightened as with a misty dawn, and then was dark again. Then droway, far-off cries and confused noises seemed to grow out of the silence, and, when they had attracted the weary ear, sank away as in a mocking dream, and showed themselves unreal. Nebulous gatherings in the fog seemed to indicate stationary objects that, even as one gazed, moved away; the recurring lap and ripple on the shingle sometimes took upon itself the semblance of faint articulate laughter or spoken words. But toward morning a certain monotonous grating on the sand, that had for many minutes alternately cheated and piqued the ear, asserted itself more strongly, and a moving, vacillating shadow in the gloom became an opaque object on the shore.

With the first rays of the morning light the fog lifted. As the undraped hills one by one bared their cold bosoms to the sun, the long line of coast struggled back to life again. Everything was unchanged—except that a stranded boat lay upon the sands, and in its stern sheets a sleeping child.

I.

The tenth of August, 1852, brought little change to the dull monotony of wind, fog, and treeless coast line. Only the sea was occasionally flecked with racing sails that outstripped the old, slow creeping trader, or was at times streaked and blurred with the trailing smoke of a steamer. There were a few strange footprints on those virgin sands, and a fresh track that led from the beach over the rounded hills dropped into the dusky recesses of a hidden valley beyond the coast range.

It was here that the refectory windows of the Mission of San Carmel had for years looked upon the reverse of that monotonous picture presented to the sea. It was here that the trade winds, shorn of their fury and strength in the heated, ovenlike air that rose from the valley, lost their weary way in the tangled recesses of the wooded slopes and breathed their last at the foot of the stone cross before the Mission. It was on the crest of those slopes that the fog halted and wallowed in the sun-illumined plain below; it was in the plain that limitless fields of grain clothed the rich adobe soil; here the Mission garden smiled over its hedges of fruitful vines, and through the leaves of fig and gnarled pear trees; and it was here that Father Pedro had lived for fifty years, found the prospect good, and had smiled also.

Father Pedro's smile was rare. He was not a Las Casas, nor a Junipero Serra, but he had the deep seriousness of all disciples laden with the responsible wording of a gospel not their own. And his smile had an ecclesiastical as well as a human significance—the pleasantest object in his prospect being the fair and curly head of his boy acolyte and chorister, Francisco, who appeared among the vines, and his sweetest pastoral music the high soprano humming of a chant with which the boy accompanied his gardening.

Suddenly the acolyte's chant changed to a cry of terror. Running rapidly to Father Pedro's side, he grasped his cassock, and even tried to hide his curls among its folds.

"St! st!" said the Padre, disengaging himself with some impatience. "What new alarm is this? Is it Luzbel hiding among our Cataian vines, or one of those heathen *Americanos* from Monterey? Speak!"

"Neither, holy father," said the boy, the color struggling back into his pale cheeks, and an apologetic, bashful smile lighting his clear eyes. "Neither; but oh! such a gross, lethargic toad! And it almost leaped upon me."

"A toad leaped upon thee!" repeated the good father, with evident vexation. "What next? I tell thee, child, those foolish fears are most unmeet for thee, and must be overcome—if necessary, with prayer and penance. Frightened by a toad! Blood of the Martyrs! 'Tis like any foolish girl!"

Father Pedro stopped and coughed.

"I am saying that no Christian child should shrink from any of God's harmless creatures. And only last week thou wast disdainful of poor Murieta's pig, forgetting that San Antonio did himself elect one his faithful companion, even in glory."

"Yes, but it was so fat, and so uncleanly, holy father," replied the young acolyte, "and it smelt so."

"Smelt so?" echoed the father doubtfully. "Have a care, child, that this is not luxuriousness of the senses. I have noticed of late you gather over much of roses and syringa—excellent in their way and in moderation, but still not to be compared with the flower of Holy Church—the lily."

"But lilies don't look well on the refectory table, and against the *adobe* wall," returned the acolyte with a pout of a spoilt child; "and surely the flowers cannot help being sweet, any more than myrrh or incense. And I am not frightened at the heathen *Americanos* either *now*. There was a small one in the garden yesterday—a boy like me—and he spoke kindly and with a pleasant face."

"What said he to thee, child?" asked Father Pedro anxiously.

"Nay, the matter of his speech I could not understand," laughed the boy; "but the manner was as gentle as thine, holy father."

"'St, child," said the Padre impatiently. "Thy likings are as unreasonable as thy fears. Besides, have I not told thee it ill becomes a child of Christ to chatter with those sons of Belial? But canst thou not repeat the words—the *words* he said?" he continued suspiciously.

