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An English Translation of the Mexican Novel
LAS TRIBULACIONES DE UNA FAMILIA DECENTE
by Mariano Azuela
with an Introduction
URBAN AND POLITICAL ASPECTS
OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

BY

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B. A., Montana State University, 1929

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INTRODUCTION

MARIANO AZUELA

His Life

Mariano Azuela, the first novelist to impress upon the world that there was a true literature of Mexico, was born in Lagos de Morena, Jalisco, January 1, 1873. He was of the gente decente or middle class. His parents owned and operated a small hacienda, but maintained a residence in town. Azuela was well educated, first at Lagos and then in Guadalajara, where he studied medicine and received his M. D. degree in 1899.\(^1\) It was while he was a student in Guadalajara that he became interested in politics and allied himself with the anti-Díaz faction.\(^2\)

After graduation he returned to Lagos to practice medicine. In 1900 he married and to this union were born ten children, five sons and five daughters. Not one of them, so far, has achieved the recognition in his respective field that the father has achieved, not in his chosen profession, but in his avocation.

Azuela lived quietly until 1911, when for a month he held the position of jefe político of Lagos, resigning

\(^1\) John E. Englekirk and Lawrence B. Kiddle, editors of Mariano Azuela's Los de Abajo, p. xi.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. xiii.
because he could foresee the crumbling of the Madero regime. He continued to be a maderista, engaging in the dissemination of subversive propaganda. After Madero's assassination, Azuela came out openly against Huerta and, when Villa's Conventionalist government was in power for a short time, he was Director of Public Education of the State of Jalisco (1914-1915).

When Carranza defeated Villa and captured Guadalajara, Azuela was forced to flee with Villa's men. He joined a unit under the command of Julian Medina, the governor of Jalisco, as the only doctor on his staff, and suffered with Medina's men on their arduous retreat north. He finally took refuge in El Paso, Texas, in October, 1915.  

In 1916 he and his family returned to Guadalajara and from there they went to Mexico City, where he has lived ever since, practicing his profession, medicine, and from time to time, his avocation, writing.

Since his student days in Guadalajara, he has kept copious notes, both as to events and characterizations. He writes of life as he sees it, of the corruption and injustices that are prevalent, of his own experiences and observations. He has little more than contempt for the so-called literary figures of the time who dwell in their ivory towers amid the "eternal snows of serenity," while

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3 Ibid., p. xii.
all about them is war and destruction. He also has little patience with the gente decente who, in the midst of direst poverty, refuse to face reality, but continue living on memories of the past and believe that to earn a living by work would be a disgrace, not only to themselves but to all their ancestors. His sympathy lies with the poor and oppressed, those who, in a blind effort to throw off the yoke of servility and degradation, "watered the soil of Mexico with their blood," often to find that their efforts and sacrifices were to no avail, that one group of oppressors was merely replaced by another.

Azuela may well be called the "novelist of the Revolution," not only because of his Los de abajo, but because he has covered the revolution in its various stages from the Madero insurrection through the hurricane of brutal conflict and on through the ofttimes bloody phase of the social revolution, which is still in progress. By his careful and analytical observation of the scenes about him, he seemed able to foretell with a remarkable degree of accuracy, the events which were to follow. Time has evidenced that his prophecies have been largely fulfilled.
His Novels of the Revolution

Andrés Pérez, maderista (1911), Azuela’s first novel of the revolution, is the story of a young newspaper man. A rather weak character, Andrés is frightened when he finds himself identified with the maderistas, as he believes the movement doomed to failure. However, when he finds that it is successful, he leads the parade of the victorious forces down the street, acclaimed as colonel. The local political boss and former porfiristas appear wearing the uniform and insignia of Madero. They are the maderistas de ocasión, the turncoats of the revolution, who join whichever movement promises them the greatest personal gain.

Los de abajo (1915), the novel that brought Azuela recognition as a writer, is the story of the warring phase of the revolution. It is based on Azuela’s own experiences and observations during his association with Villa’s troops as staff doctor. In this work he delineates the various types which made up the army of insurgents: Demetrio, a simple Indian driven by persecution into the revolutionary forces; Pancracio, a prognathous type that is pure brute; Anastasio of the mild expression and gentle manner; Marguerito, the sadist; Pintada, the greedy, ruthless soldadera; and last, but not least, Luis Cervantes, the educated, white-skinned opportunist.

Azuela points out the futility of the armed conflict
which destroyed so much and accomplished so little for those most vitally concerned. Many, who like Demetrio asked only for peace and a chance to work their land undisturbed, had everything destroyed, even themselves, without ever fully understanding the principles for which they were fighting.

Los caciques (1917) gives in detail some of the evils of the "political boss" system. This story tells of the Del Llanos family, controlling power of a small town, and of the ruthless methods employed by them to augment their wealth and power. Their position is sustained largely by their fellow townspeople who regard them with extreme respect, almost adulation. One of these is Don Juan Viñas, whom they single out as their victim. They succeed in ruining him and his family.

Rodríguez, a man who is wise, sincere, and with the courage of his convictions, has a gift of oratory which the caciques consider dangerous to them. They eliminate him by the simple expedient of denouncing him as a maderista and having him shot. Rodríguez, however, has succeeded in planting the seeds of truth in the minds of Esperanza and Juanito, children of Don Juan, supplanting the veneration of the caciques which their father had instilled in them. Azuela seems to feel that through the enlightenment of the younger generation may come the riddance of bossism.
Las moscas (1918) is a further example of the types described in Andrés Pérez, the "istás" who joined whichever faction seemed successful at the moment. The action takes place on a troop train to Irapuato. Villa has been defeated at Celaya and is fleeing north with the soldiers of Obregón at his heels. The characters of this story are both civilians and soldiers, a group which is riding in a hospital car. There are the gente decente, government employees, lawyers, military men, and women camp followers. At Irapuato there is a rumor that the carrancistas are coming and immediately the villistas, who yesterday were probably huertistas, and before that maderistas, tear the insignias from their hats and become adherents of Carranza. They are a group that contributes nothing constructive, but are pure parasites with no other object than personal gain.

Las tribulaciones de una familia decente (1918) is the last of the series known as novels of the revolution. This story, as its title implies, relates the experiences of a middle-class family, the Vázquez Prados of Zacatecas. There is Procopio, the father; Agustinita, the domineering mother; their children: Francisco José, Lulú, César, and Berta; and Berta's husband, Pascual. There is also Archibaldo, Lulú's sweetheart. Like the majority of the gente decente, they were conservatives and supporters of General Victoriano Huerta. When Villa captured Torreón
and began his march on Zacatecas, the Vázquez Prados fled for safety to Mexico City.

The first part of the novel is César's autobiographical account of the family's flight from Zacatecas and their subsequent sojourn in Mexico City. It ends with his death. The second part continues the narration of the family's misfortunes until, after sinking to the very depths of despair and discouragement, Procopio and Lulú courageously begin to build a new life.

The novel covers the period of 1914 to 1918 and presents a vivid picture of Mexico City in the confusion of revolution, the occupation by various armies of revolt, business at a standstill, repudiated paper currency, looting and confiscation. Finally, although in the grasp of corrupt government officials, the city begins to enjoy a certain peace and there are indications that life is slowly returning to a semblance of normalcy.

In this novel, Azuela offers a solution to the troubles that beset the people, a solution which he sums up in one word--WORK. Plain, honest work could ultimately be the salvation both of the individual and the nation.
In order to better understand the significance of names and events mentioned in the following novel, it is well to know something of the historical and political background of that period, the years 1914 to 1918.

General Victoriano Huerta's ascendancy to the office of president was acclaimed with rejoicing by the wealthy land owners, the Federal army, the Díaz bureaucracy, the Catholic church, and American business interests. However, from the first his administration was marked by internal turmoil and strained foreign relations.

Revolt broke out almost immediately. Huerta proclaimed himself president on February 18, 1913 and on February 19, Venustiano Carranza, governor of Coahuila, declared that he would not acknowledge this act. Carranza already had a small army under the command of Pablo González, so a few days later he was in open rebellion. He swore to defend the constitution, which Huerta had violated, and took the title of "First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army."

In Sonora and Sinaloa, Generals Alvaro Obregón, Benjamín Hill, and Salvador Alvarado pledged their support to Carranza's cause.

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4 Henry B. Parkes, *A History of Mexico*, p. 335
5 Herbert I. Priestley, *The Mexican Nation*, p. 427
From exile in the United States, Pancho Villa, bandit and cattle rustler, crossed the border with eight followers and began his conquest of Chihuahua, recruiting an army as he went. He was soon joined by General Felipe Angeles, one of Madero's most trusted officers and a true military genius.

Villa and Carranza joined forces in a common cause. They agreed that they were fighting for more than the overthrow of Huerta. "They were fighting to destroy the three traditional curses of Mexico, plutocracy, praetorianism, and clericalism."\(^6\)

In the State of Morelos, Emiliano Zapata organized his liberating Army of the South. His chief aim was to seize haciendas and distribute the land among the people.

While some idealists and reformers joined the revolutionary movement with dreams of freedom and democracy, for the fighting men, recruited from the mining camps, ranches, and border towns, the revolution meant only power and plunder.\(^7\)

Besides this strong internal opposition, Huerta was having trouble with the United States. He favored British rather than American interests, which caused a drastic change in the attitude of the United States toward Mexico.

\(^6\) Parkes, op. cit., p. 338

\(^7\) Ibid, p. 339
The United States refused to recognize the Huerta government, took advantage of an incident in Tampico to send a warship to Vera Cruz to seize the city, and finally raised the arms embargo, which had been imposed the summer of 1913.

The raising of the arms embargo was decisive. In March, 1914, Villa and his Army of the North came south in ten troop trains to capture Torreón, and from there went on to Zacatecas.\(^8\)

Obregón drove the Federalists from Sinaloa and moved towards the capital. At this point, Villa broke with Carranza. Carranza placed an embargo on Villa's coal supply, leaving him stranded at Zacatecas.

In July, Huerta left for Vera Cruz, and in August Obregón entered Mexico City.\(^9\)

With Huerta gone, Villa and Carranza struggled against each other. They differed greatly, both physically and psychologically. Carranza was a civilian, tall, broad-shouldered, with a long yellowish beard, and wore glasses. He had a benign way of looking at the one to whom he was speaking, as he thoughtfully stroked his beard. He was extremely egotistical and domineering. Anyone who showed initiative and independence was likely to find himself in

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 344
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 344
disfavor. Villa was an ex-peon, a man of the people, dark-skinned, illiterate, quick-tempered, and violent.

Obregón tried to act as mediator. A convention was called by Carranza in Mexico City but Villa caused it to be moved to Aguascalientes where he could dominate it. As a result, the Villa-Zapata faction forced Carranza out of the capital and imposed Eulalio Gutiérrez as provisional president. Carranza withdrew to Vera Cruz. While there, in order to appeal to the common people for support, he issued his decree of January 6, 1915, providing for the restitution of ejidos and the expropriation of lands. 10

Villa held the capital for about two months, when Obregón, in January, 1915, defeated Villa at Puebla and again reentered for Carranza. But again Zapata's men swarmed in and held the city from March until July, when Carranza was able to return. 11

In April, Obregón met Villa at Celaya and defeated him. On through the summer and winter of 1915 Villa suffered repeated defeats until he finally took refuge in Chihuahua, where he could not be captured.

Zapata also withdrew to his mountains and was unconquerable until the day he was betrayed and murdered in 1919.

10 Frank Tannanbaum, Peace by Revolution, p. 154
11 Priestley, op. cit., p. 430
By spring of 1916, Carranza was accepted as provisional president throughout most of Mexico, and although Villa and Zapata were still at large, the country settled down to peace.

In place of Díaz governors, there had arisen a new caste of revolutionary leaders who were often little better than bandits. The country disintegrated into a number of independent sovereign principalities, governed by the military. Carranza was totally incapable of enforcing order. 12

A new verb carrancear, meaning "to steal," was coined to express the most conspicuous activity of the officials of the Constitutionalist government. 13

In 1916, Carranza ordered the election of a convention which would make such changes in the constitution as the revolution had made necessary. This convention was the most important single event in the history of the revolution. 14 From it resulted the Constitution of 1917 which denied absolute right of private property, protected wage-earners, limited the power of the church, and instituted judicial, economic, and educational reforms.

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12 Parkes, op. cit., p. 358
13 Ibid., p. 359
14 Tannanbaum, op. cit., p. 166
One of Carranza's greatest acts was his acceptance of the Constitution, although it was vastly different from the one he had prepared. However, it remained for his successor, Obregón, to begin its enforcement.

