# HERO TALES OF IRELAND

## As Good as the Arabian Nights.

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### SEVENTH TALE.

**The King's Son from Erin, the Sprisawn, and the Dark King.**

There was a King in Erin long ago who was called King of Lochlinn, and his wife died. He had two sons. The older of the two was Miach Lay, the second was Manus. Miach Lay was a fine champion and trained in every art that befitted a king's son.

One day the father called Miach Lay to his presence and said: "It is time for you to marry, and I have chosen for you a maiden of great beauty and high birth."

"I am willing to marry," said Miach Lay.

The King and his son then left the castle and went to the house of the young woman's father, and there they spent seven days and seven nights. On their way home the King said to his son:

"How do like the young lady?"

"I like her well, but I'll not marry her."

"Oh, my shame!" said the father. "How can I ever face those people again?"

"I cannot help that," said Miach Lay.

The King was greatly confused. After another while he said to his son: "I have another maiden chosen for you, and it is well for us to go to her father's and settle the match."

"I am willing," said Miach Lay.

They went away together, and never stopped nor stayed till they reached the house of the young lady's father. They were welcomed there warmly, and spent seven days and seven nights, and were better attended each day than the day before.

"Well, my son," asked the father, "how do you like this match?"

"Well and very well," said Miach Lay, "but I will not marry this lady either. She is ten times better than the first, and if I had married the first I could not marry this one, and so I will not marry the second any more than the first lady."

"Oh, my shame!" said the father. "I can never show my face to these people again."

After another while the King told Miach Lay that he had a better lady than ever selected, and asked him to go with him to arrange the marriage.

"I am willing," answered the son.

The two went to the father of the maiden; they spent seven days and seven nights at his house, and were fully satisfied with everything. They were on the way home a third time. "Well," said the King, "you have no reason to refuse this time."

"Well, and very well, do I like the match," said Miach Lay, "but I will not marry this lady. If I had married the first lady I should have had no chance of getting the second, and the second is ten times better than the first; if I had married the second lady I should have had no chance of this one, and she is twenty times better than the second."

"I have lost all patience with you," said the King, "and I turn the back of my hand to you from this out."

"I'm fully satisfied," said Miach Lay, so they came home and passed that night without conversation. The following morning when Miach Lay rose he said to his father: "I shall be leaving the house now; will you prepare for me the best ship that you have and put in it a good store of provisions for a long voyage?"

The vessel was prepared and fully provisioned for a day and a year. The King's son went on board, sailed out of the harbor, and off to sea. He never stopped sailing till he entered a harbor in the kingdom of Greece. There was a guard there on watch at the harbor with a keen eye on all ships that were passing or coming. The King of Greece was at war in that time with the King of Spain, and knew not what moment his kingdom would be invaded.

The guard saw the vessel coming when she was so small to the eye that he could not tell was it a bird or a vessel that he was looking at. He took quick tidings to the King's castle, and the King ordered him to go a second time and bring tidings. When he reached the sea the ship was inside in the harbor.

"Oh," said the king, when the guard ran to him a second time, "that is a wonderful vessel that was so far away a few minutes ago as not to be told from a bird, and is now sailing into harbor."

"There is but one man to be seen on board," said the guard.

In front of the King's castle was the landing place, the only one of the harbor, and even there no one went beyond the shore without passing through a gate where every man had to give an account of himself. There was a chosen champion guarding the gate who spoke to Miach Lay and asked: "Who are you, and from what country do you come?"

"It is not the custom for a man of my people to answer a question like that till he is told first what country he is in, and who asks the question."

"It was I asked the question," said the champion, "and you must tell me who you are, first of all."

"I will not tell you," said Miach Lay. With that he drew his ship nearer land till it grounded, then taking an oar he put the blade end in the sand and sprang to shore. He then asked the champion at the gate to let him pass, but the champion refused. Miach Lay raised his hand and struck a blow on the oar, and sent him backward spinning like a top, till he struck the pillar of the gate and broke his skull. As Miach Lay had no thought to kill the man he was grieved, and delaying a short time went to the castle of the King, not knowing what country he was in or what city.

When he came to the castle he met a man of rank, who called to him in front of it. The people in the castle saw a young champion with bared head outside; the King came, out and speaking to him, asked what the matter was. Miach Lay told of all that had happened at the harbor, and how he had killed the champion at the gate without wishing it.

"Never mind that," said the King.

"I did not intend to kill or harm him at all," said Miach Lay; "he wanted to know who I was, and from what country; by the custom of my land I cannot tell that till I know where I am and who are the people among whom I am travelling."

"Do you know now where you are?"

"I do not," answered Miach Lay.

"You are in front of the castle of the King of Greece, and I am that King."

"I am the son of the King of Lochlinn from Erin," said Miach Lay, "and have come this way to seek my fortune."

The King of Greece welcomed him then, took the young champion by the hand, and did not stop till he brought him to where all the princes and nobles were assembled; he was rejoiced at his coming, for, being at war, he expected aid from this champion.