"'Tis a harsh tongue the *Americanos* speak in their throat," replied the boy. "But he said 'Devilishnissa' and 'pretty-as-a-girl,' and looked at me."

The good father made the boy repeat the words gravely, and as gravely repeated them after him with infinite simplicity. "They are but heretical words," he replied in answer to the boy's inquiring look; "it it well you understand not English. Enough. Run away, child, and be ready for the Angelus. I will commune with myself awhile under the pear trees."

Glad to escape so easily, the young acolyte disappeared down the alley of fig trees, not without a furtive look at the patches of chickweed around their roots, the possible ambuscade of creeping or saltant vermin. The good priest heaved a sigh and glanced around the darkening prospect. The sun had already disappeared over the mountain wall that lay between him and the sea, rimmed with a faint white line of outlying fog. A cool zephyr fanned his cheek; it was the dying breath of the *vientos generales* beyond the wall. As Father Pedro's eyes were raised to this barrier, which seemed to shut out the boisterous world beyond, he fancied he noticed for the first time a slight breach in the parapet, over which an advanced banner of the fog was fluttering. Was it an omen? His speculations were cut short by a voice at his very side.

He turned quickly and beheld one of those "heathens" whom he had just warned his young acolyte against; one of that straggling band of adventurers whom the recent gold discoveries had scattered along the coast. Luckily the fertile alluvium of these valleys, lying parallel with the sea, offered no "indications" to attract the gold seekers. Nevertheless to Father Pedro even the infrequent contact with the *Americanos* was objectionable. They were at once inquisitive and careless. They asked questions with the sharp perspicacity of controversy. They received his grave replies with the frank indifference of utter worldliness. Powerful enough to have been tyrannical oppressors, they were singularly tolerant and gentle, contenting themselves with a playful, good-natured irreverence, which tormented the good father more than opposition. They were felt to be dangerous and subversive.

The *Americano*, however, who stood before him did not offensively suggest these national qualities. A man of middle height, strongly built, bronzed and slightly gray from the vicissitudes of years and exposure, he had an air of practical seriousness that commended itself to Father Pedro. To his religious mind it suggested self-consciousness; expressed in the dialect of the stranger it only meant "business."

"I'm rather glad I found you out here alone," began the latter; "it saves time. I haven't got to take my turn with the rest, in there"—he indicated the church with his thumb—"and you haven't got to make an appointment. You have got a clear forty minutes before the Angelus rings," he added, consulting a large silver chronometer, "and I reckon I kin git through my part of the job inside of twenty, leaving you ten minutes for remarks. I want to confess."

Father Pedro drew back with a gesture of dignity. The stranger, however, laid his hand upon the Padre's sleeve with the air of a man anticipating objection, but never refused, and went on:

"Of course, I know. You want me to come at some other time, and in *there*. You want it in the reg'lar style. That's your way and your time. My answer is: It ain't *my* way and *my* time. The main idea of confession, I take it, is gettin' at the facts. I'm ready to give 'em if you'll take 'em out here, now. If you're willing to drop the Church and confessional, and all that sort o' thing, I, on my side, am willing to give up the absolution, and all that sort o' thing. You might," he added, with an unconscious touch of pathos in the suggestion, "heave in a word or two of advice after I get through; for instance, what *you'd* do in the circumstances, you see! That's all. But that's as you please. It aint part of the business."

Irreverent as this speech appeared, there was really no trace of such intention in his manner, and his evident profound conviction that his suggestion was practical, and not at all inconsistent with ecclesiastical dignity, would alone have been enough to touch the Padre, had not the stranger's dominant personality already overridden him. He hesitated. The stranger seized the opportunity to take his arm, and lead him with the half familiarity of powerful protection to a bench beneath the refectory windows. Taking out his watch again, he put it in the passive hands of the astonished priest, saying, "Time me," cleared his throat, and began:

