

Regeneracion.

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The Mexican Rebel

By
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The old Mexican and his rebel aid sat facing one another near the Plaza Fountain in Zacatecas, Mexico. Around them in skyline circle stood buildings with flat roofs. The plastered walls were painted in the various colors of the rainbow. Many of the buildings were dirty and dilapidated, but in the brilliant sunshine of the plateau, even squalid brick walls become picturesque. A multitude of moving figures passed before them. The Mexican as well as his companion were strangers. Their garments of white cotton were half concealed by red and yellow blankets. No one seemed to notice them—not even the slow moving water vendors, whose little tanks, strapped on bronze shoulders like Italian organ-grinders, contained the drinking water which they were carrying to the private houses. The elder man piled his blanket on his back as if he were a donkey.

"We will write our treaty with the points of our bayonets," he said.

They were speaking the native language, a mixture of Aztec and Spanish. "It is too bad," answered his comrade. "These people are so timid and retiring in manner that I feel like a butcher."

Thereafter they spoke no more, but silently watched the natives in their meeting and separating, or coming and going before the orange, green and blue tinted walls. Little children, whose faces were painfully innocent of soap and water, frolicked in the shadows of the sunshine. One-half of the inhabitants were either barefooted or wore a kind of sandal consisting of a small leather piece strapped to the foot like a skate.

"I don't know much about the butcher business, Mendoza, but one thing I do know; I'm going to the Plaza for a gallon of water—pay my two cents and then for Silao. It is a very dangerous affair—this business. I believe, however, that Intervention can be avoided. It must be avoided. I love my Country and wish to preserve its independence—remember that on your journey to Los Angeles, they will search for us certainly, but that is expected."

And long after the grey-haired General had passed the Plaza and disappeared with a half-naked Indian guide, Martin Mendoza stood there, frozen still under the cold waves of hatred that covered him.

He had never before had a foreign mission worth the name; he knew he had one now. He had never before hated an American; he now understood something of that, too. The purely physical desire to kill had given place to a more terrible craving to punish certain interests in California. America had taken Texas, Arizona and California from Mexico, and this new danger near the Rio Grande was more than possible now.

That interests in the United States might take advantage of the revolution only made his hatred of America more intense, and blinded by it, he stood there a few minutes, and then walked around till he found a room to be let on terms suited to the purpose of his journey, this was a ground floor room in a one-story flat roof building.

As soon as the room rent was paid, Mendoza took possession of his lodgings; he carefully locked the door and opened a small bundle that was wrapped in a red blanket. With his nerves strung to their utmost point of tension he paced the little room minute after minute, hearing nothing but the wild clamor of his brain, seeing nothing but the dream of Mexican freedom.

Toward midnight, seated on his iron bed by the window, a deathly lassitude weighing his heart, he heard a chorus of roosters—a score of dogs barking till they gasped for breath. The torrid wind nearly blew out his candle, where it stuck on the floor of stone. He sat watching the candle-light for a while, then rose and closed the window blinds.

As he turned to blow out the candle, a white piece of paper thrust under the door caught his eye, and he walked over and picked it up out of curiosity. It was a note in Spanish. He opened it, reading it as he walked back to the candle-light on the floor.

"The Federal are watching you. There is no proof, but only suspicion that you are a rebel spy! I will see you at midnight. Until then—Adios."

"A FRIEND."

He sat on the bed studying the note carefully, paying particular attention to the handwriting; presently he became aware of the fact that the lock was being tampered with from the outside. After a moment the door swung open. A tall girl stepped forward into the room, closing the door behind her, and confronted a cocked pistol held by the most daring spy in the rebel secret service.

The visitor sat deliberately on the only chair, and throwing off her black shawl, turned to greet him.

Mendoza gasped with astonishment. "What do you want?" he asked, in a voice that was almost a whisper. The girl leaned back. Of the two, she was by far the more at home. "You are crazy to be in Mexico!" she cautioned. "I came here because they are liable to get you before morning."

Mendoza favored her with a look of suspicion. The fact that she was honest was one which he scarcely

thought about. There were other things more surprising which he could not ignore. It was the hottest season of the year, yet she appeared to be comfortable in a heavy dark dress. It flashed upon him that this strange woman was a little too curious to unravel the mystery to which she seemed attached.

"Did you write this?" he demanded, showing the edges of his will kept tooth. "Do I understand that you want me to leave Zacatecas tonight? Are they really so near, Miss—Miss—"

She considered his revolver without replying. She had never before detected that manner, that hardness in a Mexican voice.

"What is your name?" he insisted. "My name is of no concern of yours! I see no other alternative. Either you leave here tonight or—you die before daylight."

Her voice had grown unsteady as the double treachery of Mendoza was now perfectly apparent.

"Oh, certainly," she replied, with a bitter smile. "I used to love America during my younger days. After all, love is like the measles, the younger you have it, the sooner you get over it. I'm older now, I think a little bit of Mexico these days."