"Will you remain with me for a day and a year," asked the King, "and perform what service I ask of you?"

"I will," said Miach Lay.

Manus, the second son of the King of Lochlinn, stopped going to school when Miach Lay, his elder brother, left home, and, after a time, the father wished to have him home. The older son had acted so did the second; he refused to marry each of the three maidens whom the King had chosen, and left his father at last.

Manus was watching when his brother sailed away and noticed the course the vessel took, so now he sailed the same way.

Miach Lay was gaining favor continually, and from as the day and the year of his service were out to a month, the King's guard saw a vessel sailing in swiftly. He ran with tidings to the King, and added: "There is only one man on board."

The King and the nobles said it was best not to let him land till he gave an account of himself. Miach Lay was sent to the landing place to get account of him.

He was not long at the landing place when the vessel came within hailing, and Miach Lay asked the one man on board who he was and whence he came. The man would not tell, as it was not the custom in his country, "but," said he, "I want something to eat."

"There is plenty here," said Miach Lay, "but if there is you will get none of it, you would better be sailing away."

"I have enough of the sea, I'll come in."

He put down the blade of his oar and sprang ashore. No sooner had he touched land than he was grappled by Miach Lay. As neither man knew the other, they were in hand grips all day. They were nearly equal in strength, but at last Miach Lay was getting the worst of it. He asked Manus for a truce.

"I will grant you that," said Manus, "but you do not deserve it, for you began the battle."

They sat apart then, and Miach Lay asked: "How long can you hold out?"

"It is getting stronger and braver I am," replied Manus.

"Not so with me. I could not hold out five minutes longer," said Miach Lay. "My bones were all falling asunder and I thought the earth was trembling beneath me. Till this day I thought to myself, 'There is no champion I cannot conquer.' Now tell me your name and your country."

"I am from Erin and a son of the King of Lochlinn," said Manus.

"Oh," said Miach Lay, "you are my brother."

"Are you Miach Lay?" inquired Manus.

"I am."

They embraced each other and sat down then to eat. Miach Lay was so tired that he could taste nothing, but Manus ate his fill. Then they went arm in arm to the castle. The King and all the nobles of Greece had seen the combat from the castle and were surprised to see the men coming toward them in such friendliness, and all went out to know the reason. The King asked Miach Lay, "How is all this?"

"This man is my brother," said Miach Lay. "I left him at home in Erin and did not know him at the harbor till after the combat."

The King was well pleased that he had another champion. The following day Manus saw the King's daughter and fell in love with her and she with him. Then the daughter told the King if she did not get Manus as husband, the life would leave her.

The King called Miach Lay to his presence and asked: "Will you let your brother marry my daughter?"

"If Manus wishes to marry her, I am willing and satisfied," answered Miach Lay. He asked his brother and Manus said he would marry the King's daughter.

The marriage was celebrated without delay and there was a wedding feast for three days and three nights, and the third night when they were going to their own chamber the King said:

"This is the third husband married to my daughter, and after the first night no tidings could be had of the other two, and from that time to this no one knows where they are."

Miach Lay was greatly enraged that the King had permitted the marriage without mentioning this matter first.

"I will do so to-night," said the King, "what has never been done hitherto; I will place sentries all around the grounds, and my daughter and Manus will not lodge in the castle at all, but in one of the houses apart from it."

"I'll watch myself," said Miach Lay, "and if it is the devil that is taking the husbands, I'll not let him take my brother."

Sentries were stationed in all parts; a house was prepared in the courtyard. Miach Lay stood on guard at the entrance all the time. Soon after midnight a gust of wind blew through the yard; it blew Miach Lay to the ground and he fainted. When he recovered he rushed to search for his brother, but he was not in his chamber. He then roused the King's daughter and asked:

"Where is my brother?"

"I cannot tell where he is," said she; "it is you who were on guard; it is you who should know where to find him."

"I will have your head, wicked woman, if you do not give me tidings of my brother."

"Do not take my head; it would not serve you. I have no account of what happened to your brother."

Miach Lay then refrained from touching her and waited till morning. The King came in the morning to see was Manus well, and when Miach Lay saw him he ran at him to destroy him, but the king fled away. After awhile, when the household was roused, the King's daughter was brought in and asked what had become of her husband or could she give an account of Miach Lay's brother.

"I cannot tell," replied she, "but one day before I was married the first time, something came to my chamber window in the form of a black bee and asked would I let it in. I said that I would not. The bee remained outside all the day watching to see could it enter my chamber. Then it flew off saying, 'Before going away in the evening the black bee said:'

"'Well, I will worry the heart in you yet.'"

The King's old druid, who was present, slapped his knee with his hand and said: "I know the story now; that was Ri Doracha (the Dark King). He is a mighty magician and it is he who has taken the husbands."

"I will travel the world till I find my lost brother," said Miach Lay.

"I will go with you and take all my forces," said Red Bow, the son of the King of Greece.