"Fourteen years ago there was a ship cruisin' in the Pacific, jest off this range, that was as nigh on to a Hell afloat as anything rigged kin be. If a chap managed to dodge the Cap'en's belaying pin for a time, he was bound to be fetched up in the ribs at last by the mate's boots. There was a chap knocked down the fore hatch with a broken leg in the Gulf, and another jumped overboard off Cape Corrientes, crazy as a loon, along a clip of the head from the Cap'en's trumpet. Them's facts. The ship was a brigantine, trading along the Mexican coast. The Cap'en had his wife aboard, a little, timid Mexican woman he'd picked up at Mazatlan. I reckon she did not get on with him any better than the men, for she up and dies one day, leavin' her baby, a year-old girl. One of the crew was fond o' that baby. He used to get the black nurse to put it in the dingey, and he'd tow it astern, rocking it with the painter like a cradle. He did it—hatin' the Cap'en all the same. One day the black nurse got out of the dingey for a moment, when the baby was asleep, leavin' him alone with it. An idea took hold on him—jest for cussedness, you'd say—but it was partly for revenge on the Cap'en and partly to get away from the ship. The ship was well in shore, and the current settin' toward it. He slipped the painter—that man—and set himself adrift with the baby. It was a crazy act, you'd reckon, for there wasn't any oars in the boat; but he had a crazy man's luck, and he contrived by scuttling the boat with one of the seats he tore out, to keep her out of the breakers, till he could find a bight in the shore to run her in. The alarm was given from the ship, but the fog shut down upon him; he could hear the other boats in pursuit. They seemed to close in on him, and by the sound he judged the Cap'en was just abreast of him in the *star*, bearing down upon him in the fog. He slipped out of the dingey into the water without a splash, and struck out for the breakers. He got ashore after havin' been knocked down and dragged in four times by the undertow. He had only one idea then—thankfulness that he had not taken the baby with him in the surf. You kin put that down for him; it's a fact. He got off into the hills, and made his way up to Monterey."

"And the child?" asked the Padre, with a sudden and strange asperity that boded no good to the penitent; "the child thus ruthlessly abandoned—what became of it?"

"That's just it, the child," assented the stranger, gravely. "Well, if that man was on his deathbed instead of being here talking to you, he'd swear that he thought the Cap'en was sure to come up to it the next minit. That's a fact. But it wasn't until one day that he—that's me—ran across one of that crew in Frisco. 'Hallo, Cranch,' sez he to me, 'so you got away, didn't you? And how's the Cap'en's baby? Grown a young gal by this time, aint she?' 'What are you talking about,' sez I; 'how should I know?' He draws away from me, and sez, 'D— it,' sez he, 'you don't mean that you'— I grabs him by the throat and makes him tell me all. And then it appears that the boat and the baby were never found again, and every man of that crew, Cap'en and all, believed I had stolen it."

He paused. Father Pedro was staring at the prospect with an uncompromising rigidity of head and shoulder.

"It's a bad look out for me, ain't it?" the stranger continued, in serious reflection.

"How do I know," said the priest harshly, without turning his head, "that you did not make away with this child?"

"Beg pardon."

"That you did not complete your revenge by—by—by killing it—as your comrades suspected you? Ah! Holy Trinity," continued Father Pedro, throwing out his hands with an impatient gesture, as if to take the place of unutterable thought.

"How do *you* know?" echoed the stranger coldly.

"Yes."

The stranger linked his fingers together, and threw them over his knee, drew it up to his chest caressingly and said quietly, "Because you *do* know."

The Padre rose to his feet.

"What mean you?" he said, sternly fixing his eyes upon the speaker. Their eyes met. The stranger's were gray and persistent, with hanging corner lids that might have concealed even more purpose than they showed. The Padre's were hollow, open, and the whites slightly brown, as if with tobacco stains. Yet they were the first to turn away.

"I mean," returned the stranger, with the same practical gravity, "that you know it wouldn't pay me to come here, if I'd killed the baby, unless I wanted you to fix things right with me up there," pointing skywards, "and get absolution, and I've told you *that* wasn't in my line."

"Why do you seek me, then?" demanded the Padre, suspiciously.

"Because I reckon I thought a man might be allowed to confess something short of a murder. If you're going to draw the line below that—"

"This is but sacrilegious levity," interrupted Father Pedro, turning as if to go. But the stranger did not make any movement to detain him.

"Have you implored forgiveness of the father—the man you wronged—before you came here?" asked the priest, lingering.

"Not much. It wouldn't pay if he was living, and he died four years ago."

"You are sure of that?"

"I am."

"There are other relations, perhaps?"

"None."

Father Pedro was silent. When he spoke again it was in a changed voice. "What is your purpose, then?" he asked, with the first indication of priestly sympathy in his manner. "You cannot ask forgiveness of the earthly father you have injured, you refuse the intercession of Holy Church with the heavenly Father you have disobeyed. Speak, wretched man! What is it you want?"

"I want to find the child."

"But if it were possible, if she were still living, are you fit to seek her, to even make yourself known to her, to appear before her?"

"Well, if I made it profitable to her, perhaps."

"Perhaps," echoed the priest, scornfully. "So be it. But why come here?"