Besides the great mass of the people, for whom any change would be an improvement, there was another group to which the revolution brought only disaster. This was the gente decente, or middle class. They were the owners of small haciendas and inheritors of illustrious family traditions. Forced to leave their homes or face mortal danger, they had their property destroyed, their cattle and crops confiscated by both Federalists and Revolutionaries until at last there was nothing left but the land itself. Sometimes that, too, was expropriated or simply stolen by crooked politicians. These people faced the necessity of beginning life over again in a changed world and many found themselves unequal to the task that was contrary to custom and tradition.

In the cities, silver and gold currency disappeared from circulation during the violent period of the revolution. Each revolutionary chief printed his own paper money whose value fluctuated with the chief's success or failure. There was such a shortage of metal that cartones,
cardboard money in denominations of five, ten, and twenty cents were issued. Food was scarce and prices high. Shop proprietors had little incentive to try to rebuild their businesses while there was constant danger of looting. However, as violence subsided, trade was again resumed and with it emerged the new middle class, the "white collar workers," drawn largely from those members of the gente decente who had enough vision to cease looking back at tradition and to look forward, instead, to a stronger, more democratic Mexico.

With the election of Carranza as president, the more turbulent phase of the revolution came to a close, but the revolution itself was far from over. The social phase was just beginning which was to continue its slow and tortuous way for many years to come.
THE TRANSLATOR'S PROBLEM

The vast difference between English and Spanish syntax presents a real problem and a challenge to the ingenuity of the translator. Rarely can a word for word translation be made. Usually, such procedure results in stilted, awkward English. The translator must transpose in order to achieve fluency but, at the same time, he must retain the original thought and preserve the author's style and the quality of his work.

Azuela makes use of many Mexicanismos and similes that have special meanings, familiar to the inhabitants of Mexico, but sometimes baffling to the translator. An earnest effort has been made to interpret the meanings intended by the author, sometimes by direct translation, and sometimes by the substitution of well-known English expressions that have a similar meaning. Uncommon similes are explained by footnotes.

Many words are best left in the original, underlined to indicate italics. These include Spanish words that are so frequently used that they are generally known, and those that are untranslatable. The latter are explained by footnotes. Names of political groups such as villistas (followers of Villa), carrancistas (followers of Carranza), etc. are not translated.
I sincerely hope that in this translation I have done justice to Azuela's inimitable style and great genius.
THE BOOK OF THE BITTER HOURS

CHAPTER I.

My brother Francisco José is a poet. He has already written two compositions: "Agonies in Marble" and Eulogy to Anxiety." Who better than Francisco José to compose "The Book of the Bitter Hours?" But Mamma says that I am to write this book.

Well, we, the Vázquez Prados, like all middle class families, have gone into a decline since the Madero revolution. "The government of Huerta," so they say at home, "was an ephemeral dream of restoration which was soon to be followed by the horrible nightmare of the revolution of 1913, the stupendous triumph of this fellow Don Venustiano, and, as a final blow, financial disaster upon the introduction of the hacendaria-latrofacciosa doctrine: One must seize money where one finds it."

One difficulty arrests my thinking and causes my pen to hesitate: my family history.

I shall explain myself once and for all: I do not know how to form an opinion. Such a faculty, if at some time I had it, did not find a propitious atmosphere for development. At home, I am never permitted to take part in

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1 hacendaria-latrofacciosa - literally "hacienda stealing," referring to the expropriation of large properties.
serious conversations. I am the youngest in the family and, apparently, I am condemned to be treated as a child for the rest of my days. If it did not seriously cause my mother embarrassment when we went out on the street, I would still be wearing, as I did three years ago in Zacatecas, short trousers, long stockings, a large bow tie, and a straw sugar-loaf hat trimmed with a rainbow-hued ribbon. Although I am twenty, Mamma does not permit me to go into the street unless I am accompanied by her or one of my sisters.

We Vázquez Prados have on our father's side a member of the Constitutional Assembly of 1857,\(^2\) and on the maternal side, many meritorious military figures, among which appear two stars of the first magnitude: my great-uncle, Don Dionisio, who reaped laurels for himself fighting with as much valor as loyalty in the service of Emperor Maximiliano of Austria, up to the tragic downfall of the empire on the Cerro de las Campanas; and my grandfather Don Ventura, who always defended with undisputed bravery the cause of legality and progress, the integrity of our territory, and the person of the most notable figure in the Americas, Licenciante Don Benito Juárez,

\(^2\) A constituent congress which drew up the Federal Constitution of 1857, which contained guarantees of personal liberty, abolished special courts and monopolies, and reduced the power of the church. This constitution served as a banner for Juárez to rally his supporters for ten years.
and harvested not only an abundance of laurels but also a heap of money.

Agustinita, my mother, repeats all that, more or less, and praises them to the skies, while Procopio, my father, observes, with a scornful smile that has the disagreeable quality of stinging like the tail of a scorpion, that thanks to their keen noses for politics, the Prado generals always came out ahead.

Pascual, husband of my sister Berta, has delivered to him on occasion this impressive reply: "The most sacred thing that man has in the world is the family. The Prado generals, by systematically holding fast to contrary factions during our civil strife, have revealed talent and nobleness of heart. Honor, ambition, glory, life itself in the service of the highest ideal, the family! And the family, of course, always won, whoever the victor might be!"

Archibaldo, the sweetheart of my sister Lulú, a brazen-faced rascal without occupation nor income, observed that in fact the generals were the model heroes of the home and that they deserved the honor of a monument.

If he said this with malicious intention, he was very well fooled. Agustinita called in a mason from the hacienda, master Canuto, a man of very skillful and neat workmanship, and ordered him to erect in the garden, in the shade of the honeysuckle, a stone statue in honor of the Prado generals.
Unquestionably, our ancestry should never become a subject of dispute, especially when it is the key to peace and domestic tranquility. Papa is accustomed to forget it and causes such painful scenes as the one that occurred a few months ago.

We had been living for a short time in a big, old house across the way from the garden of Los Angeles. "Our new house," Francisco José used to say, "has no need to envy the most miserable shack of the poorest of our sharecroppers." Actually, eight battered pillars of brick, half eroded, support a roof that seems about to fall on us because it is so wormeaten; behind this portico open four miserably small windows, with their wooden bars and some triangular pieces of plaster painted Indian red, in the manner of an entablature. For the sake of truth, I must say, nevertheless, that Agustinita, when she saw the little yard of the house, found a pretext to recall pleasant memories of Zacatecas, and that Francisco José is enchanted by a discovery of an admirable source for subsequent writings of the most finished modernist taste; he affirms that in this old house, there are some very important ruins of colonial art. These two are the demanding ones: as for me, partly too lazy and partly too ignorant in arts and sciences, I am satisfied to look at the view from the living room and see the warm colors of
the garden and the reddish cupola of the church of Los Angeles that, above the high tops of the trees, is outlined against the blue sky. When it is blue. Because in September it rains from noon on and often the rain settles into an obstinate drizzle. Under a leaden sky, everything seems enveloped in an ash-colored veil. Nevertheless, these same afternoons have their sublime quarter of an hour, when near six o'clock the sun violently tears the leaden clouds asunder and a sudden flash of light is diffused on the horizon, providing a luminous background for the quivering foliage of the Alameda, and fades away like a thread of quicksilver on the pavement and dark green benches of the garden.

Well, once at that hour, while we were grouped behind the windows, watching the afternoon die in the deserted plaza, there happened to pass two large automobiles filled with the men of Carranza and their women of ill fame, all drunk and making a commotion. Papa, who had spent the week sunk in a broken-down cane chair, his head in his hands and never once opening his lips, got up quickly and came to the window.

"There are the founders of the aristocracy of tomorrow," he said dispiritedly.

Agustinita, in the blackest humor in the world because she had again run through all our money and we had no
information as to the whereabouts of Pascual, guardian angel of the family, heaped abuse upon the government.

"It isn't necessary to give this more importance than it deserves," Procopio interrupted her, almost without listening to her, following only the thread of his own thoughts. "From the War of the Independence till now, people of that kind, assassins and bandits, have been the foundation of the successive aristocracies of the country."

"Procopio!..........Procopio! Do you know what you are saying? Ah, Procopio, your words exceed the limits of the education that you have received and of all propriety. You are blaspheming the sacred memory of our ancestors!" (Perhaps this is the opportune moment to say that Francisco José asserts that his poetic talent comes to him in a direct line from Mamma.)

Procopio did not answer, he did something worse, he smiled.

About Procopio's smile, opinions at home are divided. Lulú, my youngest sister, approves with enthusiasm the opinion of her sweetheart: "There is no laughter that reveals more intelligence and a more noble heart than the laughter of Procopio. The severe, almost savage expression of his austere face—those dark eyes, that rugged, dry skin like the bark of an old oak, that rough beard—all is totally
altered as soon as one exchanges the first words with him and on his lips appears his easy smile and his eyes open wide like the windows of a house in the country that wishes to hide nothing."

But Agustinita, Berta, Francisco José, and my brother-in-law Pascual understand it another way. Francisco José, for example, says, "When I laugh, when you laugh, when we all laugh, the reason for our joy is not an enigma to anyone. The laughter of Papa is often the laughter of one only, of two at the most."

"The worst of all," comments Pascual, "is that it leads to estrangement; it loosens the sacred family ties, causes conflicts and provokes disagreeable scenes."

Well, I was saying, Procopio did not answer, he did something worse, he smiled. Mamma, who is not well versed in the history of our country and has very little worldly knowledge, could not think of a fitting reply and burst into tears.

The voice of Lulú interrupted the scene, calling us with an ironic: "The soup is served!"

We had had nothing to eat since the supper of the evening before.

Francisco José and I, as always, were the first to rush into the dining room. As soon as the clamorings of
our stomachs were silenced a little by a cupful of bean broth and while, on the same plates, Lulú served us the eternal and despised boiled potatoes, Francisco José, patting his stomach, rolled his eyes, grunted with satisfaction and got ready to talk.

Francisco José, he himself says, is the living antithesis of Procopio. Francisco José aspires to a life of pure meditation; his dream is ART, and the goal of his aspirations "the eternal snows of serenity." He wishes that his voice itself be but a murmur of leafy branches, the gentle sound of small rivulets, that his gestures carry the ineffable elegance of a marble of Praxiteles.

That day, however, the tears of Agustinita made this glittering sea of words overflow.

"Where does the aristocracy of the viceroys begin? Where begins the decadent nobility of old Europe? Why, then, belittle anyone for dubious defects?"

Procopio turned from his absorption in thought with a look of surprise. He had the words of Francisco José repeated and his expression of surprise was followed by the usual malicious smile.

"And?"

"Well, then, as the smartest seminar student in the class of Logic, I should be able to argue: what proves too much, proves nothing."
"And?"

His smile, more solemnly contemptuous yet, was Procopio's reply.

"Your father, Procopio, was one of the members of the Constitutional Assembly of 1857; the Prado generals left a luminous wake in the history of their country, as Francisco José says. None of them knew how to laugh as you laugh. No, they didn't know how to laugh like that, but they knew something that has absolutely escaped you."

The voice of Agustinita, growing more husky and dull, faded out like a death rattle. Meanwhile, a shadow darkened the peculiar brightness of Procopio's look and his smile became fixed.

"...they always knew how to spare their children the shame of living in a foul pigsty and of eating nothing but boiled beans."

Disturbed and with tear-filled eyes, Lulú got up abruptly from the table and, leaving her plate barely touched, went out.

Procopio became very pale, he raised his hand to his breast and half closed his eyes.

"A vertigo!" Agustinita explained to us in a low voice; "it looks as though the beans didn't agree with him."
CHAPTER II.

It has been three years since we left Zacatecas. Step by step we have descended to where we are now.

What a day that was! Its memory still torments me. While we were packing trunks and suitcases, laughing and joking with false merriment, Procopio, contrary to custom, was walking very thoughtfully from one end of the hall to the other. When he realized that we had literally turned the house upside down, he approached Agustinita affectionately and said, "Dear, remember the proverb: 'Go slowly, for I am in a hurry!'"

"Bah! Within two weeks, more or less, we shall be back here and I shall have peace and plenty of time to put everything in order again."

"I fear that those weeks shall be as long as those of the creation of the world."

Mamma, without heeding these words, continued her work. And Archibaldo, like one who is talking to himself, said to me: "To suppose that the understanding of Agustinita has ears is like supposing, dear César, that your shrewdness has a nose."

"What does that mean, Archibaldo?"

He laughed a great deal; but I did not insist because Agustinita and Francisco José say that he very often enjoys offensive jokes and puns.
Nevertheless, I ask myself now: could not Agustinita, with her inconsiderate haste, be the cause of the penury which we are now suffering and which does not show a trace of never ending?