"I need no assistance," said Miach Lay. "If I myself cannot find him, I think that no man can, but if you wish to come you are welcome."

Miach Lay went to his vessel, and Red Bow chose the best ship from all that his father had and went on board of it. The two ships sailed away together. In time they neared land, and on reaching the mouth of the harbor they saw a third ship sailing toward them as swiftly as the wind blew, and it was not long till it came alongside. There was only one man on board; he hailed Miach Lay and asked:

"Where are you going?"

"It would not be the custom of my country for me to tell you what you ask till you tell me who you are yourself and where your own journey lies."

"I know myself," said the warrior, "where you are going; you are in search of the Dark King, and I myself would like to see him."

With that he took a bundle of branches he had on deck and threw them overboard. Then every twig and twig on the branches became an enormous log of wood, so that the harbor was covered with one raft of timber, and then he sailed away without waiting.

After much struggling with the logs, shoving them over and hither, Miach Lay was able by pushing with oars to make room for his vessel to come to land. Red Bow and his men were cast into deep sleep by the man on the vessel that had sailed away.

After Miach Lay landed he passed through a great stretch of wild country, and, drawing near a large forest, saw rising up a small tender sister to the oak and ash trees. He made for the place where the smoke was, and there he discovered a large, splendid castle in the depth of the forest, but could find no sign of an entrance.

When Miach Lay had stood outside some time a young woman looked through the window and spoke to him and said:

"You are a stranger and will find no lodgings in these parts, but if I could at all, I would let you come in here."

"Open the window if you are able," said Miach Lay.

"The window had hinges, and she opened it in the middle; he stepped backward nine yards and went in at one bound to the chamber.

"You are welcome," said she, and soon prepared dinner for him. When he had eaten, she inquired who he was, from what place he had come, and what brought him that way.

He told her all that had happened to him from the first, and when he had finished he said: "I know not where to find my brother."

"You are not far from him now," said she; "'tis in this country he is living and the land he is in bounds our land."

When they had talked long she said: "You are tired and need rest; so sleep in this chamber." She went then to her own place. The following morning his breakfast was ready before him, and, after he had eaten, the young woman said:

"I suppose you will be thankful if I tell you where to find the castle of the Dark King."

"I will, indeed," said he. Then she gave him full directions how to go. He took his sword then, and sprang out as he had sprung in in the evening, and went in the direction which she told him to take. About midday he met a man, who hailed him and asked:

"Who are you, and from what country?"

"'Tis not the custom for a man of my country to answer that question till told where he is and to whom he is speaking."

"I know who you are and whither you are going. You are going to the castle of the Dark King, and here he is before you; now show your daring."

They made at each other, and if they did, they made soft ground hard and hard ground soft, they made high places low and low places high, they brought cold spring water through dry, gravelly places, and if any one were to come from the Eastern to the Western world, it is to look at these two he should come.

They were this way till evening, and neither had the better of the other. Miach Lay was equal to the Dark King, but the Dark King, having magic, blew a gust of wind at Miach Lay which knocked him flat on the earth and left him half dead. Then the Dark King took Miach Lay's sword and went away. When he recovered, Miach Lay regretted his sword more than all else and went back to the castle where he had spent the night before. He was barely able to go in at the window.

"How have you fared this day?" asked the young woman.

He told her of all that had happened.

"Be not grieved, you will meet him another time," said the young woman.

"What is the use? I have no sword now."

"If its a sword you need I will bring you a blade far better than the one which the Dark King took from you."

After breakfast next morning she brought him her father's sword, which he grasped in his hand and shook. Miach Lay bade farewell to the young woman and sprang out through the window. Knowing the way better this time, he hastened forward and met the Dark King just where he met him before.

"Did not yesterday tire you?" asked the Dark King.

"No," said Miach Lay.

"Your journey is useless," said the Dark King.

"We shall see," answered Miach Lay, and they made at each other, and terrible as the battle was on the first day it was more terrible on the second; but when the Dark King thought to strike the blow, to blow a gust of wind which threw Miach Lay to the earth and left him senseless. The Dark King did not take the sword this time.

After the Dark King had gone, another man came the way who was called Sprisawn Wooden Leg.*

"Well, my good man, you are nearly dead," said the Sprisawn.

"I am," said Miach Lay, rousing up.

"You are his equal but for the magic; I watched the combat these two days, and you would have overcome him but for his magic; he will finish you to-night if he finds you. He has two magic tricksters, who are heavier his house at this moment. They have a spear which the rear man of the three hurls forward, the trickster in front catches the spear in the heel of his foot, and in turn hurls it with all his force forward; those behind rush ahead of the front man, and in turn catch the spear in their hands. No matter how far or how fast the spear is thrown forward there is always a man there before it to catch it. They are rushing hither a long distance apart."

The Sprisawn saw the tricksters approach and told Miach Lay that they were coming. When they came within a spear cast one of them hurled the spear at Miach Lay; it went through his heart, passed out through his body, and killed him.