"To ask your advice. To know how to begin my search. You know this country. You were here when that boat drifted ashore beyond that mountain."

"Ah, indeed. I have much to do with it. It is an affair of the Alcalde—the authorities—of your—your police."

"Is it?"

The Padre again met the stranger's eyes. He stopped, with the snuff box he had somewhat ostentatiously drawn from his pocket still open in his hand.

"Why is it not, señor?" he demanded.

"If she lives she is a young lady by this time, and might not want the details of her life known to any one."

"And how will you recognize your baby in this young lady?" asked Father Pedro, with a rapid gesture, indicating the comparative heights of a baby and an adult.

"I reckon I'll know her, and her clothes too, and whoever found her wouldn't be fool enough to destroy them."

"After fourteen years! Good! You have faith, Señor—"

"Cranch," supplied the stranger, consulting his watch. "But time's up. Business is business. Good-by; don't let me keep you."

He extended his hand.

The Padre met it with a dry, unsympathetic palm, as sere and yellow as the hills. When their hands separated, the father still hesitated, looking at Cranch. If he expected further speech or entreaty from him he was mistaken, for the American, without turning his head, walked in the same serious, practical fashion down the avenue of fig trees, and disappeared beyond the hedge of vines. The outlines of the mountain beyond were already lost in the fog. Father Pedro turned into the refectory.

"Antonio."

A strong flavor of leather, onions, and stable preceded the entrance of a short, stout *caquero* from the little *patio*.

"Saddle Pinto and thine own mule to accompany Francisco, who will take letters from me to the Father Superior at San José to-morrow at daybreak."

"At daybreak, reverend father?"

"At daybreak. Hark ye, go by the mountain trails and avoid the highway. Stop at no *posada* nor *fonda*, but if the child is weary, rest then a while at Don Juan Briones or at the rancho of the Blessed Fisherman. Have no converse with stragglers—least of all those gentile *Americanos*. So. * * *"

The first strokes of the Angelus came from the nearer tower. With a gesture Father Pedro waved Antonio aside, and opened the door of the sacristy.

"*Ad Majorem dei Gloriam.*"

II.

The hacienda of Don Juan Briones, nestling in a wooded cleft of the foot hills, was hidden, as Father Pedro had wisely reflected, from the straying feet of travellers along the dusty highway to San José. As Francisco, emerging from the *cañada*, put spurs to his mule at the sight of the whitewashed walls, Antonio grunted:

"Oh ay, little priest! thou wast tired enough a moment ago, and though we are not three leagues from the Blessed Fisherman, thou couldst scarce sit thy saddle longer. Mother of God! and all to see that little mongrel, Juanita."

"But, good Antonio, Juanita was my playfellow, and I may not soon again chance this way. And Juanita is not a mongrel, no more than I am."

"She is a *mestiza*, and thou art a child of the Church, though this following of gypsy wenches does not show it."

"But Father Pedro does not object," urged the boy.

"The reverend father has forgotten he was ever young," replied Antonio, sententiously, "or he wouldn't set fire and tow together."

"What sayest thou, good Antonio?" asked Francisco, quickly opening his blue eyes in frank curiosity; "who is fire, and who is tow?"

The worthy muleteer, utterly abashed and confounded by this display of the acolyte's direct simplicity, contented himself by shrugging his shoulders, and a vague "*Quien sabe?*"

"Come," said the boy, gayly, "confess it is only the *aguardiente* of the Blessed Fisherman thou missest. Never fear, Juanita will find thee some. And see! here she comes."

There was a flash of white flounces along the dark brown corridor, the twinkle of satin slippers, the flying out of long black braids, and with a cry of joy a young girl threw herself upon Francisco as he entered the *patio*, and nearly dragged him from his mule.

"Have a care, little sister," laughed the acolyte, looking at Antonio, "or there will be a conflagration. Am I the fire?" he continued, submitting to the two sounding kisses the young girl placed upon either cheek, but still keeping his mischievous glance upon the muleteer.

"*Quien sabe?*" repeated Antonio, gruffly, as the young girl blushed under his significant eyes. "It is no affair of mine," he added to himself, as he led Pinto away. "Perhaps Father Pedro is right, and this young twig of the church is as dry and sapless as himself. Let the *mestiza* burn if she likes."

"Quick, Pancho," said the young girl, eagerly leading him along the corridor. "This way. I must talk with thee before thou seest Don Juan; that is why I ran to intercept thee, and not, as that fool Antonio would signify, to shame thee. Wast thou ashamed, my Pancho?"