What a day! At sunset we were waiting for the last train that, at seven o'clock in the evening, was to leave with us middle-class families who had, until the last moment, hoped for the triumph of the government forces. The babble of the people had changed to feverish excitement. In the streets, plazas, and walks, were milling about only military personnel: infantry and cavalry, sordid camp followers, all jubilant as on market day. Bumping noisily through the steep streets, enormous pieces of artillery, cart-loads of ammunition and provisions, and ambulances rolled heavily; from all sides of the city was rising a confused, muffled, but incessant rumbling. And what expressions in the eyes of the men and their beasts! How pregnant with the storm that was going to be unleashed upon my unfortunate homeland, the homeland of my heart.

Among a group of showy and elegantly mounted officers, suddenly appeared General Medina Barrón with his staff. In order to be recognized better, Mamma jumped with extraordinary agility upon a pile of rotting cross ties, her eyes flashing. As soon as he recognized us he came to salute us with his habitual gallantry.
"At last you are leaving!" Not even in jest did he try to dissuade us. However, yielding to hints from Agustinita, he agreed that, aside from the unpleasantness that the trip was going to cause us, within two weeks he would have the pleasure of seeing us returning home.

"Just what I never tire of telling them. Do you hear that, Procopio?"

Papa, chewing the end of his cigar, did not even raise his eyes. Pascual, my brother-in-law, agreed, perfectly convinced, but Archibaldo smiled scornfully.

Seldom had the words of General Medina Barrón done us so much good. The congeniality which he always enjoyed among our good society, his preeminence as a soldier and as a man of the government, his contagious optimism, the sonorousness of his affirmations and promises, made his presence alone dissipate our anxiety and fears, and the accent of his voice was enough to return to us the tranquility that conniving people delight in snatching from us. We felt, then, as though tons of lead were lifted from our hearts.

Who could compare with Mamma in her fervid admiration for President Huerta, the iron hand that our country justly needed? Who could compare with her in imposing at home like a dogma the endowments of energy and patriotism of our great
president? Overflowing with enthusiasm for the brave and self-denying fellows who heroically shed their blood in defense of the privileges of high society, her diatribes were directed against the rabble of Villa and Carranza, who, if they continued to have a leg to stand on, could attribute it to their unheard-of cowardice in systematically avoiding all formal encounters with the intrepid loyal forces.

"And the taking of Ciudad Juárez? And the taking of Torreón? And the battles of Tierra Blanca?"

"Not only have you learned how to accept the gossip of the common people, Archibaldo, but you have even acquired certain manners of theirs also."

"In fact," said Pascual in defense of Agustinita, "the taking of Torreón by the villistas was no more than the perfidious surrender of a federal Judas."

Because we never gave credit to the boasted triumphs of those bandits; strongly influenced by Agustinita's faith, we had held firm and resolved not to abandon one iota of our property to strange hands. But on the eve of these events, all this changed abruptly. Agustinita, prey to inexplicable anguish, demanded that Procopio go immediately to ask General Medina Barrón for a special train.

It had so happened that Mr. Moneda, counselor of the Bank of Zacatecas and a great friend of Papa's, came looking for him, showing signs of great agitation. The two
gentlemen shut themselves up in Papa's office and Agustinita, incapable of enduring curiosity, flew to Mrs. Moneda for information. And she learned the whole truth: General Huerta was going to resign, the members of his cabinet and the most prominent persons of his government were already on their way to the seaports, soon to leave the country. The triumph of the indefectible revolution.

"But, then, why haven't you left the city?" retorted Mamma, still with a grain of doubt.

"We are retiring to a nearby hacienda. The American Consul has offered us all kinds of guarantees."

But, in spite of such formidable blows, Mamma's faith in General Medina Barrón was not shattered and a few brief seconds of talking with him were enough to cause a rebirth of all her hopes and energy.

Archibaldo invited us to have a cup of tea in the station restaurant and Mamma was in an enviable humor; she joked with Pascual, with Francisco José; she scolded me because I had not changed my stockings, and Lulú because she wore an outmoded hat.

We all came out, verbose, contented, satisfied. Pascual repeated with emphasis the old refrain of his friends of the casino: "With the brave veterans of Porfirio Díaz and the valiant lads of the Military Academy, there are more than enough to put that wild herd of Villa to flight."
"So that's why you're showing the white feather," murmured a greasy, filthy person with unheard-of disrespect. I do not understand the slang of the common people, but by the tone, I presume that they must give insulting significance to that phrase. Some ragged, lousy individuals, their coarse mouths open from ear to ear, were laughing at our flight.
CHAPTER III.

Zacatecas remained then at the mercy of the soldiery and an emboldened, insolent people who laughed at our panic in the moments of greatest anguish.

At seven o'clock we settled ourselves, as God willed, in a cattle car. As everyone was able to travel without a ticket, we were forced to mix with people of low breeding: packed in, with less comforts than the cattle themselves in their stalls.

Already the streets had faded away in the night, the massive bulks of El Grillo and la Bufa could scarcely be seen under the flickering lights on the fortifications. In the troubled settlement glimmered the subdued lights from intermittent inhabited houses.

An hour passed; again we felt oppression in our hearts; sad and silent we waited for the signal of departure. Procopio got down to investigate the cause of the delay. My sister Berta, filled with anxiety, was asking about Pascual. Procopio came at last and told us that the engine was scarcely puffing and that the engineer, brakeman, and conductor had not yet arrived. Then Mamma called us together to say the Rosary.

3 Mountains near Zacatecas.
I woke up at nine o'clock to the oppressive feeling of silence, because the murmur of prayers is for me the most powerful hypnotic. The echoing drums were rolling, the grave or sharp notes of the trumpets and bugles came stridently from the tops of the military cars, reverberating from the rocks of the hills; melancholy and dull from the farthest advanced; all mingling in a tumultuous din. The orgy of noises and sounds was prolonged for a half hour, afterwards all was as a cemetery. Neither the crowing of cocks nor the barking of dogs. One by one the lights of the town were extinguished and an orange-colored, flat moon began to shine and shed its rays over the somber landscape. That imposing silence was broken from time to time by the hoofbeats of some patrol that now approached and now receded out of hearing. From time to time a faraway shot, a faint cry, "Halt! Who goes there?"

About the middle of the night the engine gave a hoarse and trembling groan. The train at last began to roll. From many hearts came sighs, from many eyes rolled tears, from many lips ascended prayers. We, truthfully, were not so candid as to believe it to be a trip for pure recreation, as General Medina Barrón had assured us, but neither did we suspect that we were going from one pole to the other, from one planet to another, from a world of comforts and wealth to one of impossible economies and numberless sacrifices;
passing from irritating mediocrity to the utmost poverty.

Berta gave a cry of anguish:

"Pascual! What's happened to Pascual?"

Agustinita tried in vain to convince her that there was no reason for alarm; Pascual is a person of as much authority in Zacatecas as ourselves. Surely the train could not leave without him. But she began to cry.

Then it was Francisco José's turn: his aspirin tablets had been forgotten and, as if it had know it, the cursed headache was going to tear him apart.

Our engine turned out to be an unhappy, sickly thing, rheumatic and wheezing, that would run for an hour and then stop for an hour to get up steam. We arrived at noon at the station of Aguascalientes. There, although the train was already filled, a larger crowd got on who trampled and crushed us without any consideration. We found ourselves separated, Mamma and Berta at one end, Francisco José--his head hidden under a white cloth--squeezed in the other end; Archibaldo, Lulú, and I very near the door.

The change of altitude, the suffocating heat, the thick air, made Lulú ill. She became very pale and, as if everything went black, she stretched her hands towards me seeking support.

"Mamma! Berta!" I exclaimed.

"Catch her in your arms!" Mamma shouted at me sternly.
Archibaldo, less stupefied, had already done it. I thanked him. What more could I do? Impossible to move feet or hands. We were like cigarettes in a pack. Lulú, pale as wax, rested her head upon Archibaldo's breast. As to the rest, the attack was very brief; the color began to return to her cheeks and then she opened her eyes. She seemed not to realize until then that she was in Archibaldo's arms and, blushing, she pulled away quickly. I smiled, content to see her now fully recovered. And solely for the purpose of quieting her I said, with that inexperience and lack of worldliness which then was characteristic of me:

"Just to see a white lily and then red carnations bloom in your cheeks again, Lulú, I should like you to faint once more."

Archibaldo looked at Lulú and smiled perfidiously, while she, blushing again, shook me vigorously by the arm in order to make me understand that my candor was out of time and place.

Suddenly we saw Procopio appear. Berta asked anxiously for Pascual.

"I preferred to ride on the roof of the car to suffocating here inside, like you.

"But isn't Pascual with you?" groaned Berta wringing her hands, exhausted by sorrow.

"I don't know anything about him," replied Papa, indifferently.
I saw two tongues of fire flicker in Agustinita's eyes. A quarrel between her and Papa would have flared up if at that very instant the eternally serene and amiable face of my brother-in-law had not appeared at the side of Procopio's grave and disdainful one.

"I bring you the news that I have secured a place in the caboose, where we shall all be able to continue the trip together and with less annoyances," said Pascual before quieting the laments and complaints of his beloved Berta.

We jumped from the car, trampling on everybody, as they themselves had taught us there, and rushed along the platform toward the end of the convoy. The caboose seemed like a fairy palace to us. Then Papa brought us milk and bread, and we all breakfasted with a hearty appetite.

When Procopio went to pay, his expression suddenly changed. He searched for something through all his pockets, he turned them inside out. His eyes dilated in a grimace of stupor. Thus he remained for some moments. Pale as death, he came then to Mamma:

"Dear, my wallet has been stolen, all the securities and the registration of the strong box," he exclaimed in a broken voice.

The serenity of Agustinita surprised me.

"I know your absent-mindedness," she said, smiling lightly. She drew towards her a small bag of Russian leather that she is never without on her trips, and placing a small
key in the lock she repeated:

"I know your absent-mindedness too well. In order to avoid exactly this, which I had already foreseen, when you changed your clothes I took the securities from your wallet and here.......here......."

Mamma hesitated. Now it was she who became pale and opened her eyes. Astonished, her face contracted in a violent spasm, her limbs began to twitch.

"The attack! The attack!"

We all rushed to her aid.

Yes, Agustinita had forgotten the wallet, as well as the securities that she had extracted from it, on the dining-room table.

After the attack she remained in a lethargy for more than two hours. Solicitous as always, Pascual did not leave her side an instant. Procopio became himself again and, at a distance, was smoking, smoking, lighting one cigarette from the butt of the other.

But when Agustinita recovered, he came to her, brave and serene, as if nothing of importance had occurred.
CHAPTER IV.

About four o'clock in the afternoon there began to appear vaguely in the immensity of the dark-green valley a great gray splash which, little by little, became clear in the oblique light of the sun.

"Mexico City!" exclaimed Archibaldo.

I, very excited, climbed to the window of the caboose. The superb panorama of the capital was already appearing in the mist that floated above it and enveloped it in an immense festoon of delicate and intangible gauze. The enormous buildings and numberless dwellings were already beginning to stand out when Agustinita obliged me to get down. She was engaged in the task of methodically distributing the baggage, with the purpose that we might disembark at the station without great haste, oversight, and disorder.

"Be very careful with your purses!" she warned us.

Pascual, who is an expert on travel, buttoned his faultless sack coat. Francisco José gave signs of life, he opened his eyes and sat up. Berta immediately caught Pascual's arm and didn't let go until we arrived at the hotel.

Agustinita left in Procopio's care all the purchases made on the way, two small reed suitcases from Salamanca, a
dozen strings of limes\textsuperscript{4} from Silao, six heavy baskets of strawberries from Irapuato, twenty \textit{cajetas}\textsuperscript{5} from Celaya, I don't know how many bunches of sweet potatoes from Querétaro, and a lariat from San Juan del Río, with blue markings, that she insisted in buying so that I might play with it at the hacienda upon our return. Pascual apparently intended to squander everything, since it was he who paid for it all from his own pocket, undoubtedly so as to make Agustinita forget our disaster.

With these commissions Procopio remained perplexed and sad. Lulú observed him and, resigning herself to an interruption in her interminable coloquies with Archibaldo, came to offer her help. But, however much they studied the division of the purchases between her, Papa, and Archibaldo, the three together were not enough for such a task.

"You are worrying for nothing, Uncle Procopio. Let us begin to rid ourselves of what is useless and a nuisance. The strawberries there will fit into one of Lulú's hands alone, so we can, without the least remorse, throw them out on the track. The \textit{cajetas} from Celaya can have an equal fate for nowadays they are not of milk but of starch, which

\textsuperscript{4} In the country, limes and other fruits are sometimes wrapped in banana leaves and tied so as to separate each fruit from the other.