When the Sprisawn saw Miach Lay lying dead he fell to weeping and wailing, and so loud was his wail that every one heard it throughout the whole kingdom. Red Bow was sleeping yet in the harbor, but so loud was the wail of the mourning Sprisawn that it roused him from the slumber which the Dark King had put on him. He landed at once with his forces and made on toward the wailing. When they came to the place and saw Miach Lay lying dead they themselves began to wail; they asked the Sprisawn then: "Are there any means by which we might raise him to life?"

"There are," replied the Sprisawn. "The Dark King is rejoicing now in his castle with the King of Mangling and the Gruagach of Shields. They are drinking each other's health from a horn, and the Dark King is telling the other two that Miach Lay was the best man that ever stood in front of him; and if he could drink from that horn, he would rise up as well as he ever was."

"I with my men will go for that horn," said Red Bow.

"Not you nor all the men like you now living on earth could bring that horn from the castle of the Dark King," replied the Sprisawn. "That castle is surrounded by three walls. Each wall is four feet in thickness and twenty feet high. Each wall has a gate as high and as thick as the wall itself. How could you pass through those walls? Remain here and watch over this body; I will bring the horn hither myself."

Off went the Sprisawn and he had more control over magic than even the Dark King. When he arrived at the castle he struck the gate with the heel of his wooden foot and it opened before him; the second and third gate opened, too, in like manner when he struck them. In he went to the room where the Dark King and his two friends were drinking. There he found them raising toasts to each other. He was almost invisible. As soon as they rested the horn on the table, he snatched it and made off for the place where Miach Lay was lying dead. Then Red Bow and his men raised up the dead man and poured down his throat some of the wine or whatever liquor was held in the horn.

After a time Miach Lay opened his eyes and yawned. They were all so delighted that they raised three shouts of joy.

"Come on with me now," said the Sprisawn, "to the castle of the Dark King. We will have a trial of strength with him. I will take the Dark King in hand myself. Do you, Miach Lay, take the King of Mangling, and you, Red Bow, take the Gruagach of Shields."

"This will be very good for us to keep," said Red Bow, when he saw the virtue of the horn.

"No," said the Sprisawn; "it is good for the man who owns it, and I will return it."

The Sprisawn, who could travel as swiftly as his own thought, vanished with the horn, placed it on the table from which he had snatched it, and came back to the others. No one had missed the horn; when they turned to use it it was there on the table before them in the chamber of the Dark King. Miach Lay and his friends went on together, and never stopped till they stopped in the chamber where the Dark King was sitting with his friends. The gates had remained open since the Sprisawn opened them. When the Dark King saw the dead man alive, standing in his chamber before him, he said:

"Accursed welcome to you, you miserable creature, with the wooden foot. What brought you hither or how did you come?"

"I have come to you with combat," said the Sprisawn, "and now do you choose the manner of fighting."

In the castle were three chambers, in each chamber a cross-beam as high from the floor as a man's throat; in the middle of each cross-beam was a hole, through this hole passed a chain, at each end of the chain was an iron loop; above the hole and lengthwise with the beam was a sword with keen edge on it. Each pair of champions was to take one room of the three, and each man of them was to place a loop on his own neck; each then was to pull the other to the hole if he could and then pull till the sword cut his head off.

The Sprisawn and the Dark King took one room, Miach Lay and the King of Mangling another, and Red Bow and the Gruagach of Shields took the third.

The first pair were not long at each other, as the Sprisawn was greatly anxious for the other two, and with the second pull that he gave he had the head off the Dark King. He then went to see how it fared with Miach Lay. Miach Lay was tired and nearly beaten.

"Come out of that for me," said the Sprisawn. "What playing is it you have with him?"

"Fully satisfied am I to give this place to you," said Miach Lay, raising the loop, and the Sprisawn put it quickly on his own neck.

With the first pull the Sprisawn gave he had the head off the King of Mangling. They ran then to Red Bow, whose head was within two feet of the sword.

"Go on out of this," said the Sprisawn, putting the loop on his own neck. The Gruagach, by reason of having Red Bow so near the beam, was himself at a distance, but at the first pull the Sprisawn gave he drew the Gruagach within a foot of the beam. Fearing that if he killed the third man there would be no one to give an account of these carried off by the Dark king, the Sprisawn offered the Gruagach his life if he told him where Manus and the other two husbands of the King's daughter were.

"If I tell you that," said the Gruagach, "the Dark King will knock the head off me."

"If you saw the head of the Dark King would you tell me?"

"I would."

The Sprisawn sent Miach for the head of Lay the Dark King; he brought it.

"Is that his head?" asked the Sprisawn.

"It is," said the Gruagach.

"Well, tell me now."

"Were I to tell you," said the Gruagach, "the King of Mangling would knock the head off me."

"If you saw his head would you tell me?"

"I would."

The head of the King of Mangling was brought.

"Is this the head?"

"It is."

"Well, tell me or you'll lose your own head."