The boy threw his arm familiarly round the supple, stayless little waist, accented only by the belt of the light flounced *saya*, and said:

"But why this haste and feverishness, 'Nita? And now I look at thee, thou hast been crying."

They had emerged from a door in the corridor into the bright sunlight of a walled garden. The girl dropped her eyes, cast a quick glance around her, and said:

"Not here—to the *arroyo*," and half leading, half dragging him, made her way through a copse of *manzanita* and alder until they heard the faint tinkling of water. "Dost thou remember," said the girl, "it was here," pointing to an embayed pool in the dark current, "that I baptised thee, when Father Pedro first brought thee here, when we both *played* at being monks. They were dear old days, for Father Padro would trust no one with thee but me, and always kept us near him."

"Ay, and he said I would be profaned by the touch of any other, and so himself always washed and dressed me and made my bed near his."

"And took thee away again, and I saw thee not till thou camest with Antonio, over a year ago, to the cattle branding. And now, my Pancho, I may never see thee again." She buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud.

The little acolyte tried to comfort her, but with such abstraction of manner and inadequacy of warmth that she hastily removed his caressing hand.

"But why? What has happened?" he asked, eagerly.

The girl's manner had changed. Her eyes flashed, and she put her brown fist on her waist and began to rock from side to side.

"But I'll not go," she said, viciously.

"Go where?" asked the boy.

"Oh, where?" she echoed, impatiently. "Hear me, Francisco; thou knowest I am, like thee, an orphan; but I have not, like thee, a parent in the Holy Church. For, alas," she added, bitterly, "I am not a boy, and have not a lovely voice borrowed from the angels. I was like thee, a foundling, kept by the charity of the reverend fathers, until Don Juan, a childless widower, adopted me. I was happy, not knowing and caring who were the parents who had abandoned me, happy only in the love of him who became my adopted father. And now—," she paused.

"And now?" echoed Francisco, eagerly.

"And now they say it is discovered who are my parents."

"And they live?"

"Mother of God! no," said the girl, with scarcely filial piety. "There is some one, a thing—a mere Don Fulano—who knows it all, it seems, who is to be my guardian."

"But how? Tell me all, dear Juanita," said the boy with a feverish interest, that contrasted so strongly with his previous abstraction that Juanita bit her lips with vexation.

"Ah! How? Santa Barbara! an extravaganza for children. A necklace of lies. I am lost from a ship of which my father—heaven rest him—is General, and I am picked up among the weeds on the sea shore, like Moses in the bulrushes. A pretty story, indeed."

"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Francisco, enthusiastically. "Ah, Juanita! would it had been me."

"*Thee!*" said the girl bitterly—"thee! No!—it was a girl wanted. Enough, it was me."

"And when does the guardian come?" persisted the boy with sparkling eyes.

"He is here even now with that pompous fool, the American Alcalde from Monterey—a wretch who knows nothing of the country or the people, but who helped the other American to claim me. I tell thee, Francisco, like as not it is all a folly; some senseless blunder of those *Americanos* that imposes upon Don Juan's simplicity and love for them."

"How looks he—this *Americano* who seeks thee?" asked Francisco.

"What care I how he looks," said Juanita, "or what he is." He may have the four S's, for all I care. Yet," she added with a slight touch of coquetry, "he is not bad to look upon, now I recall him."

"Had he a long moustache and a sad, sweet smile, and a voice so gentle and yet so strong, that you felt he ordered you to do things without saying it? And did his eye read your thoughts—that very thought that you must obey him?"

"Saints preserve thee, Pancho! Of whom dost thou speak?"

"Listen, Juanita. It was a year ago, the eve of Natividad, he was in the church when I sang. Look where I would, I always met his eye. When the canticle was sung and I was slipping into the sacristy, he was beside me. He spoke kindly, but I understood him not. He put into my hand gold for an *aguinaldo*. I pretended I understood not that also, and put it into the box for the poor. He smiled and went away. Often have I seen him since, and last night when I left the Mission, he was there again with Father Pedro."

"And Father Pedro—what said he of him?" asked Juanita.

"Nothing." The boy hesitated. "Perhaps—because I said nothing of the stranger."

Juanita laughed. "So thou canst keep a secret from the good father when thou caresst. But why dost thou think this stranger is my new guardian?"

"Dost thou not see, little sister? he was even then seeking thee," said the boy with joyous excitement. "Doubtless he knew we were friends and playmates—may be the good father has told him thy secret. For it is no idle tale of the Alcalde, believe me. I see it all! It is true!"