\textsuperscript{5} A jelly made from goat's milk.
no one eats if he is a genteel person."

"I have not asked for your opinion, charlatan," said Mamma, pricking up her ears.

A brief dispute ensued because Archibaldo is a perfect hypocrite. First he makes Agustinita angry and then he turns to apologies and excuses.

"Aunt Agustinita, far be it from me to annoy you, but please examine the baskets and try the cajetas."

Mamma convinced herself that under one layer of large, red berries, there was only dry leaves, covered with dirt; and if the cajetas from Celaya were not exactly starch, they were indeed of a very respectable age, judging by their color and the cracks in the surface. She, herself, gathered her purchases together and said dryly that she didn't need help from anyone, that she would know how to shift for herself so as to get it all unloaded and that we should occupy ourselves only with the baggage. I came forward first to take a valise, but she objected firmly.

"You must not carry anything, César! Mexico City is full of kidnappers."

And from that moment, I was committed to the care of Lulú and a maidservant that we had brought from Zacatecas.

The contagion of the coquetry of these middle-aged metropolitan women! Now our elderly locomotive took a
fancy to give itself the airs of a light-hearted girl. As if by a miracle it had suddenly recovered its agility and vigor; it rushed, vociferous and with great hubbub, at high speed across poor and melancholy, narrow streets; then it thrust itself like the head of a snake through a red wooden door, between two whitewashed walls; from there we came out to lose ourselves in a sea of trains; some panting, emitting billows of black smoke; others mute, dusty, and inert. At each change of track, at each crossing, the train stopped; now advancing along the narrow road that another train left clear, now moving back to give passage to a convoy in the opposite direction. Among whistles and the dissonant ringing of bells of the most distinct timbres and tones, we spent an hour. But suddenly, when we were least expecting it, we entered the station of Buenavista.

What din and what confusion! We, bewildered by everything, including Agustinita’s warnings; Pascual, who is the most clever, incapacitated because Berta clung to him like ivy to an oak; the rest, searching for everything and not finding anything; being trampled by and trampling upon the passengers that were arriving as confused as we. Then, when they discovered us, an avalanche of porters, carriers, coachmen, chauffeurs, and transportation agents from hotels, shouting like maniacs, snatching our baggage from our hands, and confusing us to the point of making us lose our minds.
"Union Hotel, sir," a well-dressed gentleman said to me formally, stopping me face to face.

"Be careful, young man," hissed another behind, making me turn my head, "it is not proper for a genteel family to go to that house. You have no idea where he will take you."

I was going to present my respects and my thanks to such an unforeseen friend, who could be none other than my guardian angel; but at that moment something distracted my attention; I felt a hand slip gently into the pocket of my jacket. I tried to grab it, but in vain. Lulú and Bernabé held me firmly by the arms. I shouted then with all my strength:

"My watch has been stolen!"

"A thief......a thief!" cried Pascual.

A crowd gathered. There in the exit, a policeman had just made an arrest. I tried to protest. Such a fine-looking gentleman could not be the one who had stolen my watch. Nevertheless, I restrained myself, because I recognized the well-dressed gentleman who but a few moments before had offered the Union Hotel.

The policeman asked for a description of the watch, our names and that of the lodging we would probably take, and made us an appointment at the Commissariat.

We were already at the doors when an employee, with
very courteous manners, stopped us. It was necessary to search the baggage.

"But, we are partisans of Mr. Huerta," protested Francisco José haughtily.

The guard turned a deaf ear and put his hands in the suitcase that Archibaldo, who was first, had presented to him, already opened.

"He is probably accustomed to these humiliations," observed Agustinita, "but nobody has ever treated us in this way. Besides being a genteel family, we are intimate friends of General Medina Barrón."

The employee raised his head and looked at us with a certain impertinent curiosity, even with a sarcastic smile, and continued searching the suitcases.

Archibaldo made us realize that we were losing time and revealing our identity besides. So then, there were no more obstacles put in the way.

We scarcely breathed until the hour and moment when Procopio had us get into an enormous automobile which started up at full speed. Mamma thanked God that, up to then, nothing serious had happened to us. With the exception of my watch, we were all complete, including Mamma's purchases.

The fresh air of that time of day had just cleared
Francisco José's brain. Animated, he began to name the buildings and monuments that were along the way. I must confess that I believed myself to be seeing an uncontrollably swift motion picture. Save for the gigantic iron skeleton of the Legislative Palace, and without points of comparison to orient myself in any way, all appeared to me in exasperating uniformity: streets, walks, houses, the statue of Columbus, the semicircle of Juárez, the great National Theater. At this building, Pascual tried to stop the car so that we might be able to contemplate some famous flying horses that to me looked something like closely packed bundles of kindling wood piercing the sky.

Vehicles were crossing in all directions; electric streetcars, automobiles swift as arrows, sedate carriages drawn by teams of arrogant steeds, clattering hacks with their solitary sorry-looking nags, performing the miracle of going back and forth in that turbulent sea without being crushed.

"Glory be to God!" exclaimed Mamma, giving such a sharp cry that the chauffeur violently put on his brakes. No, it was no more than the natural fright of seeing how a very elegant lady was crossing the street among that blur of whirling wheels, as if she were taking a walk through a deserted park. Mamma thought that she would be crushed at any moment,
and we all, in truth, were astounded to see her arrive unharmed at the opposite sidewalk.

Still, Agustinita said the "Magnificat" seven times. The most simple thing in the world, in fact, would have probably been for some auto to smash us to smithereens or for our own car to dash itself to pieces against some corner or telephone pole. There was a moment when I became stupefied by everything. The noise of the trains, the buzzing of the automobiles, the ringing and tolling of bells, the harsh sirens, the shouts of newspaper vendors, all resulted in making me lose my conception of myself. "Who are now, then," I thought, "the Vázquez Prados of Zacatecas? Where is the fine gloved hand raised to salute our passing? Where is one head uncovered respectfully or bowed humbly at sight of us? Cold, disdainful, apathetic, insolent faces. Nothing. The odious city. Yes, here we are now no more than a very small drop of water lost in the vastness of the ocean."
CHAPTER V.

We took lodging in the Gillow. Only Pascual persisted in stopping at the White House, in the vicinity of an American business firm where he says that he has affairs of much importance.

"A mere pretext!" observed Agustinita sourly when Pascual and Berta left us. And it may be that she is right. He is a gentleman of such exquisite breeding and of so much delicacy that he is easily hurt by things that others pass unnoticed.

Procopio turned a deaf ear. It appears that Pascual resents the fact that Procopio always treats him with a cold and suspicious reserve, while for Archibaldo's foolishness, he is all frank and ostensible cordiality. The ways of Papa! Pascual has been a member of the family for scarcely two years, it is true; but his conduct has been always that of a polished gentleman. Berta adores him; Mamma sees herself reflected in him. And what is a more eloquent example of his expedition and zeal than this trip from Aguascalientes, with so many comforts due to his efforts alone? That very afternoon of our arrival in Mexico City one could see the most rude contrast between the conduct of my brother-in-law and that of Archibaldo, aspirant to the same status. While Pascual was finding out, with surprising promptness, how to obtain funds for us to take care of our excessive
expenditures from the first moment, the other disappeared as if by a trapdoor for eight days following. We realized it from Lulú’s tearful eyes and faded cheeks. It seems that not even the lack of money has made him abandon certain habits of dissipation. As Mamma says, these periodical disappearances give the true measure of what the man is worth. But Lulú holds to her own opinion and is very stubborn.

Well, what for us is a disinterested and noble plausible action, concerning Pascual, is pure officiousness with a tail in Procopio’s judgment. By such an inelegant expression he means that Pascual is two-faced and of fraudulent intentions. It was not strange, there, that instead of showing gratitude for Pascual’s services, Procopio started a bitter argument concerning details that, in the opinion of Agustinita, were of absolutely no importance. It seems that the person from whom Pascual obtained the money for us required that it be stipulated clearly in the loan document that silver money had been given us and Procopio was opposed because what we received was pure paper.

"It is a mere form," observed Pascual, surprised, "how, in fact, can one demand payment in silver, a currency that has disappeared from circulation and is no longer taken into account in commercial transactions?"

Agustinita made Procopio note the injustice of his
obstinacy. Pascual would be made ridiculous, now that he had already arranged the loan under such conditions. Besides, as already a good sum had been spent, it was impossible to dissolve the pact.

"Dearest," still insisted Procopio, "let me handle these affairs myself. They are things that you cannot understand."

"Won't one of the houses that we have in Zacatecas be enough to pay many thousands of pesos more than the amount these papers represent? What money have you obtained for me to cover the necessary costs of getting ourselves settled, and for food?"

Procopio took the pen and, signing nervously, murmured: "It is evident that I do whatever you wish."

Well, even after that, Pascual has continued visiting us as if nothing had happened. Is not that evident proof of his inexhaustible kindness and of his perfect mastery of the situation? Agustinita excuses Papa: "They are just his odd ways."

And it is true. Procopio is full of peculiarities that very well explain his aversion for Pascual and his preference for Archibaldo. As for the virtues of Pascual, we have understood them all, and as for Archibaldo, we do not need for anyone to relate his past life, because the fact that we know him is more than enough for us. Although of
humble birth, Pascual has succeeded in winning for himself a very enviable social position. The day that he came to Zacatecas his baggage consisted only of a law degree from Tlaxcala, half a dozen celluloid collars and a pair of celluloid cuffs; but neither shirt nor underwear. Well, that is to his credit, because without more weapons than his intelligence, he succeeded in opening wide the offices of the bankers and other business people, afterwards, the very salons of our aristocracy. He possesses physical, moral, and intellectual endowments which are captivating. He is of good stature, virile arrogance, his white skin has the smoothness of that of a girl of fifteen summers, his forehead is high and clear below his very black and brilliant hair, parted in the middle. In all, he reveals intelligence and kindness. With his black eyes, his aquiline nose, the purity of his features are never altered by awkward laughter or by vulgar anger. His characteristic is moderation. Wisely he knows how to place himself always in an exact middle, and thus he gains the admiration and appreciation of all those who know him. In the name of society, it was he who spoke with the Bishop of the affairs which concerned the Sacred Miter, and in the name of society, he who personally discussed with the civil authorities the affairs of that nature. And the clergymen as much as the laymen distinguish him with their very special esteem.
Of course, explosive daredevils like Archibaldo or impudent, empty-headed girls like poor Lulú, cannot comprehend such eminent qualities. Archibaldo thrust his fangs like the serpent in the eagle: "If Pascual has gained the reputation in our salons of being a wise man, it is unquestionably due to the fact that he is an imposing braggart." A double affront to us that we let go in one ear and out the other.

On the other hand, here is a sketch of Archibaldo. All who know this dissipated young man will see that there is no slander nor exaggeration in the harsh concepts with which I have presented him and will continue qualifying him. Opinions, moreover, which are not only mine but the common feeling of all our family. A distant relative, an orphan at eighteen, with two hundred thousand pesos of capital, he gave people of Zacatecas much to talk about in his youth, and it even seems that in this period he became the "arbiter elegantiarum" of our town. And I believe that it is the man who was with whom Lulú is in love. If one can give credit to the incendiary glances with which both young and old contemplate my sister Lulú, she unquestionably has a very pretty face. And in the following way am I able to explain her strange affection for this relative.

While Archibaldo was squandering his wealth profusely, he paid little or no attention to us, with the exception of
Lulú, whom he has courted since childhood. One day he disappeared from Zacatecas and for some time it was known that he was in Mexico City wasting the remains of his inherited cash. Afterwards, no one knew more of him. We even had him dead and buried, when one day he presented himself at our house. Still covered with dust from the road, his clothes old and worn, emaciated, becoming bald, he was a ruin of the Archibaldo who, five years before, was the favorite swain of the marriageable girls of Zacatecas. He had travelled all over America as a newspaperman, sportsman, hotel waiter, soldier, etc. In brief, he had exhausted his body and soul in the pleasures of the flesh and of the spirit, as well as in the sorrows of misery and vice. As was natural, he was coldly received with formal politeness. But Papa (that Papa!), a victim of the warmest and most absurd sympathy, not only greeted him with open arms, but actually took him into our home. He was given a royal reception. An evening party was arranged, young people from our best society came, and there was music, dancing, and cider. When the last guests had taken their leave, Archibaldo said solemnly:

"Uncle Procopio, now I know what the warmth of the home is."

He raised his handkerchief to his eyes, apparently to dry a tear, and in a trembling voice, without the frivolous
note that characterizes him, added:

"I have squandered my fortune and my own life. I drop in here without knowing why....I am useless. But in this hopeless hour, my spirit catches a glimpse of an unforeseen course: I find an object for my life."