"Went this castle is a lake," said the Gruagach, "and under its water is an enchanted tower of steel, with high walls three feet in thickness; around that tower on the outside a long serpent has wound itself closely from the bottom to the top. This serpent is called the Worm of Nine Eyes. Inside in the tower are the three men."

"And how can we come at them?" asked the Sprisawn.

"Whoever wants to free them," said the Gruagach, "must stand on the shore of the lake and shout to the serpent, calling it the Worm of Nine Eyes. Hearing this, the serpent will unwind and with lashing will drive all the water of the lake in shivers through the country and flood the whole land. The basin of the lake will be dry then, and the serpent will rush at the man who uttered the insult and try to devour him. The serpent must be killed, and the champion must run to the tower, if he can break in, he will rescue the three men."

"Is that all?" asked the Sprisawn.

"It is," said the Gruagach. "I have no further account of the matter; that is all I know."

"Then you'll lose your head, too," said the Sprisawn; and with one pull of the chain he swept the head off the Gruagach. The three champions went then to the lake. Miach Lay and Red Bow assisted to help the Sprisawn, but he forced them to remain behind, saying that they would be swept away by the waters if they went.

The Sprisawn, coming to the bank of the lake shouted: "Worm of Nine Eyes!" No sooner did the serpent hear the name than it uncoiled to strike killing power, lashed the lake and sent the water over the country. When the lake bed was dry the serpent rushed toward the Sprisawn with open mouth. When the Sprisawn saw the serpent he took his sword in both hands and held it crosswise in front of his face, and when the serpent was coming to swallow him so great was the force with which it rushed forward and sucked the air to draw him in that the Sprisawn split it in two from the mouth to the tail, dividing the back from the belly, and the two pieces fell apart like the two halves of a split log of timber.

Miach Lay and Red Bow came up then and went to the tower, but if they did, they could not enter.

"Oh," said the Sprisawn, "if you had all the arms in the world you could not break through that tower. He went himself to the door then and, striking it slightly with his wooden foot, forced the door inside by too hard a blow, he burst in the door. The three men inside then came out, and Miach Lay embraced his own brother. All were glad and all started for home, but had not gone far when the other two men began to dispute whose would the King's daughter be. The first husband said his claim was strongest; the second said his was. The Sprisawn tried to settle the quarrel, but could not. "I would advise you," said he, "to leave the matter to the first man you meet."

All agreed to do this.

The Sprisawn now left them and vanished as if he had never been. They had not gone far when they met a man. "Well met," said they; "we are glad to see you."

"What is the trouble that is on you?" asked the man.

"So and so," said they, telling him the whole story; "and now you are to be our judge."

"I will do my best," said the man. "If each one will be satisfied with my decision."

"We will," said they.

"Now let each man of you tell his story."

Each man told his story to the end.

"Who rescued you?" asked he.

"Miach Lay and his forces," said they.

"Had not this man and his forces come, you would have been there till this time."

"We should," said the three.

"If so," said the man, "my decision is that the first and second husband should each be thankful go to his own people, and get another wife for himself; and that the daughter of the King of Greece remains to the brother of the man who rescued all three."

The two princes went away toward their own homes, and the man remained, and who was he when he took his own form again but the Sprisawn. They went then to the castle where the young Red Bow entertained Miach Lay, and whose castle was it but the Sprisawn's; the young woman was his daughter. After resting there for some days, the Sprisawn asked Miach Lay would he marry his daughter. Miach Lay was willing and glad, and remained there.

Manus and Red Bow returned to the King of Greece. Manus lived in Greece happily and so did his children.

The two brothers did well not to marry any woman their father found for them, for they would not have had the grand ladies that they had in the end, and Miach Lay had the dominions of the Dark King, as well as those of the Sprisawn, and they were very rich kingdoms.

THE END OF THE SEVENTH TALE.

* Sprisawn, in Gaelic Sprisean, a small twig, and, figuratively, a poor little creature, a sorry little fellow.

# SUSY;

## The Story of a Waif.

BY BRET HARTE.

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CHAPTER IX.—CONTINUED.

But with the conviction came a singular calm. In the last few moments he seemed to have grown older—to have loosed the bonds of old companionship with Susy, and the later impression she had given him of her mature knowledge—and moved on far beyond her years and experience. And it was with an authority that was half paternal and in a voice he himself scarcely recognized, that he said:

"If I did not know you were prejudiced by a foolish and indiscreet woman I should believe that you were trying to insult me as you have your adopted mother, and would save you the pain of doing both in her house by leaving it now and forever. But because I believe you are controlled against your best instinct by that woman I shall remain here with you, to frustrate her as best I can, or until I am able to lay everything before Mrs. Peyton, except the foolish speech you have just made."

The young girl laughed. "Why not that one, too, while you're about it? See what she'll say."

"I shall tell her," continued Clarence, calmly, "only what you yourself have made it necessary for me to tell her to save you from folly and disgrace, and only enough to spare her the mortification of hearing it first from her own servants."

"Hearing what from her own servants? What do you mean? How dare you?" demanded the young girl sharply.