"Then thou wilt let him take me away," said the girl bitterly, withdrawing the little hand he had clasped in his excitement.

"Alas! Juanita, what avails it now? I am sent to San José, charged with a letter to the Father Superior, who will give me further orders. What they are, or how long I must stay, I know not. But I know this: the good Father Pedro's eyes were troubled when he gave me his blessing, and he held me long in his embrace. Pray heaven I have committed no fault. Still it may be that the reputation of my gift hath reached the Father Superior, and he would advance me." And Francisco's eyes lit up with youthful pride at the thought.

Not so Juanita. Her black eyes snapped suddenly with suspicion; she drew in her breath, and closed her little mouth firmly. Then she began a *crescendo*.

Mother of God! was that all? Was he a child to be sent away for such time or for such purpose as best pleased the fathers? Was he to know no more than that? With such gifts as God had given him, was he not at least to have some word in disposing of them? Ah! *She* would not stand it.

The boy gazed admiringly at the piquant energy of the little figure before him, and envied her courage. "It is the *mestizo* blood," he murmured to himself. Then aloud, "Thou shouldst have been a man, 'Nita."

"And thou a woman."

"Or a priest. Eh, what is that?"

They had both risen—Juanita defiantly, her black braids flying as she wheeled and suddenly faced the thicket. Francisco clinging to her with trembling hands and whitened lips. A stone loosened from the hillside had rolled to their feet; there was a crackling in the alders on the slope above them.

"It is a bear, or a brigand?" whispered Francisco hurriedly, sounding the uttermost depths of his terror in the two words. "It is an eavesdropper," said Juanita, impetuously; "and who and why, I intend to know," and she started toward the thicket.

"Do not leave me, good Juanita," said the young acolyte, grasping the girl's skirt.

"Nay; run to the hacienda quickly, and leave me to search the thicket. Run!"

The boy did not wait for a second injunction, but scuttled away, his long coat catching in the brambles, while Juanita darted like a kitten into the bushes. Her search was fruitless, however, and she was returning impatiently when her quick eye fell upon a letter lying amid the dried grass where she and Francisco had been seated the moment before. It had evidently fallen from his breast when he had risen suddenly, and been overlooked in his alarm. It was Father Pedro's letter to the Father Superior of San José.

In an instant she had pounced upon it as viciously as if it had been the interloper she was seeking. She knew that she held in her fingers the secret of Francisco's sudden banishment. She felt instinctively that his yellowish envelope, with its red string and its blotch of red seal, was his sentence and her own. The little *mestiza* had not been brought up to respect the integrity of either locks or seals, both being unknown in the patriarchal life of the hacienda. Yet, with a certain feminine instinct, she looked furtively around her, and even managed to dislodge the clumsy wax without marring the pretty effigy of the crossed keys impressed upon it. Then she opened the letter and read.

Suddenly she stopped and put back her hair from her brown temples. Then a succession of burning blushes followed each other in waves from her neck up, and died in drops of moisture in her eyes. This continued until she was fairly crying, dropping the letter from her hands, and rocking to and fro. In the midst of this she quickly stopped again; the clouds broke, a sunshine of laughter started from her eyes, she laughed shyly, she laughed loudly, she laughed hysterically. Then she stopped again as suddenly, knitted her brows, swooped down once more upon the letter, and turned to fly. But at the same moment the letter was quietly but firmly taken from her hand, and Mr. Jack Cranch stood beside her.

Juanita was crimson, but unconquered. She mechanically held out her hand for the letter; the American took her little fingers, kissed them, and said:

"How are you again?"

"The letter," replied Juanita, with a strong disposition to stamp her foot.

"But," said Cranch, with business directness, "you've read enough to know it isn't for you."

"Nor for you, either," responded Juanita.

"True. It is for the Reverend Father Superior of San José Mission. I'll give it to him."

Juanita was becoming alarmed—first at this prospect, second at the power the stranger seemed to be gaining over her. She recalled Francisco's description of him with something like superstitious awe.

"But it concerns Francisco. It contains a secret he should know."

"Then you can tell him it. Perhaps it would come easier from you."

Juanita blushed again. "Why?" she asked, half dreading his reply.

"Because," said the American quietly, "you are old playmates—you are attached to each other."

Juanita bit her lips. "Why don't you read it yourself?" she asked, bluntly.

"Because I don't read other people's letters, and if it concerns me you'll tell me."

"What if I don't?"

"Then the Father Superior will."

"I believe you know Francisco's secret already," said the girl, boldly.

"Perhaps."