His voice became more and more solemn. We, very entertained, were listening to him as we do to the blind man who tells stories at the door of the church.

"Uncle Procopio, instead of shooting myself when I leave here, as had occurred to me, with the great respect that this house deserves of me, and with all the customary formalities, I ask you for the hand of Lulú."

Procopio burst out laughing; the rest of us remained stupefied before the catastrophe. Agustinita's face ran the gamut from old marble to deep purple. Lulú blushed. Procopio, the only one who rose to the climax of the wicked comedy, took one of Lulú's hands and with his other drew the revolver from Archibaldo's pocket.

"Dear nephew: your ideas are equally agreeable to me. So much so that I feel myself helpless to choose. Let Lulú decide."

Who could imagine that this odious farce would be the formal beginning of a relationship that, like the sword of Damocles, is suspended over the name and honor of our family?
CHAPTER VI.

The day after our arrival in Mexico City there was a quarrel between Agustinita and Procopio. Mamma was warmly praising Pascual, who generosity and promptness had facilitated and solved our delicate situation. Procopio, with malign words and a malicious smile, risked questioning the intentions of my brother-in-law.

"Why does he leave the place blank where he ought to place the name of the creditor?"

"You well know that Pascual is poor and that his funds do not amount to one thousand pesos."

"Well, it doesn't seem improbable to me that he himself is the one who is lending us that money."

"All the more reason we should be grateful to him."

"If he were to lend it to us in gold or silver."

"How hard-headed you are, Procopio!"

"I only hope that I am wrong."

Procopio was asking about Archibaldo daily; Lulú had shut herself up in her room. But the rest of us, if we noticed the absence of our relative, it was only because we were breathing easier.

Visiting churches and show windows in the morning, telling each other what we had seen the rest of the day, made time pass without our noticing it. Francisco José, in his ivory tower, was devouring new books.
It took Archibaldo one week to return. He came back thinner, his clothes wrinkled, unshaven, his eyes like fire. What shamelessness, or, what manly valor!

"I swear to you that it will be the last time, Uncle Procopio," he whispered in Papa's ear.

Agustinita protested mildly, sympathizing with the "poor woman who might decide to become the wife of such a reckless person."

Poor Lulú! She is so good that she cried all that afternoon. Nevertheless, in the evening I found her kissing him as if nothing had happened.

Two weeks elapsed. Francisco José gave us his intellectual first fruits in this City of Palaces. In a voice sweeter than the honey of Hybla, he recited to us "I Am Searching Now for the Heights of Serenity." Agustinita listened to him, enchanted. But Procopio, stretched out on the sofa, yawned and didn't for an instant cease smoking. Archibaldo entered on tiptoe and waited for Francisco José, his voice choked with emotion and his eyes damp, to finish his poem. Then he said: "The Federal troops are arriving in great disorder. They have suffered staggering defeats at Zacatecas and Guadalajara."

Francisco José, terribly upset by such a stupid and inopportune interruption, went out abruptly.
"Dear," observed Procopio, sitting up with excitement, "we ought to take a house with the necessary conveniences, as I have said from the start."

"Yes, Mamma, a house," repeated Lulú, as if the hotel might become too small for tête-à-têtes with her sweetheart.

"Never think it," affirmed Agustinita. "The desertion of some cowardly federal troops signifies nothing. For your information, Archibaldo, I have some better news: Pascual Orozco and Pepe Pérez Castro have now raised the flag of General Huerta. And see what men: Pascual Orozco and Pepe Pérez Castro! Which means that before a month has passed we shall be back in Zacatecas."

Francisco José, who had returned for his aspirin tablets, showed signs of approval, while Archibaldo, slapping me on the back, said to me very gently:

"This return to Zacatecas is as unreal as the 'heights of serenity' that your brother goes looking for."

"I thank you for your affection and deference, Archibaldo," I answered him, "but you must know that my silence does not mean acquiescence to what you say, but simply education."

And Agustinita, observing the merriment of Archibaldo, exclaimed with indignation:

"Do you see, Procopio, how Archibaldo is not able to
hide his joy for these happenings that do us so much harm?"

"Archibaldo is one of those who with the revolution is bound to come out ahead," observed Papa, absent-mindedly.

Stupendous! Agchibaldo, who has deaf ears for all that Agustinita says, turned red. And when nobody was expecting it, he disappeared, bag and baggage. Lulú naturally became very sad; within a few days she looked pale and even lost some weight. But it was all for the well-being and tranquillity of our household.

Unfortunately, the gloomy forecasts of Archibaldo were realized. One morning Berta and Pascual came with the latest news. By their appearance alone when they arrived, I guessed the catastrophe: she, wearing a crepe shawl and a narrow skirt that in Zacatecas she would not even have put on; he, with the collar of his shirt open and his shoes unshined.

"Are they going to give me chills?" A shiver shook my arms and legs.

Pascual showed us a copy of "The Tribune" with news of the presence of the Constitutionalists in the outskirts of the capital.

"All that has nothing to do with me," said Francisco José, waxen-faced and stricken by a headache.

Agustinita was dumbfounded; she wept a sea of tears.
It was more than an hour before she could express her thoughts.

"Procopio, you must look for a house."

"I have had one rented for a week," he responded with astonishing tranquility.
CHAPTER VII.

There we were, then prey to feverish excitement. Francisco José, foregoing his fifth aspirin, came to help us pack mattresses. Agustinita, exasperated by the repeated absences of Lulú, who was not able to detach herself from the balcony, said to me:

"Go and see what business Lulú has out there."

"What other business could it be, Mamma dear? The immovable Don Tancredo there on the corner."

Now, poor Mamma at least had an object upon which to discharge her wrath. If Archibaldo's ears were not ringing that day, surely they were burning.

We left. I was surprised to see the auto stop when it had turned the corner of a street, and Papa get out quickly to show us our new house. The car had passed over the steel rails of the railroad track which, struck by the rays of the sun, had left me blinded and I did not know at what moment we entered Roma Colony.

We opened a wrought-iron door covered with ivy and adorned with bougainvillaea, we ascended a marble stairway,

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6 Tancred was a hero of the Crusades, who assisted at the siege and capture of Jerusalem. He was first to mount its walls.

7 Mexico City is divided into districts called colonias, or colonies.
equally ornamented by flowers and vines, and entered our house. May God forgive my spiritual poverty in grace at my good faith. It was the moment in which I blessed the fate that had thrown us from our gray lands in Zacatecas to this delightful corner of the world that is called Roma Colony. Not only I; Lulú herself, who since the disappearance of her sweetheart had not looked pleasant, now had a bright and dewey look and on her lips trembled one of our sweet lowlander songs.

I spent that first afternoon on the terrace, observing with pleasure the warm green of the grove of trees, the red brick masonry, the facades of carved stone, the pure line of reinforced concrete, touches of living light in the heart of the woods. Not even lacking was the murmur of glittering water and the chirping of birds in their aviaries. Until all was fading into uncertain angles, diffused masses and innumerable voltaic arcs.

Francisco José said to me very seriously: "Observe, César, how here nature is embellished by art, by the hand of man. Better said, it is stylized, ennobled. I shall write the 'Elegy of the Manorial Colony.'"

Mamma, although she always refused to confess it, yielded also to these enchantments. Her frown had been erased and she even permitted me to go out, accompanied by Lulú, to travel through some of the streets.
We dashed madly about, stopping every other minute for the most trivial excuse. I had reverent phrases of admiration for the facade of a modern church. But Lulú, with that Voltairian spirit, which she had not inherited from Mamma, and of which she boasts at times, answered me that the cupola had a notable resemblance to the bald and pointed head of Pepino, a very well-known and popular clown from our hometown. We laughed loudly at the attempted ferocity of some small lions on Orizaba street. And the morning would have ended as one of the best in the world except for an incident which was as pleasant for Lulú as it was disagreeable for me. As if he had sprung from the ground, Archibaldo appeared in our path. He greeted me smiling, put a letter in Lulú's hands, and continued walking at her side.

"Mamma is expecting us at exactly ten o'clock, Lulú, and it is ten to ten now," I said, taking out my watch.

Archibaldo smiled ironically; but my gesture and the accent of dignity that I put in my voice must have convinced him, for he only accompanied us two blocks more and then said goodbye. Lulú and I continued on our way, without speaking. Naturally, I felt myself again farther apart from her.

Like me, Francisco José liked to take a comfortable seat on the balcony and become absorbed in thought while
contemplating the panorama. So much so that at times he
did not even realize my presence. Along the sidewalk in
front of the house a veiled lady of very distinguished bear­
ing passed, then a group of four young girls of aristocratic
aspect, with very large and very dark eyes, very small and
very red mouths, and very delicate and very white necks.
The appearance of such an attractive bouquet drew my brother
out of his reverie and he said:

"The enchantment of woman at a distance! Thus we
ought always to see her. Slender, luminous, ethereal as the
muslin that caresses her breast, her body, and her thighs,
with her narrow skirt that implies her venusian nakedness."

"You are erotic, brother!" I interrupted him, blush­
ing and seized by the most vivid alarm. "How much better it
would be for you to return to your customary diversions with
gentlemen of note, shrewd and brave attendants, shield-bear­
ing squires, duennas with dark glasses, fat priests, cups of
hot chocolate, and the rest of your tastes which, if they do
not profit anyone, neither do they harm your soul nor your
health."

"Shut up, foolish! What do you understand about such
things!"

"As much as you, Francisco José; but it is not decent
to say them because they offend the prudence of our souls and
the modesty of our bodies."

Our rejoicing was very brief; within forty-eight hours the hordes of Carranza invaded. Unexpectedly the streets were overshadowed, inundated by beasts and by people worse than beasts. Those clean cobblestone streets with their quiet groves of trees and cloudless, blue sky, the high and nomenclature facades, were turgid with grimy horsemen, ragged soldiers wearing straw hats adorned by red and green ribbons, all dripping mud up to their ears. Blackish men with stringy, rough beards, sharp, white teeth, smiles that were idiotic and ferocious at the same time; enough to make one shiver.

"The men of the New Regime!" Francisco José said, smiling.

Agustinita escaped to the bathroom to hide her sorrow. Lulú and I, notwithstanding our natural anxiety, raised the window shades.

"Horrors, what faces!" cried my sister and drew back terrified.

I, truthfully, did not understand why she should have so much fear of them and I opened the window. In the circuses I have seen many bloodthirsty, wild animals that never harmed anyone. I called Francisco José.

"What were you reading to me last night about a famous sculptor, who caused purely animal characteristics
of the most refined cruelty to appear in the lines of his portraits?"

"The sculptor Rubeck de Ibsen."

And he also came to the window, his curiosity now aroused.

"This exceeds all exaggeration, César! Look, the one who is coming there on the right is the wolf-man, the one who is going along the sidewalk in front is the coyote-man, and that one who is coming on the left is the pig-man."

"I admire your perspicacity; but I have seen no more than two: the jackal-man from time to time and occasionally the jackass."

"The most interesting type is lacking, you will notice. He should be all arrogance, courage, nobleness..... Have you caught on? The lion-man is lacking."

"I greatly fear that that species has disappeared from our fauna," Procopio answered from behind us.

As soon as he went away, Francisco José said to me:

"When Papa wants to be clever, he is."

"Why do you say that?"

"Haven't you often heard him justify the work of these bandits?"

* * *

Who would have imagined that our absolute unawareness of the danger and the serenity with which we were
amusing ourselves at the expense of those savages definitely saved us from falling into their clutches. The act of plunder respected us! We observed, in fact, a short time afterwards, that the abandoned residences, or those left in the care of servants, were invaded by the rabble. With the blades of their knives, with axes, with the barrels and butts of their guns they broke open doors and windows and looted everywhere.

Procopio says that nothing happened to us because we did not show fear nor distrust. But Agustinita insisted that it was the Virgin of Guadalupe, into whose hands she had commended us, who performed the miracle in such troubled times. I remember that, many years before, an employee of the house took me to the Norris circus and had me mount upon the back of an elephant and pull the tail of a lioness. When they told me afterwards what might have happened to me, I had the same sensation as I felt when the dangers that we were running with these men from the infernal regions were revealed to us.

Our streets, then, were converted into the dens of beasts. When I search for something very unclean with which to compare them, I find only the environs of Merced Market, which seems to me to be a symbol: the true heart of Mexico City.
Carriages of great luxury were followed by automobiles covered with muddy, coarse canvas, always filled with horrible ruffians and painted women; true ambulating taverns that passed like the Furies, sowing panic even in such steadfast hearts as that of Procopio himself.