She was quite real in her anxiety now, although her attitude of virtuous indignation struck him as being, like all her emotional expression, merely acting.

"I mean that the servants know of your correspondence with Mrs. McClosky, and that she claims to be your aunt," returned Clarence. "They know that you confided to Pepita. They believe that either Mrs. McClosky or you have seen—"

He had stopped suddenly; he was about to say that the servants, particularly Incarnacion, knew that Pedro had boasted of having met Susy, when for the first time the tremendous significance of what he had hitherto considered as merely an idle falsehood flashed upon him.

"Seen whom?" repeated Susy in a higher voice, impatiently stamping her foot.

Clarence looked at her, and in her excited, questioning face saw a confirmation of his still half-formed suspicions. In his own abrupt pause and knitted eyebrows she must have read his thought also. Their eyes met; her violet pupils dilated, trembled, and then quickly shifted as she suddenly stiffened into an attitude of scornful indifference, almost grotesque in its unreality. His eyes slowly turned to the window, the door, the candle on the table, and the chair before it, and then came back to her face again. Then he drew a deep breath.

"I give no heed to the idle gossip of servants, Susy," he said slowly. "I have no belief that you have ever contemplated anything worse than an act of girlish folly, or the gratification of a passing caprice. Neither do I want to appeal to you or frighten you, but I must tell you now that I know certain facts that might make such a simple act of folly monstrous, inconceivable to you, and such an accessory to a crime! I can tell you no more. But so satisfied am I of such a possibility that I shall not scruple to take any means—the strongest—to prevent even the remotest chance of it! Your aunt has been looking for you; you had better go to her now. Wait outside the door, and leave this room for the time I should advise you not to sit so near an open window with a candle at night in this locality; even if it might not be dangerous for you, it might be fatal to the foolish creatures it might attract."

He took the key from the door as he held it open for her to pass out. She uttered a shrill little laugh, like a nervous, mischievous child, and, slipping out of her previous artificial attitude as if it had been a mantle, ran out of the room.

CHAPTER X.

As Susy's footsteps died away Clarence closed the door, walked to the window, and examined it closely. The bars had been restored since he had wrenched them off to give ingress to the family on the day of the recapture. He glanced around the room; nothing seemed to have been disturbed. Nevertheless he was uneasy. The suspicions of a frank, trustful nature, when once aroused, are apt to be more general and far reaching than the specific distrusts of the disengenuous, for they imply the overthrow of a whole principle and not a mere detail. Clarence's conviction that Susy had secretly and recently since his dismissal led him into the wildest surmises of her motives. It was possible that without her having reason to suspect Pedro's greater crime, he might have confided to her his intention of reclaiming the property and installing her as the mistress and chatelaine of this rancho. The idea was one that might have appealed to Susy's theatrical imagination. He recalled Mrs. McClosky's sneer at his own pretensions and her vague threats of a rival of more lineal descent. The possible infidelity of Susy to himself touched him lightly when the first surprise was over—indeed, he could hardly be called infidelity if she knew and believed Mary Rogers's discovery—and the conviction that he and she had really never loved each other now enabled him, as he believed, to look at her conduct dispassionately. Yet it was her treachery to Mrs. Peyton, and not to himself, that impressed him most, and perhaps made him equally unjust through his affections.

He extinguished the candles partly from some vague precaution he could not explain, and partly to think over his fears in the abstraction and obscurity of the semi-darkness. The higher windows suffused a faint light on the ceiling, and occasionally the dark lantern-like glow cast on the opposite wall by the tunnel of the embrasure window. The familiar outlines of the room and its furniture came back to him. Somewhat in this fashion also, in the obscurity and quiet, came back to him the events he had overlooked and forgotten. The reports he had heard of the servants, and vague hints dropped by Susy of a violent quarrel between Peyton and Pedro, which resulted in Pedro's dismissal, but which now seemed clearly attributable to some graver cause than insubordination and insolence. He recalled Mary Rogers's playful pleasantries with Susy about Pedro, and Susy's mysterious air, which he had hitherto regarded only as part of her exaggeration. He remembered Mrs. Peyton's unwarrantable uneasiness about Susy, which he had overlooked or referred entirely to himself; she must have suspected something. To his great astonishment, the ruin of his faith and trust he believed that Susy's disaffection was either part of the conspiracy or that he had run away to avoid being implicated with Susy in its discovery. This, too, was the significance of Gilroy's parting warning. He and Mrs. Peyton alone had been blind and confiding in the midst of this treachery, and even he had been blind to his own real affections.