"Then, Mother of God! Señor Cranch, what do you want?"

"I do not want to separate two such good friends as you and Francisco."

"Perhaps you'd like to claim us both," said the girl, with a sneer that was not devoid of coquetry.

"I should be delighted."

"Then here is your occasion, Señor, for here comes my adopted father, Don Juan, and your friend, Señor Br—r—own, the American Alcalde."

Two men appeared in the garden path below them. The stiff, glazed, broad-brimmed black hat, surmounting a dark face of Quixotic gravity and romantic rectitude, indicated Don Juan Briones. His companion, lazy, specious, and red faced, was Señor Brown, the American Alcalde.

"Well, I reckon we kin about call the thing fixed," said Señor Brown, with a large wave of the hand, suggesting a sweeping away of all trivial details. "Ez I was saying to the Don yer, when two high-toned gents like you and him come together in a delicate matter of this kind, it ain't no hoss trade nor sharp practice. The Don is that lofty in principle that he's willin' to sacrifice his affections for the good of the gal; and you, on your hand, kalkilate to see all he's done for her, and go your whole pile better. You'll make the legal formalities good. I reckon that old Injin woman who can swear to the finding of the baby on the shore will set things all right yet. For the matter o' that, if you want anything in the way of a certificate, I'm on hand always."

"Juanita and myself are at your disposition, *caballeros*," said Don Juan, with a grave exaltation. "Never let it be said that the Mexican nation was outdone by the great *Americanos* in deeds of courtesy and affection. Let it rather stand that Juanita was a sacred trust put into my hands years ago by the goddess of American liberty, and nurtured in the Mexican eagle's nest. Is it not so, my soul?" he added, more humanly, to the girl, when he had quite recovered from the intoxication of his own speech. "We love *thee*, little one, but we keep our honor."

"There's nothing mean about the old man," said Brown, admiringly, with a slight drooping of his left eyelid; "his head is level, and he goes with his party."

"Thou takest my daughter, Señor Cranch," continued the old man, carried away by his emotion; "but the American nation gives me a son."

"You know not what you say, father," said the young girl, angrily, exasperated by a slight twinkle in the American's eye.

"Not so," said Cranch. "Perhaps one of the American nation may take him at his word."

"Then, *caballeros*, you will for the moment, at least, possess yourselves of the house and its poor hospitality," said Don Juan, with time-honored courtesy, producing the rusty key of the gate of the *patio*. "It is at your disposition, *caballeros*," he repeated, leading the way as his guests passed into the corridor.

Two hours passed. The hills were darkening on their eastern slopes. The shadows of the few poplars that sparsely dotted that dusty highway were falling in long black lines that looked like ditches on the dead level of the tawny fields. The shadows of slowly moving cattle were mingling with their own silhouettes, and becoming more and more grotesque. A keen wind rising in the hills was already creeping from the *cañada* as from the mouth of a funnel, and sweeping the plains. Antonio had foregathered with the servants, had pinched the ears of the maids, had partaken of *aguardiente*, had saddled the mules—Antonio was becoming impatient.

And then a singular commotion disturbed the peaceful monotony of the patriarchal household of Don Juan Briones. The stagnant courtyard was suddenly alive with peons and servants, running hither and thither. The alleys and gardens were filled with retainers. A confusion of questions, orders, and outcries rent the air, the plains shook with the galloping of a dozen horsemen. For the acolyte Francisco of the Mission San Carmel had disappeared and vanished, and from that day the hacienda of Don Juan Briones knew him no more.

(*To be concluded.*)

SARDOU'S NEW PLAY.

A Romance of Nihilism With a Remarkable Part for Sarah Bernhardt.

PARIS, Dec. 12.—The Parisians are so constituted that a new play of Sardou throws all other topics into the background, while Sarah Bernhardt's début before a Parisian audience, after her adventures as a wandering star, has the privilege of overshadowing the memories of two great men who had the misfortune to die at this inopportune moment—Louis Blanc and the advocate Georges Lachaud, the greatest French criminal pleader of this century after Chaix d'Est Ange. One must have lived at Paris, and lived the life of the Parisians, in order to realize the intensity of public curiosity on this occasion. It was simply phenomenal. How many people last night vainly offered $100 for the privilege of witnessing the first performance of "Fedora" from a stool in a passage way!