And to realize that that was not a nightmare for a moment, neither for an hour nor a day. Ay! Our eyes became accustomed to the brilliance of the flash of gunfire and our ears to the thunder of shots. What do I say! Our moral sense itself was dulled to the point of being able to listen without great emotion to the story of an armed assault, a robbery, a violation, a treacherous assassination, all in the full light of day, in the middle of the street, and with dreadful cruelty.

One day Pascual came, changed, nervous, and violent. It was the first time that I had seen him like that.

"Impossible to bring Berta," he told us, collapsing into a chair; "impossible to find a cab; all are running, jammed with the rabble with sandals and rifles. They have taken possession of the streetcars and it is a heroic feat to venture on them as I have just done. They took my watch and I was nearly forced to thank them for doing it. There are no decent people that they do not insult.

"That is nothing!" cried out the heroic Agustinita. "These people kill just for the pleasure of seeing blood
Pascual buried himself in deep thought. Afterwards, he related to us, in a bitter and dull voice, the latest events: a series of assassinations perpetrated among the revolutionists themselves.

"Good!" exclaimed Agustinita, radiant with joy. "They are divided now! God be praised!"

Francisco José added that the hand of the All-Powerful could be seen in that, since no people had ever been able to exist in anarchy.

Overflowing with faith and hope, we gave our hearts over to rejoicing. Agustinita begged Pascual not to endanger Berta again by leaving her alone to come to visit us, but to stay and take care of her until the reestablishment of order and individual guarantees.
CHAPTER VIII.

A week later. Atoms lost in this Hell. The volcanic
imagination of Agustinita working ceaselessly. Premonitions
like the turmoil of the Furies running through her thoughts.

One day Procopio attempted to go out.

"Man of ice!" chided Mamma, beside herself, "you
know that you not only expose your life but also those of
your wife and of your own children! This is surely tempt­
ing the magnificence of the Lord who has looked upon us
until today with merciful eyes!"

That was the morning in which Bernabé returned from
the market with more news than vegetables. The bandits
were hanging all middleclass gentlemen from the towers of
the cathedral.

"Pascual is lost!" cried Mamma with a howl that
could surely be heard in Cortez' palace. "It is impossible
that they could have pardoned him! Pascual dead, dead!
What shall I do?"

Human cruelty. It is painful to say so, but some
persons wound even when they try to do good. Procopio
answered her prudently:

"Calm yourself, dear, Pascual is as well-known in
Mexico City as our cook, our good Bernabé."

Mamma became silent; the flaming anger in her eyes
was her reply.
Then spasms began to distort the lines of her face and her limbs began to twist like a chicken that has just had its head cut off.

"The attack!"

I rushed to the bedroom in search of the ether and the alcohol, and collided with Lulú who entered crying:

"Pascual is here! He just got out of a car filled with soldiers."

Mamma's attack suddenly stopped: "A prisoner!"

Then, again pondering:

"A prisoner! They're coming for the ransom! Procopio, save him! Save us! Sell the hacienda! Mortgage the mine! All, all for him!"

Neither the alcohol nor the ether, nor the energetic words of Procopio had the effect on Agustinita that the mere presence of Pascual had. Serene as always, smiling as always, kindly as always, handsome as always.

"Pascual, my son!"

Mamma was crying and laughing at the same time; the muscles of her face appeared to have gone crazy again. She finished by throwing herself in his arms.

"What is happening? Why are you crying?"

"You are a prisoner, Pascual, don't hide it from me!"

"What a funny idea!"
"And us without capital on hand to save you......... procopio, his ransom! Quickly, his ransom!"

"But where did you get that idea?"

"I know everything; it is useless for you to persist in denying it; those bandits have taken you prisoner."

"Bandits? Captain Covarrubias, my splendid friend, and the other gentlemen who are waiting for me outside?"

We looked at each other, dumbfounded. On Procopio's lips hovered an ambiguous smile.

"I have acquired connections with the high persons of our new government. There are some very honorable ones, like Captain Covarrubias. Anyhow, it suits our interests to accept the new men. Today and tomorrow are theirs. The captain enjoys the confidences of Carranza. He is a loyal and sincere friend that would be able to obtain all kinds of guarantees for the family."

There were abrupt and varied changes of expression. Procopio himself, who had listened to it all with an air of contempt and irony, scowled violently and bit his lips.

"If you will permit me," continued Pascual, ignoring the effect of his words, "I will present Captain Covarrubias to you right now."

I confess that, notwithstanding the respect and affection that I have for Mamma, and the great respect and almost veneration that my brother-in-law inspires in me,
on this occasion I did not agree with them. If I was unable to explain to myself the astonishing about-face of Pascual, Agustinita's reply astounded me even more.

"Procopio, what Pascual says is absolutely right. You must offer your services to Mr. Carranza. What talent and what shrewdness! Have you finally understood Pascual?"

Papa was as surprised as a colt caught by a lasso. And Lulú, behaving as if she had not been imbued with rigid family principles, replied vehemently:

"And the famous dignity?"

While Agustinita might have wished to annihilate her with a look, Procopio, with a glow of tenderness shining in his paternal eyes, defended her, firm and arrogant in her disrespectful gesture.

But I do not know why at that point the argument stopped. Pascual, without changing expression, said:

"My conditions not being acceptable, I shall retire. But I must not conceal from you the fact that you are in danger while you remain in this colony."

"What! What mystery do your words contain?" wailed Mamma in consternation.

"I have stated it very clearly," he responded, now standing, "the middle-class families are the ones most in danger of abuse."
Pascual withdrew and Agustinita, choking with anger, ordered Procopio to search for another house immediately.

"And where can we go so that we don't meet them?"

"To the Bolsa or Santa Julia colonies," Francisco José spoke discordantly; "it is logical to suppose that now in such locations the middle-class families may find the maximum of guarantees."

"There would be no anxieties or annoyances if Procopio were not so obstinate," said Agustinita.

And as Procopio remained silent, she insisted:

"Stubborn man, talk with Carranza, talk with Obregón: Pascual will open those doors for you...."

"Yes, dearest," Papa answered with a sweet voice and a sarcastic smile; "I shall join Carranza without delay, as Pascual advises us to do, and following that, I shall bring home all his new friends. How joyful! Our house a den of bandits. Isn't that the name you called them yesterday?"

One must assert one's opinion: if the hordes of Carranza are capable of all sorts of outrages, why open to them the doors of our house? Why deliver Lulú to them? Why entrust in their hands honor, lives, and property?

I made my thoughts and fears known to Lulú: I told her that she would be like an innocent gazelle in the midst of a pack of hungry wolves. She gave a disconcerting laugh.
"These people of the revolution frighten me as much, César, as that little lap-dog that is passing by."
CHAPTER IX.

It was necessary, therefore, that we move. What a house the new one was! Through a narrow and interminable passageway illuminated by artificial light as early as five o'clock in the afternoon, one came to a damp, cold patio like the bottom of a gigantic well, walls on the four sides perforated by dark entrances in which I glimpsed restless feminine heads, like doves in their dove-cote; large, black painted eyes, like the drawings in illustrated magazines, and the stirring of bare necks and arms in a froth of gauze and lace.

I had a presentiment and asked myself what kind of a place we could have gotten into.

The landlady, a crafty forty-year-old, "a type worthy of the Archpriest of Hita," according to Francisco José, relieved my fears.

"In all Mexico City you cannot find a more decent tenement house than this one. You must take into account that for us of the Interior, this matter of tenements is

8 Juan Ruiz, Arch-priest of Hita--first great Spanish humorist, author of "El Libro de Buen Amor," a precursor of the picaresque novel, which vividly portrays life and types in fourteenth century Spain. The reference is probably to "Trotaconventos," the hag who acts as a go-between in various love affairs.
something so strange to our manners and customs, that whatever might be the pretext by which one wishes to hide the shame of occupying them, never does one avoid the anguish of feeling that he has descended into an abyss on the social ladder."

We looked over the unoccupied apartment that was offered to us. It was the better part of the second floor: a series of rooms without more windows than one which overlooked the street, without other horizons than the whitewashed, glaring wall of a candy factory. Architecture hatefully geometric, of a hideous stupidity. I felt suffocated.

Mamma, who guessed my suffering, tried to console me: "Just imagine that we are in a provincial hotel, as travellers, for only one or two weeks."

Since our arrival in Mexico City, Mamma had insisted that we were just passing through and that such a thought would help us to endure our sad exile patiently.

We left, resolved to take the house, and that same night Procopio signed the contract. Resigned and depressed, we then abandoned our beautiful little palace.

The first days Procopio did not grumble, but at the end of the first week he began to complain of the cold and suffocating atmosphere between the white, bare walls.
Afterwards, he persisted in walking from one end of the house to the other, stopping from time to time to breathe deeply, his chest raised and his nostrils dilated. Until one day he finally exploded:

"Here one lives like a caged animal."

There was no human strength capable of restraining him and he rushed out into the street.

Like Agustinita, Pascual also accomplished his purpose: one afternoon he presented Captain Covarrubias to us. a young, arrogant man with good eyes, a small mouth crowned by two reddish mustaches like scorpions, gleaming, pointed teeth.

"My great friend, Pepe Covarrubias," explained Pascual, noting our cold and almost hostile reception, "is a member of a leading frontier family. A countryman and friend of Mr. Carranza. If he is only a captain, it is because his ambitions are not of that type. He united with the revolution only to look after the interests of his family."

Agustinita's expression changed quickly and she hastened to apologize:

"Please forgive us, sir; but all those people with leggings and Texas hats frighten us. With Pascual's explanation I understand everything. The motive that has obliged you to follow these people is very noble and just. Therefore,
know that you are welcome here."

"Madam, I shall how to make myself worthy of such a distinguished family," responded Covarrubias with the resonance of a bugle.

The conversation was very lively. Pascual delights us always with his pleasing and interesting talk. When, however, after having forgotten the presence of the captain, we turned our eyes toward the place that he occupied at Lulú's side, we had the disagreeable surprise of seeing him courting her in a manner that, if it is very Mexican, is not within the customs of decent people from the provinces. Mamma pressed her lips together with displeasure, calling Pascual's attention. And Pascual explained confidentially:

"It is just his way; but I guarantee his quality of a gentleman."

Then as he saw that his words did not succeed in quieting the kindled eyes of Agustinita, he called to the military man:

"Pepe, come here. I have been telling you for some time of the literary talent of Francisco José, haven't I? He is a future poet. I want you to hear one of his latest compositions."

The captain left Lulú, who was smiling, imitating in an admirable manner the sarcastic and cruel smile of Papa.
He came, then, to our side and told us that he was a devotee of art in all its manifestations, that he cultivated intimate friendships with literary people, painters, musicians, and eminent intellectuals.

And Francisco, standing in the middle of the living room, threw back his abundant black hair, revealing his bulging, serene forehead, his dreamy eyes, his aquiline nose, and his projecting and kindly lower lip. He fanned his face, fluttered the ends of his black butterfly-bow tie and, knitting his brows in order to collect his thoughts, with that grace that is so characteristic of him he began to recite a sonnet.

"What do you say, Pepe, what do you say?" exclaimed Pascual almost in ecstacy.

"Young man," answered Covarrubias emphatically, "you have unquestionable faculties; only I find it......how should I say it......a little out of date. You need surroundings... atmosphere. Look me up tomorrow at seven so that we may take you to a meeting of writers and present you. Look for me, you and Lulú; I will be very glad.....or if you prefer, I, myself, will come for you in the evening. You will go, Lulú?"

But Lulú was not able to answer because she had disappeared. Mamma commented afterwards: "If this young man
would succeed in erasing the impression that good-for-nothing Archibaldo has made on the child, I would become a little tolerant."

But such was not Lulú's opinion. The two occasions that the captain returned to the house, my sister refused to come out or to greet him.
CHAPTER X.

The days continued drifting by with discouraging slowness. One morning Lulú called me aside:

"César, I am dying here. Without air, without light, without sun! You, who are Mamma's pet, ask her to let us go out in the street, even for an hour."

"Lulú, are you in your right mind? Would you dare to set foot outside the house, seeing how the streets are still filled with those people without faith or fear of God?"

"Did you learn that refrain already? Silly! Come to the window and see how peacefully everyone is going by now."

She may have been right; but it was the innate lameness of my character that made me accede. Naturally, Agustinita gave me for a reply a peremptory "no" accompanied by a solemn invective for Lulú. Mamma was wise enough to understand that such an idea would not have been born in my head. However, the devil that intrudes everywhere, caused the desires of my sister to be realized that same afternoon. It happened that in those days the articles of prime necessity had reached an alarming scarcity, a very weak sketch, in truth, of the spectre of hunger that we now know so well, of a hunger that we did not suspect except as of hypothetical existence, as a creation of the phantasy of demagogues. Anyhow, Mamma had had to force herself to the last extreme to confess that in less than two months even
the last *cartones*\(^9\) were exhausted. There was nothing for breakfast on the following morning.

