

El Cid looked at them both with disdain, then wheeled round to face Leonor and Don Luis. "This is your betrothed husband," said he to the girl.

"Yes; I go to wed him in Guanajuato."

"Do you love him?" asked the bandit in a low voice.

"Yes," she replied, in a whisper, slowly and with an effort. "I—love—him."

Don Carlos turned pale and his lip quivered under his dark moustache. "What you love is sacred, Senora," he said after a pause.

Luis laughed scornfully. "Chivalry in a robber," he sneered, "has Don Quixote quitted romance for thieving."

"You are ungenerous, Senor," said Carlos, wincing at the speech.

"I am an honest man," was the fierce retort, "and should my life be spared I trust to see you and your fellow-scoundrels garroted in Mexico City."

"Peace, my son," said the Padre in dignified reproof, "it becomes you not to insult those who have us in their power," for the good father was alarmed by the menacing looks cast by the inferior robbers on their plain spoken captive.

"Santa Anita, we are all dead folk," wept Ursula with noisy grief.

"That depends upon the generosity of Don Carlos," said Leonor in soft tones, and looked significantly at the bandit.

He winced, and whitened, and flushed crimson. "What would you have me do, Senorita?" said he in a low voice.

"I would have you speak privately with me."

There was a murmur at this, but Carlos, raising his head, darted an eagle look on his followers, who at once subsided into silence. Then, removing his sombrero, he took Leonor by the hand and led her with a graceful courtesy to one side, out of earshot. Luis flashed a glance of jealous rage on the pair, and writhed in impatient fury. But Father Ignatius nodded approvingly as he saw a chance of release in the action of the girl.

"Don Carlos," said Leonor, when they were alone. "I have seen you often in the Pasco, and at the fandango; and I have heard you singing at midnight under my window. Why?"

El Cid raised his head proudly. "Because I love you."

"What do you call love, Senor; to capture me thus?"

"No, no; by all the saints I swear that I did not know it was your party, senorita. Had I known, it would have gone free for me."

"Will it go free still?"

"Senorita," stammered Carlos much agitated. "I am—I am—"

"You are a robber upon whose head a price is set, but you are also a noble gentleman, a good man. I have heard of your chivalrous deeds."

"Have you heard of my wrongs?" cried El Cid, with flashing eyes. "How I was despoiled and imprisoned by the Government; how I was driven forth like a wild beast; and condemned to this degraded existence? What wonder that the hunted should turn hunter. I am no longer Carlos Juarez, the rich ranchero. I am El Cid, the bandit; I am Cain with my hand against every man."

But not against every woman," said Leonor, earnestly. "Senor, you have a noble heart to which I appeal. Younder is my future husband whom I must marry by the wish of my dead father. We go to Guanajuato to fulfil that wish. You say you love me; prove that love by releasing us."

"Oh, oh," groaned Carlos. "I am but a man!"

"The man who loves me, and to whom I appeal."

Something in her speech made El Cid raise his head, and he looked eagerly at her. In a moment he sprang forward and clasped her hand. "Leonor! you do not love this man," he said breathlessly.

"I am betrothed to him," she answered with feminine evasion.

"But you do not love him. I see it in your eyes; you love me, me, the outlaw, the robber. Mother of God, you will stay with me, you will be my wife, you —"

"I shall go to Guanajuato," inter-

rupted Leonor, "if you love me as you say. True love is unselfish."

"But this man is not worthy of you."

"Detain me, and would you be worthy?"

El Cid cast a despairing look on her resolute face, and, dropping his head on his chest, groaned aloud. He saw that she was right; that she desired to prove the strength and purity of his boasted love. Still he was but mortal, and it was hard for him to surrender this brave and beautiful woman to one so unworthy as Luis Tebucio.

Leonor, knowing how he suffered, put forward her hand and touched his arm gently. A thrill ran through him, and nerved him to the act of self-sacrifice he was called upon to make. With a sigh he straightened himself and offered her his hand.

"Senorita, my love is as boundless as the sea, as generous as that of Heaven. You and your—your future husband—he pronounced the word with an effort—"are free."

"Carlos!" half gladly, half sadly, she uttered the name.

She again extended her hand, and he kissed it two or three times.

"Speak no more," said he, hoarsely. "I am not strong enough to—to—"

Go, go, my dear one, whom I give to another. You are free," and with stately grace the unfortunate lover led her back to Dona Ursula.

"Clear that tree out of the road," said he to his men. "These people go free."

"Free!" cried Ursula. "Ah, gracious Lady of the Heavens, thou hast heard my prayer!"

"Blessed be the Virgin who hath interceded for us all," mumbled Ignatius; but Don Luis proffered neither prayer nor thanks. He scowled on Carlos, whose generosity his base soul could not comprehend, and looked spitefully at Dona Leonor who had saved his life.

In a short space of time the road was clear, the diligence with its occupants proceeded on its way escorted by Luis and the remaining soldiers, and El Cid, by his own generous act, was bereft of all that he held dear. And yet there was joy in his heart. For he knew well that though he had lost Leonor as a wife, he had gained her love. Their souls, noble and generous, understood one another.

On arriving at Guanajuato it was discovered that the marriage could not take place immediately. The mother of Luis was too ill to attend the ceremony, and Leonor refused to be married unless she was present. Fearful lest he should lose the girl, Tebucio fell into a great rage, and insisted that she should become his wife at once, but Leonor remained firm, and was supported in her refusal both by Padre Ignatius and the duenna. Whereat Don Luis accused Leonor of deferring the marriage on account of Carlos.

"You love this wretch!" he cried furiously.