I need not tell the old story of Sardou's manner of writing a play, of the conscientious way in which he superintends every detail of the preparation, of his famous mufflers, his château at Marly, and the other hackneyed anecdotes. But before analyzing the plot and the principal situations, I wish to call attention to the fact that *Fedora* is the first role that Sarah Bernhardt has created. Hitherto she has only had episodic parts, for instance a scene in the third act of the "Fille de Roland," in the third act of the "Etrangère," in the fourth act of "Rome Vaincue," and a secondary character in the "Sphinx." In *Fedora* her rôle is complete, and allows the artiste to employ all her means, to display all the phases of her marvellous talent, all her exquisite femininity, impressionability, and nervosity. In a letter written on the eve of the first performance Sarah Bernhardt says: "To my mind, *Fedora* is, as it were, a second creation of woman. Eve, the creation of God, is woman. *Fedora*, Sardou's creation, is all woman. At least this is the way I have taken the rôle. *Fedora* is the incarnation of all feminine charms and of all feminine defects. In order to render fully the author's conception, she ought to be at once coquettish like a Slav, violent like a Spaniard, amorous like an Italian, refined like a French woman, and racy like an English woman; a white-winged fallen angel. I have tried to be all that, and for the first time my travels have been of advantage to me, for I have been able to study all these types from life."

Now let us see on what conditions the character of *Fedora* is developed. M. Sardou has hung his four acts of concentrated emotion and passion upon a peg of contemporary interest, namely, Nihilism. The first act takes place at St. Petersburg. The son of the Minister of the Russian police, *Wladimir Gariskine*, is found assassinated in an isolated house. The *Princess Fedora*, whom the young man is about to marry, not having seen him during the day, comes to his house after the theatre, just as his servants are bringing him home with a ball in the region of his heart. While *Wladimir* is breathing his last a summary inquiry is made. During the day a letter was brought to *Wladimir*; he put this letter in his desk; a search shows that the letter has disappeared; it has been stolen; who can have stolen it? only one man has entered the room, the *Count Loris Ivanoff*; it is therefore concluded that *Loris* stole the letter and that *Loris* is the assassin. The police go to arrest him; he has fled. *Wladimir* is son of the Police Minister, therefore *Loris* is a Nihilist and *Wladimir* is the victim of Nihilism. Such is the clear, rapid, and striking exposition of the drama.

The second act transports us to Paris, to the salon of the *Comtesse Olga Soukarof*, a young, pretty, and frivolous lady who plays at conspiracy in order to console herself for her disappointments in love. *Loris*, who has gone into exile to escape the persecution directed against him by the Police Minister, is an habitué of *Olga's* salon, and there he meets and falls in love with the *Princess Fedora*, who has imposed upon herself the mission of discovering the murderer of *Wladimir*, and under cover of a supposed disgrace has come to Paris to direct the secret police kept there by the Russian Government to watch the Nihilist refugees. To her surprise, *Fedora* felt no instinctive repulsion when *Loris* was presented to her; she almost likes him; she would certainly prefer to find him innocent. Meanwhile *Loris* declares his love she listens more sincerely than she had intended, but nevertheless, in one of the finest scenes of the drama, she struggles against her sympathy for *Loris*, masters her emotions, and plays his passion until she forces him to confess the crime. Yes, it is he, *Loris*, who killed *Wladimir!* Why? The story is too long to tell here in the *Comtesse Olga's* salon, above all places, where they might be observed or overheard. "Then, to-night at my house," exclaims *Fedora*, "towards 1 o'clock I will expect you, after the theatre." The confession of *Loris* that he killed *Wladimir* suffices. In *Fedora's* heart there is no longer love nor indulgence but only hatred and vengeance.

In the third act we find *Fedora* at her house on the Cours la Reine, the most deserted of the quays of Paris. *Fedora* is preparing her vengeance. She writes a letter to the Police Minister at St. Petersburg, announcing that the Nihilist, *Loris*, has confessed that he assassinated *Wladimir*, and adding, from the indications of the secret police, that his accomplices were his brother *Valerian* and his friend *Platon Sekoroff*. As *Loris's* crime is supposed to be political, it is useless to demand his extradition of the French Government. *Fedora*, who has her steam yacht moored at the quay, will take charge of the extradition herself. Accordingly she posts an ambush of secret police in her yard and gives them orders to seize, gag, and carry off *Loris* as he comes out of the vestibule after his interview with her.

Loris arrives full of tenderness and love; he resumes his story where it was interrupted in the second act; yes, he killed *Wladimir*, not out of political hatred. Why? Because *Wladimir* was the lover of his wife *Vanda!* He has the proofs, the letters of *Wladimir* to *Vanda*, a letter in which *Wladimir* announces that his marriage with *Fedora* is simply a matter of interest and money. *Loris* surprised *W