"You should have told me before. I shall go at once to get some money," responded Procopio without becoming disturbed.

"No; Pascual will get it sooner. I shall call him by phone."

Procopio took his hat and went out into the street without answering.

When it struck three o'clock, we became alarmed because Papa is like a chronometer.

Agustinita was of the opinion that some interruption in the traffic had probably detained him. And with that, we all began to eat tranquilly. But four o'clock struck and then five and he did not return.

"I hope that he hasn't met with an accident; nowadays those bandits attack gentlemen even to take their hats away from them," said Agustinita.

"Let us talk to Pascual, Mamma; it is possible that he may know something," I observed.

Lulú and I ran to the telephone of the drugstore across the street. But it was impossible to get the connection. Lulú, who was holding the receiver, said that the

\(^9\) *cartones*—cardboard money in denominations of five, ten, and twenty cents.
line was interrupted, that they did not answer, and so forth. We returned home and Lulú insisted that she and I should go personally to look for Pascual. He would probably be the only one that, in the ultimate event, would be able to serve us somewhat.

"Well, if we are going to do that, let's do it at once," I responded, "because it is growing dark and I wouldn't dare go out into the street then."

Although alarmed, Mamma seemed perplexed before making any decision. Lulú demonstrated to her with much ability that we would not walk even twenty meters on our own feet, then it was a matter of getting on a San Rafael train at the corner, getting off at the hotel itself, and then returning with the same security. Who knows why something of suspicion of Lulú's attitude passed through my mind, and I wished to give voice to alarm; but I felt sorry for her and kept silent.

Still Agustinita struggled brief moments to decide.

"You take an unfair advantage of my distraction, Lulú. Do you think that my prayer book of San Francisco is going to be the map of where you are going?"

And she snatched from her the book of prayers upon whose cover Lulú was illustrating her explanations with a sketch. Afterwards, she found fault with our clothing,
assuring us that she had never seen us look so dowdy. Finally, commending us fervently to all the Celestial Court, she sent us into the street. In the vestibule the poor woman was still urging me to take care of Lulú and Lulú to take care of me.

We had hardly set foot in the street when Lulú surprised me with her inconceivable audacity:

"Trains! What do you mean, trains! That's all we need! We came out of that house with our legs almost paralyzed and now are we going to shut ourselves in a box because of a mere whim when we have the free streets and two hours, at least, to run through them?"

"For the love of Heaven, Lulú!"

"I am not afraid of anybody when I go on the arm of César."

She seized me forcefully and let out a peal of laughter.

"Ah, Lulú, how tricky you are! What can I say when you thus put the dignity of my sex on trial?"

Then we rushed like two fools through those streets of God; lost among a crowd that intermingled in different directions, who were walking quickly, quickly. The peacefulness of the pedestrians restored my peace of mind. I finished by catching some of Lulú's joyful madness. When
we met a multitude of men, coarse, unkempt, and of frightful visage, I thought with horror, "It is they!" In fact, they did push me aside when they met us; but, upon coming out unscathed from the collision, I had a strange sensation of both joy and fear that made me recall Jhonson, a magnificent Newfoundland dog of Papa's, who, if he wished, could have devoured me at one bite. When I was very small, I used to place my little hands in his mouth, as moist and red as the heart of a watermelon, and the big dog would lick them gently, at the same time making me feel the faint contact of his sharp fangs which gave me a strange chill.

I told Lulú what I was thinking and she answered:

"When one lives thus, buried between the walls of that pork sausage that we call a house, the easiest thing is to give space in our minds to the worst lies and exaggerations. Whom have you seen these men harm?"

When we passed through San Fernando, I was surprised by the very effusive greeting Lulú gave to someone whom I did not see.

"Some fellow countryman, Lulú?"

"Yes," she answered me, smiling, "he is a fellow countryman."

10 Possibly a typographical error in the name "Johnson."
I searched eagerly for some familiar countenance, because the radiant face of Lulú was exceedingly expressive. "Do you guess who it is?"
"No, I don't find him."
Then I was able to discover a young man with a black beard and clumsy in his dress, who was coming in our direction, smiling and joyful.
"I think I know that face, Lulú."
She burst out laughing. Now Archibaldo was facing us, bareheaded, radiant as the sun at noon.
"As you formerly used to shave, I didn't recognize you," I observed gruffly.
I intended to make him understand my displeasure at the meeting; but without giving me time to begin, and with an arrogance without equal, he removed my hand from Lulú's arm, taking it himself with a very ardent gesture. Then they made me walk in front.
I turned my anguished eyes in all directions. I thought I would die of shame. Who might be witnessing my humiliation and disgrace? Fortunately, nobody noticed me nor Archibaldo nor Lulú. It seems that in Mexico City it is the common custom for sweethearts to go walking together and for brothers to pretend not to see. Such reflections calmed me, although for a very brief time; then the tacit
mission that Agustinita had imposed upon me was very clear. "I will not speak to them the whole way," I thought with dignity. Only they, as happy as a pair of sparrows escaped from their cages, were so busy with themselves that they did not even realize my existence.

Burning with just anger, I devoted myself to figuring out the most adequate means of acquainting Mamma with the occurrence, leaving my dignity safe and eluding responsibilities, when a storm began.
CHAPTER XI.

"Here through San Diego, turn at Juárez Avenue," Archibaldo said to me, patting me affectionately on the back, making me turn into the street.

That was not what was strange; the strange thing was that I should have obeyed without protesting. But if I am slow thinking at times, I am not slow acting. My sensitiveness rose to white heat. "Soon I shall make them understand," I said to myself, "that I am not precisely what they have tried to make of me." And from that instant, I had no other desire than to make them feel the weight of the authority with which Agustinita had invested me, and I watched for the first propitious occasion.

We passed through the Alameda. The wind was raging, the branches were shaking furiously, groaning, and the tree-tops bobbed about like mad things. Happily for me, there was neither lightning nor thunder, which would have made me lose my dignified aspect. Nevertheless, when the wind was flattening the grass and even the bushes and, roaring along the street, tore up a lamppost by the roots, a reflexive action made me retreat and put me at Archibaldo's side.

"Don't be frightened; it is nothing," he said to me.

I felt my face burning, but I had sufficient strength not to implore and I continued walking ahead, preserving my
threatening expression and my absolute silence.

Dense clouds of dust smothered the globes of the street lights along the avenue; large drops of rain began to spatter the pavement.

"We should be able to take refuge here under the trees," said Archibaldo.

And I thought, "Now it's my turn." All the more because the great responsibility in which the events placed me was not hidden from me. Resolved, I united all my energies and replied authoritatively:

"Mamma has not sent us to take refuge under any trees; Lulú and I must continue on our way. As for you, sir, you are very free to go whichever way suits you best."

I believe that until that moment they had not noticed my existence. They looked at me, surprised, they looked at one another and then laughed as if something had tickled them.

Nevertheless, my triumph was indefectible; they did not dare disobey. And precisely because I was fully conscious of it, it seemed yet a cruelty to persist in my whim, when it was raining in torrents.

"On the opposite sidewalk a vestibule is open. Let us go there, Lulú, until this shower passes."

They followed me without joking; but we had scarcely
arrived at the threshold when the porter slammed the door in our faces.

"Listen, you!" I shouted angrily, "we are the Vázquez Prados of Zacatecas!"

I have never seen more impolite people in my life.

Perplexed, since I had now taken the role that legitimately belonged to me, I thought about new arrangements, while they laughed and flirted, very happy, crowding together in that furious tempest as if they were in the pale light of the moon.

There was a streak of lightning, the lights were extinguished and I, in the dark, searched for Archibaldo and Lulu and tightly embraced them. What to do?

Like fugitive fireflies, white, green, and red lights were passing and intermingling precipitately, accompanied by the muffled rolling of busses, carriages, and bicycles. Near us were passing indistinct bulks; they would fall back to the wall and instantly disappear. The water was running off my hat like a canal. Suddenly, the street lights all went on and the great, lonely avenue was reborn, inundated in radiant clarity. Diagonally the rain was delineating arabesques of crystal. But it was the vision of a moment; a new electrical discharge submerged us again in darkness. And then something horrible occurred.
Near us arose a tremendous shouting: "Long live Francisco Villa! Death to Don Venustiano!" Then there were shots and people began to run in all directions. An avalanche reached us and carried us away. I tried to go back in search of Lulú and I became lost; I no longer knew in what direction I was walking. I became so frightened that I began to pray and with tearful eyes I shouted:

"Archibaldo, Lulú, here I am!"

Then, from a very large entrance hall, many armed men came out and dispersed in opposite directions. Suddenly a heavy hand fell on my shoulder.

"Is it you, Archibaldo?" I wailed.

They answered me in a language that I could not understand; then, seizing me forcefully, they dragged me to I don't know where.

Intense cold penetrated my bones. I shivered, gave a weak cry and opened my eyes. Horrors! Some giants with faces like Aztec gods had submerged me to my neck in a fountain of icy water.

"Good Heavens! Where am I?"

I could not understand the gibberish of those monsters from Hell. They were talking around me and showing their very white teeth in horrible grimaces. One of
them, muscular and colossal as one of the Green Indians\textsuperscript{11} of the Viga Canal, took me from the fountain and, by pushing, conducted me to a very dark place where he left me alone. Without strength to stand, I stretched out on the ground. An acrid odor of manure filled my nose, then I sensed very near the iron-shod hoofs of a beast. I understood that they had me in the stables of the barracks. I wept bitterly for my misfortune with tears that would have softened the most stony hearts. But, what can one expect from men who, as Mamma says, do not have a soul to save?

To my laments there answered, now a silence of death in the shadowy darkness, now the brief, sharp neigh of some stallion, infuriated because another was stealing his food from him, now the pawing of a satisfied mare. And oh! I felt the consolation of not being entirely alone.

"Come, Lulú, and see where your caprices and your rashness have brought me!" The idea came to me that my life was going to be extinguished in that dungheap and, what an extraordinary and stupendous thing! Instead of commending my soul to God, victim of an incomprehensible attack of rebellion, I shouted with all my strength:

\textsuperscript{11} Two bronze statues of alleged pre-Hispanic inhabitants of the Valley of Mexico. They weigh four tons each and originally were placed at the east end of the Paseo de la Reforma but adverse public criticism caused them to be removed to the Calzada de la Viga.
"That is enough, God; you are squeezing me like a new shoe! Confound it!"

Frightened by such ugly blasphemy or lack of courtesy, I realized that it was the blood of Procopio which, at that moment, had boiled in my veins and, with repentance for all my sins, I immediately made an act of contrition and disposed myself to die reconciled with God at least.

They say that the dying relive their entire past life in one second. What I felt in that solemn moment was an incomparable fortitude. I saw myself surrounded by all my most tender earthly affections. Agustinita with her meticulous love was not lacking, nor Pascual with his refined courtesy, nor Lulú herself, the frivolous cause of my misfortune (what am I saying!), nor the same Procopio whose blood made me blaspheme. Nobody disturbed the enchantment of these tragic moments. Then I closed my eyes very tightly, now disposed to surrender my soul to the Creator. But on the clock of time my hour had not yet struck; a brutal hand, perhaps the same that had dragged me from the street to the barracks, jerked me roughly from the ground and forced me to leave the corral. In the dark I crossed an immense patio; then they made me walk through a somber and interminable corridor. I heard a vague mumble of soft voices, almost like women singing; a nauseating odor of human excretions
saturated the atmosphere and that erased my first impression of a tropical wood at the hour when the small parrots begin to fall asleep. My feet stumbled against a multitude of squatty bodies and shadows that stirred and grew larger as I approached the only electric light in the middle of the corridor. When my eyes became accustomed to the half-light, these shadows began to materialize; some were cooking, others were darning black rags, many were cleaning themselves of lice, and the rest, lying around like animals, seemed to sleep deeply. I observed the noticeable resemblance of all of them: the same dull olive color, the same flat cheekbones almost protruding through the skin, the same lack of expression in their small eyes without eyebrows, their thin, beardless lips, the same long, straight, shining hair. But, since they were moving, they were not idols; then who were they? What men and what women? The light flashed suddenly in my brain and I began to shiver: a barracks of Yaquis!

They took me to the entrance way. A very sturdy charro, wearing a well-pressed cotton shirt, baggy trousers of white canvas, tight-fitting black leggings, and a straw hat with a brim so wide that it touched both walls, came to meet me:

"Do you know this friend, kid?"