"I am betrothed to you," retorted Leonor, "and if I loved him I left him. He is a noble and good man."

"He is a robber, and I shall hunt him down."

"What! would you plot to take his life after he spared yours?"

"Yes," snarled Luis, whose vile temper was fully roused. "He let us go free because he loves you, and for that I hate him. I'll catch him, and kill him as soon as I may."

"Lay one finger on him, and I refuse to marry you."

"That we shall see," sneered Luis, and hot with rage he took his departure.

Leonor was in despair. She knew the vindictive temper of her future husband, but did not know how to protect El Cid from its fury. Luis had the law on his side, and would no doubt ride to the mountains with soldiers at his back, to capture the famous outlaw. Every day she expected to hear of El Cid's arrest, but as time went by, and Luis showed no disposition to fulfil his threats, she breathed more freely. Carlos was safe, and Luis had forgotten his hatred. So Leonor thought; but subsequent events proved that she was wrong.

In about a month Senora Tebucio recovered her health, and preparations were made for the wedding. Dona Ursula was in her element, surrounded

by an atmosphere of scandal and dressmaking, and she frequently rallied Leonor on her wau looks.

"You fret over that handsome El Cid," she chattered, "but, Holy Mother, the lamb lies not with the wolf, say I. Your Carlos is a robber, but Don Luis, oh, my little one, has much wealth."

"And much temper."

Ursula snapped her finger. "Kil! Kil! Kil!" said she, "temper or no temper, a fair woman can always manage a man."

Leonor, reflecting that the duenna had never secured a chance of proving her theory, laughed at this, but was not consoled by the idea. She had long since discovered that she loved Carlos more than Luis, and contemplated the coming marriage with great aversion. However, her word was plighted and she could not break it, therefore she was prepared at all costs to keep her promise to her dead father when fate intervened. And fate delivered her fiat by the mouth of the man she designed to injure.

"To-morrow is our wedding day," said Luis one afternoon. "I intend to make you a present."

"You have given me many," replied Leonor, languidly. "What is this one?"

"The body of El Cid."

"What!" shrieked the girl, terror struck. "Is Carlos dead?"

"He will be to-morrow by the garrote," said Luis, coolly. "At present he is in gaol. He was captured last night on the outskirts of the city."

"By whom? Mother of Miracles, by whom?"

"By me."

"But you have not been to the mountains?"

"Not such a fool," answered Tebucio with a shrug. "No, no I beguiled the rascal here through his love for you."

"His love for me," murmured Leonor, bewildered. "You—you—mean?"

Luis, who had with difficulty repressed his passion, seized the frightened girl by the wrist and burst into furious speech. "I mean that your beloved Carlos thinks you a traitress. Through him I have wounded you. Through you I have wounded him. I wrote him a letter signed with your name."

"Ah, villain!"

"That letter entreated him to meet you on the outskirts of Guanajuato, near the old adobe prison house; begged him to save you from a marriage with me; promised him to leave all for his sake. What lover could resist such an appeal? He came and was met by myself and a dozen soldiers. Now he is in that prison house and dies on the day you become my wife."

"This is your revenge?" gasped Leonor, breathlessly.

"On him only. My revenge on you comes after marriage. You shall learn what it means to trick me," and casting her from him Don Luis rushed furiously from the room. He was triumphant and his rival was in his power, doomed to a cruel death; but it was bitter for him to see how Leo-

nor lamented for the luckless lover.

When alone Leonor sat down to think. The fiery blood of her Castilian ancestors burned in her veins at the insults she had received. Come what may she was determined never to marry the man who had betrayed so generous a rival. In a few moments her resolution was taken and she sent for a faithful peon servant whom she could trust. It was useless to appeal to priest or duenna, as she knew well that they would side with the enemies of Don Carlos. Henceforth his enemies were hers, and she resolved that the lying letter which had decoyed him to his death should be proved true.

That night El Cid sat in a small cell of the adobe prison house, sad and spiritless. He was bound with raw hide and well guarded, and as the gaol was presumed to be safe he had been left there for the time being instead of being taken to the more modern prison within the city gates. The poor man was much dejected, as he thought that Leonor had returned evil for good by betraying him. The moon shone in through a slightly barred window which overlooked some precipitous rocks—a gulch so dangerous that there was no guard on that side of the prison. Carlos had looked out several times, but owing to the great height could see no chance of escape.

"And if I did escape, what use," he thought, "since she is false?"

Even as this idea passed through his mind he heard a splintering noise, and an arrow, white feathered, shot in through the window bars. El Cid, who could move his feet, struggled towards it and found a thin piece of steel, sharp as a razor, bound to its head. At once he guessed that friends were without, ready to assist him to escape, and by rolling on his back he was able to grip the steel in his fingers. With some difficulty he managed to saw through the raw hide and free his hands; then he liberated his feet, and afterwards made the further discovery that a silken thread was attached to the arrow. This he drew in carefully. It was succeeded by string, the string by a thin rope, that by a thick one; until at length the means of escape were furnished to him. Looking through the window he saw two men and two horses on the other side of the gulch.

"Pepe and Jose," cried Carlos, thinking of two of his band. "Brave men, they must have heard of my capture and come to aid me."

The moonlight vanished from his cell, but this was all the better for the prisoner. By sheer force he wrenched two bars out of the window, and having fixed the rope to the iron handle of the door, he thrust his body through the aperture. In a moment he was swinging over the black depths of the gulch, but, nerved by the hope of escape, he dropped rapidly hand over hand down the rope. On reaching the broken ground at the foot of the precipice he glanced up at the frowning wall of the prison, but, seeing no lights and hearing no