The girl, chin cradled in her hollow hand, sat quietly inspecting his bundle—the red blanket, also.

"What are you people going to do with me?" he ventured.

The woman looked up and dropped one arm on the back of her chair.

"Major Palachis will escort you to El Paso," she smiled, maliciously.

Kindly tell the Americans to mind their own business. Mexico will settle her own affairs."

"Your General," she said, calmly, "was so careless in giving you the money with the bundle. It should have been sewed in the blanket."

But, after all, the majority of men are always on the side of a pretty woman, and this one was honest.

Mendoza intimated that a soldier has no time for delay.

"Well, in short," he frowned, "what do you want?"

"I came here to prevent you taking another step towards the Rio Grande. You do not know me," said the stranger, but I know you well. You are Captain Mendoza of the Rebel forces, aid to General De Lara. I also want your money and counter-sign."

"I suppose you come with thousands of troops to oppose my journey."

"No, sir, I'm alone with only another, my brother, who, if you make an outcry—will blow up this room with dynamite!"

She crossed her knees, one slender ankle imprisoned in her hand, leaning forward defiantly.

In spite of all his caution, Mendoza restrained himself with great difficulty from using violence. Something in her eyes stopped him, and following their direction, he turned round to her brother standing at his elbow, both hands busy with revolvers.

"Did you call?" asked the newcomer, icy and expressionless.

"Yes, thank you," she nodded, coolly, "you may go now. See that the entrance is well placed in the door."

They remained standing as the door opened and closed again. Then the rebel aid sat down, pistol held loosely, eyes fixed, scowling into vacancy. For the last of the Mendozas had at last been trapped. The vast unseen machinery set in motion by the Federal Secret Service had begun in the National Palace in Mexico City; and here was a cunning woman before him whose detective skill had caused his downfall. Who was she? Why didn't she make a move and really do something? He drew out his cigar case and was holding it half open, when the window blind cracked sharply, a bullet whistled over their heads, struck the opposite wall and fell on the floor.

They ran to the window and peered out into the night. The whole town seemed in a stir. Drums were beating and by a bench near the Plaza Fountain, they noticed a troop of Mexican Rural Guards.

"Did the bullet come near you?"

Her cool manner angered him more than human flesh can bear. His obstinate under lip protruded further and further.

"Oh, no! It just missed my head and went through my hat—that's all," he flashed, in a voice that failed to be calmly ironical.

There had been some talking in excited voices outside, and now, her brother opened the door to say that there were three officers inquiring for Madame.

So the strange woman rose to her feet.

"I have them come in one by one," she frowned.

The first who entered was a little man, with cheeks as black as a negro's. Madame had drawn a small book from her dress-pocket.

"What name?" she asked.

"Juan Rico."

"I'm sorry, Rico, but the journey is too far. Here are some pesos for your trouble. Just step outside, and wait there with my brother."

The second man was dressed like a native coffin-peddler. His name was Campo Lopez. He also received his dismissal, his pesos, and the order to wait.

The third person was a man of remarkable appearance. A peculiar face—half Spanish, half Oriental, was framed in a costume of the water-vender, and the little tank on his shoulder seemed to shine like copper. He saluted and stood there, turning his peaked hat of straw.

"Your name?" she inquired.

"Teodora Palachis."

"Water-vender?"

"Yes, Madame. Water here is precious—two cents a gallon."

"Could you start for the United States at once?"

"As soon as my clothes are ready."

"How many men are in your command?"

"Five hundred."

And meanwhile, Mendoza leaned over to get his blanket.

The water-vender lurched across the room and passed both hands over Mendoza's neck.

"This will do the business," he sneered.

A click of steel and Mendoza at last understood that resistance was vain. His brown eyes returned to the red blanket, fascinated. He eyed it, perplexed, deadly afraid, yet seeing no avenue of escape.

Nobody said anything for a while. Presently Teodora Palachis, the water vender, proceeded to carefully unfold the red blanket. Suddenly, Palachis cut the four corners and burst out laughing. In each corner were enough ten thousand dollar bills to finance one, if not two, revolutions.

"You infernal spies!" snarled Mendoza.

"Why, Captain Mendoza," she said coolly, "one might think that you were afraid of finding something out."

"Madame," boasted Palachis, "this is splendid, but I used to know you as far different from what you are now."

Her voice had grown unsteady as the double treachery of Mendoza was now perfectly apparent.

"That is not considerate of the President," he jested, "not at all considerate. But, I may tell you, Miss Stranger, without any breach of confidence, that I have been presented to a squad of soldiers more than once."

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SEGUNDO ALONSO DEBESA.

NUEVO GRUPO

Texas, dando muestras de conciencia de clase han establecido un grupo Regeneración, al cual le pusieron por nombre el del ideal que perseguimos

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