The wind had risen again, and the faint light on the opposite wall grew tremulous and shifting with the movement of the foliage without. But presently the glow became quite obliterated, as if by the intervention of some opaque body outside the window. He rose hurriedly and went to the casement. But at the same moment he fancied he heard the jamming of a door or window in quite another direction, and his examination of the casement before he turned him to the silver twilight of the thinly clouded sky falling uninterruptedly through the bars and foliage on the interior of the whitewashed embrasure. Then a conception of his mistake flashed across him. The line of the casa was long, straggling, and exposed everywhere; why should the attempt to enter or communicate with any one within be confined to this single point? And why not satisfy himself at once if any trespassers were lounging around the walls and confront them boldly in the open? Their discovery and identification was as important as the defeat of their intentions. He relit the candle, and, placing it on a small table by the wall beyond the visual range of the window, rearranged the curtain so that, while it permitted the light to pass, it left the room in shadow. He then opened the door softly, locked it behind him, and passed noiselessly into the hall. Susy's and Mrs. McClosky's rooms were at the further end of the passage, but between them and the boudoir was the open patio and the low murmur of the voices of servants that still lingered until he should dismiss them for the night. Turning back, he moved silently down the passage until he reached the narrow arched door at the end. This he unlocked and opened with the same stealthy caution. The rain had recommenced. Not daring to risk a return to his room he took from a peg in the recess an old waterproof cloak and sou'wester of Peyton's, which still hung there, and passed out into the night, locking the door behind him. To keep the knowledge of his secret patrol from the stable men he did not attempt to take out his own horse, but trusted to find some vaquero's mustang in the corral. By good luck an old blue grass back of Peyton's, nearest the stockade as he entered, allowed itself to be quickly caught. Using its rope headstall for a bridle, Clarence vaulted on its bare back and paced cautiously out into the road. Here he kept the curve of the long line of stockade until he reached the outlying field, where, half hidden in the withered, sapless, but still standing stalks of grain, he slowly began a circuit of the casa.

The misty, gray dome above him, which an invisible moon seemed to have quick-silvered over, alternately lightened and darkened with passing gusts of fine rain. Nevertheless, he could see the outline of the broad quadrangle of the house quite distinctly, except on the west side, where a fringe of writhing willows beat the brown adobe walls with their imploring arms at every gust. Elsewhere nothing moved; the view was uninterrupted to where the shining, watery sky met the equally shining, watery plain. He had already made a half circuit of the house, and was still noiselessly picking his way along the furrows, muffled with soaked and broken-down blades, and the velvety upspringing of the "winter" growth, when suddenly, not fifty yards before him, without sound or warning, a figure rode out of the grain upon the open cross road, and deliberately halted with a listless, abstracted, waiting air. Clarence instantly recognized one of his own vaqueros—an undersized half-breed—but he as instantly divined that he was only an outpost or confederate stationed to give the alarm. The same precaution had prevented each hearing the other, and the lesser height of the vaquero had rendered him indistinguishable as he preceded Clarence among the grain. As the young man made no doubt that the real trespasser was nearer the casa, along the line of willows, he wheeled to intercept him without alarming the sentry. Unfortunately his horse answered the rope bridle clumsily, and splashed in striking out. The watcher quickly raised his head and Clarence knew that his only chance was now to suppress him. Determined to do this at any hazard, with a threatening gesture, he charged boldly down upon him.

But he had not crossed half the distance between them when the man uttered an appalling cry, so wild and despairing that it seemed to chill, even the hot blood of Clarence's veins, and dashed frenziedly down the cross road into the interminable plain. Before Clarence could determine if that cry was a signal or an involuntary outburst, it was followed instantly by the sound of frightened and struggling hoofs clattering against the wall of the casa, and a swaying of the shrubbery near the back gate of the patio, to where was his real quarry! Without hesitation he dug his heels into the flanks of his horse and rode furiously toward it. As he approached, a long tremor seemed to pass through the shrubbery, with the retreating sound of horse hoofs. The unseen trespasser had evidently taken alarm and was fleeing, and Clarence dashed in pursuit. Following the sound, for the shrubbery hid the fugitive from view, he passed the last wall of the casa, but it soon became evident that the unknown had the better horse. The hoof beats grew fainter and fainter, and at times appeared even to cease until his own approach started them again, eventually to fade away in the distance. In vain Clarence dug his heels into the flanks of his heavier steed and regretted his own mustang, and when at last he reached the edge of the thicket he had lost both sight and sound of the fugitive. The descent to the lower terrace lay before him empty and desolate. The man had escaped.

He turned slowly back with baffled anger and vindictiveness. Whether, he had prevented something, although he knew not what. The principal had got away, but he had identified his confederate, and for the first time held a clue to his mysterious visitant. There was no use to alarm the household, which did not seem to have been disturbed. The trespassers were far away by this time, and the attempt would hardly be repeated that night. He made his way quietly back to the corral, let loose his horse, and regained the casa unobserved. He unlocked the arched door in the wall, re-entered the darkened passage, stopped a moment to open the door of the boudoir, and, finding it already fastened casement, and extinguish the burning candle, and, relocking the door securely, made his way to his own room.

But he could not sleep. The whole incident, over so quickly, had nevertheless impressed him deeply, and yet like a dream. The strange yell of the vaquero still rang in his ears, but with an unearthly and superstitious significance that was even more dreamlike in its meaning. He awakened from a fitful slumber to find the light of morning in the room and Incarnacion standing by his bedside.

The yellow face of the servant was greenish with terror and his lips were dry. "Get up, Señor Clarencio; get up at once, my master. Strange things have happened. Mother of God protect us!"

Clarence rolled to his feet, with the events of the past night struggling back upon his consciousness. "What man you, Nasci?" he said, grasping the man's shoulder, which was mechanically making the sign of the cross as he muttered incoherently. "Speak! I command you!"

"It is José, the little vaquero—who is even now at the padre's house—raving as a lunatic—struck down by the sight of an Indian! He has seen him—the dead alive! Save us!"

"Are you mad yourself, Nascio?" said Clarence. "Whom has he seen?"

"Whom? Whom? God help us—the old padron—Señor Peyton himself! He rushed toward him—here in the patio last night—out of the mist, like skin from a snake—new out—his own self wrapped in his old storm cloak and hat and riding his own horse—erect, terrible, and menacing, with an awful hand upholding a rope—so! He saw him with these eyes as I see you. What he said to him—God knows! The priest, perhaps!—for he has made confession."

In a flash of intelligence Clarence comprehended all. He rose grimly and began to dress himself. "Not a word of this to the women—to any one, Nascio; dost thou understand?—he said, curtly. "It may be that José has been partaking too freely of aguardiente. It is possible. I will see the priest myself. But what possesses thee! Collect thyself, good Nascio."

But the man was still trembling. "It is not all, mother of God! It is not all, master!" he stammered, dropping to his knees and still crossing himself. "This morning, beside the corral, they find the horse—Pedro Valdez—splashed and spattered—in saddle and bridle, and in the stirrup, dost thou hear, the stirrup, hanging, the torn-off boot of Valdez, ah, God! the same as his! Now, do you understand? It is his vengeance—no—Jesu forgive me! It is the vengeance of God!"

Clarence was staggered. "And you have not found Valdez? You have looked for him?" he said, hurriedly throwing on his clothes.

"Everywhere—all over the plain. The whole Rancho has been out since sunrise—here and there and everywhere. And there is nothing! Dead! Dead! Dead! Pedro Valdez!"

He pointed solemnly to the ground.

"Nonsense!" said Clarence, buttoning his coat and seizing his hat. "Follow me."

He ran down the passage, followed by Incarnacion, through the excited, gesticulating crowd of servants in the patio, and out of the back gate, where he turned first along the wall of the casa toward the barred window of the boudoir. Then a cry came from Incarnacion.

They ran quickly forward. Hanging from the grating of the window like a mass of limp and saturated clothes was the body of Pedro Valdez, with one unbooted foot dangling within an inch of the ground. His head was raised inside the grating, and at first at that moment when the first spring of the frightened horse had broken his neck between the bars as in a garrote, and the second plunge of the terrified animal had carried off his boot in the caught stirrup when it escaped.

CHAPTER XI.

The winter rains were over and gone, and the whole long line of California coast was dashed with color. There were miles of yellow and red poppies, leagues of lupines that painted the gently rounded hills with soft delicate hues, and, growing, continuous sapphire like mountain systems, masses of daisies and dandelions. At Sacramento it was already summer; the yellow river was flashing and intolerable; the tule and marsh grasses were lush and long; the bloom of cottonwood and sycamore whitened the outskirts of the city, and as Abner Hopkins and his daughter Phœbe looked from the veranda of the Placer Hotel, accustomed as they were to the cool trade winds of the coast valleys they felt homesick from the memory of Eastern hearts.

Later, when they were surveying the long dinner tables at the table d'hote, with some thing of the unconscious pride and shamefaced loneliness of the provincial, Phœbe uttered a slight cry and clutched her father's arm. Mr. Hopkins stayed the play of his squared elbows, and glanced inquiringly at his daughter's face. There was a pretty animation in it as she pointed to a figure that had just entered. It was that of a young man whose dress and bearing rather than the taste of the prevailing fashion, which did not, however, in the least conceal a decided rusticity of limb and movement. A long moustache, which looked unkempt even in its pomatumed stiffness, and lank, dark hair that had been, but never curled, under the barber's iron, made him notable even in that heterogeneous assembly.

"That's he!" whispered Phœbe.

"Who?" said her father.

Alas for the inconsistencies of love. The blush came with the name and not the vision.

"Mr. Hooker!" she stammered.

It was, indeed, Jim Hooker! But the rôle of his exaggeration was no longer the same; the remorseful gloom in which he had been habitually steeped had changed into a fatigued yet haughty fastidiousness more in keeping with his fashionable garments. He was more peaceful, yet not entirely placable, and as he sat down at a side table and pulled down his striped cuffs with his clasped fingers, he cast a glance of critical disapproval on the general company. Nevertheless, he seemed to be furtively watchful of his effect upon them, and as one or two whispered and looked toward him his consciousness became darkly manifest.

All of which might have intimidated the gentle Phœbe, but did not discompose her father. He rose and crossing over to Hooker's table, clapped him heartily on the