"Archibaldo.....Archibaldo, my brother-in-law!" I
cried with unspeakable joy.

Hatless, drenched, his hair disheveled as a mop, Archibaldo, pale as a corpse, was standing in the midst of a guard.

"Take notice, my general!" he said, "that this poor boy is incapable of what they say! What I told you is the absolute truth."

The huge bandit, in the rays of the light in the vestibule, looked at me with unusual curiosity from head to foot and, giving me a kick as a parting gift, he cheerfully shoved me into the street and grunted:

"Villista......what do you mean, villista! This sissy couldn't be anything but a simpleton!"

"God be praised!" I said to Archibaldo as soon as he was at my side, also at liberty. "You don't know what tragic hours I have lived!"

"Well, you still don't know the most important thing. They were going to shoot us both. There was a conspiracy in the environs of the barracks and they picked you up for a villista. When you missed us, it occurred to me to ask about you at the barracks and they collared me also. Your limited physical development has saved us, and your looks... not very masculine......"

"Archibaldo, come to my arms! Come to my arms,
Archibaldo! I owe you my life! I owe you everything!"

I embraced him, weeping with emotion and gratitude.

"But, woe is me!" I moaned, "Archibaldo, I am wounded, I am wounded to death."

"You wounded? Where?"

"Blood is running down my face...."

"It can't be, César. Remember that you are drenched, and confused."

"No, Archibaldo, I really am wounded to death. The water in the fountain was icy and what is oozing down my chin is warm, almost hot......Blood, Archibaldo, blood!"

"But, the fact is that at the barracks I saw your face very clearly and you had only just finished washing it."

"Say what you wish, Archibaldo, but I feel my head spinning now. Help! Have pity, for I am dying! Archibaldo, hold me up; I'm getting weak!"
CHAPTER XII.

Very alarmed, Archibaldo carried me to the light. He examined me thoroughly and, after a burst of disconcerting laughter, he said to me:

"Don't worry, César. It isn't blood, your nose is running—very freely, of course, because of your ducking."

In spite of his objectionable tone, I felt my soul returning to my body.

"Now we must go get Lulú!" he said to me, suddenly filled with fear.

"Good Heavens! Where did you leave her? In the name of your ancestors, Archibaldo, please tell me where the poor girl is!"

God punishes our sins harshly! Oh, sister Lulú, I had forgotten even you!

"Lulú is waiting for us in the Alameda."

"Alone in the Alameda? Is it possible that you are so featherbrained, Archibaldo?"

"Surely she is better off there than where you were, in the barracks."

There was no reply to this charge. With all haste we entered the trees; Archibaldo walked toward a bench from which promptly arose a faltering little gentleman who threw himself into my arms, sobbing.
"Thanks be to God!" I exclaimed.

It was she, Lulú, wrapped in Archibaldo's raincoat and wearing his hat. We kissed each other and wept for joy. The poor child was scarcely able to believe in the miracle of my reappearance, and her faltering words revealed the sincerity of her pain and, at the same time, of her intense rejoicing. She caressed me with such tenderness that I, incapable of resisting these family scenes, without reflecting the scope of my words and responding only to the voice of my grateful heart, investing myself with the solemnity that such an act required, I said:

"I forgive you for everything; my life is yours. I had intended to tell Mamma everything, but by the venerated memory of the Prado generals, I swear to you that my lips will be mute."

Intoxicated with joy they embraced each other above my head and I think that they even kissed.

When we arrived at the market of San Cosme, Archibaldo said goodbye and I then realized the monstrousness of my offer.

"Since we can count on César," said Archibaldo, "let us see each other more often, Lulú."

I barely shook hands with him.

"What are you thinking of, Lulú? Look to what degree
of abjection you have made me descend! What are we going to
tell Mamma now? What are we going to tell Papa?"

"Don't you worry about such a little thing. Papa
must be already in bed by this time and much warmer than we
are. Run, for it is almost eight o'clock."

A few moments later, the trumpets and drums of a
barracks startled us and a retrospective horror made me
shudder.

"For goodness sake, Lulú, don't pull me along at
this pace for I am suffocating! Of what use is so much
speed now?"

At the door of the house, I stopped, perplexed and
worried. How to explain our lateness to Mamma without
speaking untruthfully and, at the same time, without break­
ing my wretched promise to Lulú and Archibaldo? It was
useless to rack my brain; my energies were spent; I under­
stood my absolute incapacity to give any continuity to my
ideas and so, leaving to chance that all would be resolved,
I lifted my head as much as I could, took a step forward
and entered.

Mamma screamed and fainted. Everyone ran to catch
her.

Pascual and Berta were there also, very much alarmed
by our delay.
"Mamma wished to put out a general alarm that would cause a search through all Mexico City."

"What a dreadful time you have given us, youngsters!"

Francisco José kissed me on the forehead. As soon as Mamma came to, she drew me to her bosom and our kisses and tears were mingled. What an affinity of manners, those of Archibaldo and Lulú! With an unbelievable impudence my sister said:

"This is what happened: we got on the train and half-way there it began to rain, then the lights went out and we were in darkness. It occurred to me that we were on the street of Isabel la Católica so we got off. An alley as black as the mouth of a wolf; then streets and more streets. 'I think we're lost, Lulú,' César said to me. I well knew it but I didn't say anything. Drenched to the skin we wandered to God knows where. Pure chance put us on the San Rafael line and, thanks to the miracle of I don't know what saint, here we are now."

"But, how could you come by San Rafael," observed Berta, very surprised, "if since six o'clock in the afternoon those trains have been suspended by some damage to the line? We had to take a cab because they assured us that those trains wouldn't run until morning."
"How are you going to fix it up now, bold Lulú, so as to get out of this mess?" I raised my head in order to observe the facial expressions and the first I encountered was Papa's, with a wide smile on his lips, as eloquent in his sarcasm as I have but few times seen him. I felt absolutely exposed and had an impulse to tell the truth, to shout it. But, surely taking pity on my torment, Procopio came discreetly to my side and, stroking my head with his habitual benevolence, he murmured in my ear:

"Poor little one! You are your mother's son!"

Why, instead of lowering my eyes, humbled, I raised my head in mute protest? Why did I feel hurt?

Lulú, meanwhile, had gotten out of her difficulty with the greatest of ease:

"I don't know if it was exactly a San Rafael train that left us off near here; the only thing that I can assure you is that now we are together and without more trouble than that of having come back changed into frogs."

"Certainly, for you are still croaking," I exclaimed without being able to contain myself.

"César, dear brother," she burst out in a happy laugh, "I hadn't noticed you! You look like a mouse just come out of the lard."
Everyone made much of her, even Mamma, who took the blame for all that happened, without remembering more of Lulú's perfidious insinuations. And I thought with deep bitterness of the sad future awaiting that wilful girl who didn't care an iota for the tears and grief caused by her guilt alone in the bosom of the most honorable home.
CHAPTER XIII.

"Man is not driven beyond his endurance," says Agustinita. And it is the truth. Contrary to all forecast, that night I slept as I do only when I am chilled and Mamma, before giving me a very vigorous massage, has me swallow a potion of warm milk with elderberry blossoms, poppies and dried prunes.

My first thought, upon awakening, was the correction of my errors. How could I live, carrying on my back the infamous complicity that I had committed myself to in a moment of perfect unconsciousness or of absolute imbecility? I sat up, jumped from the bed and went to the wash basin. A pitcher of cold water poured over my head returned my clearness of thought.

"I shall speak plainly," I thought, "and first to Procopio, because his smile I carry fixed in my mind like the sting of a venomous wasp. Afterward, I shall tell it all to Mamma so that she may take the measures that her duty dictates to her."

But I did not have to waste my breath. Events so favorable to my wishes occurred by themselves that that very morning I was able to exclaim, brimming with joy: "lavabo inter inocentes manus meas." When I was coming out of my room I saw Papa talking from his window to someone in the street:
"Come up, man, come up. Why are you prowling around the house like some criminal?"
And of course he would have to come up! Just look at the one they were saying it to!
Shamelessness in his monkey eyes, shamelessness in his small rabbit teeth, shamelessness even in the joy that flushed his cheeks.
"Aunt Agustinita, I am happy to see you so well. The colony of San Rafael suits you better than the Roma Colony. You have color and such round, plump cheeks that everyone is going to think that you are Lulú's sister and not her mother."

The flatterer went to greet Francisco José:
"I congratulate you, Frank, for your verses in the 'Radical' yesterday. They are a true revelation."
And just as I am telling it, with two sentences and two gestures stuffed full of pure lies, Archibaldo put us again in his pocket, melting the ice of an interview that for another would have been one of torment and confusion.

Naturally, his reëntrance to the bosom of the family in this form lifted a formidable weight from me. I doubt that his rejoicing, together with Lulú's, surpassed mine.

For certain persons, the use of words is redundant. Between Archibaldo and Procopio, explanations nor apologies
do not intervene; a light smile, a frank handshake, and that was all.

His visit was brief, and when he said goodbye with an odious "until this afternoon," we more than quickly rushed to the dining room.

"Where are you going? You should have stayed in bed. I am very sorry, my sons, but as Pascual has not come with more money, we shall have to tighten our belts."

The tone was so sour and the allusion so direct that Procopio, contrary to his habits and manners, felt constrained to reply:

"I recognize my guilt; I spent the afternoon looking for money and I have returned without even a piece of paper so that we might breakfast now. The truth is that a man can't consent to be the defenseless victim of those Bank crooks who, infected by the methods of our illustrious magistrates, assault him with the words: 'Your pocketbook or your life!'"

"You saved your purse, no doubt, and now we shall have your brave action for breakfast," exclaimed Mamma, allowing a wounding smile to show on her thin, dry lips.

Papa, pale, stood up:

"If I defend some interests........I think that they are yours........those of all of you...."
"Pascual will obtain money without any difficulty; you will see."
"Under the conditions which Pascual will arrange, surely I also could have brought it."
"He would have had it.....but you didn't......"
Procopio brought his fist down on the dining room table.

I was frightened. Vague memories of my childhood were stirring and, when they became clear in my mind, I was afraid. Why didn't the same thing happen to Mamma? Why, instead of appearing prudent, did she not have a recurrence of her attacks?

"Understand," she said to him, "that because of your ill humor no one is having breakfast, either."
"I have acknowledged my fault. Enough!"
"And you ought to acknowledge also that your aversion to Pascual is unjust."
"I have no aversion to anyone."
"You have always doubted his ability, his talent, his....."
"To do business with another's money, one doesn't need any talent."
"Pascual will bring us funds."
"The same as the other times: a heap of paper rubbish, to be refunded to him in cash values."

"Paper rubbish that will give us something to eat. Anyway, something that you haven't been able to obtain."

"Enough, I said!"

The voice of Procopio resounded like thunder. What grief! Surely the neighborhood would notice this disagreeable scene. How could we face them again?

Francisco José, to whose esthetic temperament all manifestations of violence are repugnant, took refuge in the bathroom; I shivered, hiding behind Mamma's skirt.

And she, as if she had been wound up, went on:

"What is happening is that Pascual's qualities have awakened envy and odium of impotence."

"What is happening is that Pascual is a trickster worthy of the veneration of idiotic old women."

A new blow with his fist made pieces of silverware roll with a crash to the floor.

Procopio got up and the doors, as if slammed shut behind him by a strong wind, made the whole house rumble.

The most profound silence followed. Mamma remained motionless and pale.

In a subdued and husky voice and with incomprehensible boldness, Lulú said:

"Papa is right!"
CHAPTER XIV.

To the honor and luster of our house, scenes of this kind have been exceptional. I can affirm that only on one other occasion something similar occurred. Papa had insisted that Francisco José and I go to the United States to complete our education. The resources that affection and wit had inspired in Mamma to defend us from such an outrage having been exhausted, she conceived the idea of consulting the opinion of the Bishop. The results were decisive. Mamma returned from the bishopric filled with vigor. With great courage she took the offensive openly and thus spoke to Procopio:

"I want you to show me where is the superiority of the American universities over our establishments as, for example, the school of the Marist fathers of Zacatecas or that of the Jesuits of Saltillo."

Papa thought he could reply by only shrugging his shoulders disdainfully and smiling.

"Then what you are seeking to do is merely to make our sons into Protestants, Masons, atheists?" Mamma burst out impetuously.

"You well know, dear, that I have never argued about the education of the family. I should like to prepare them better for the battle of life, that is all."

"Yes, now I understand: you would like to pull out
the wheat that I have sown in their tender hearts and supplant it with the nettles of worldly matters."

"The nettles of the ideas about worldly matters!" Papa exclaimed, still smiling in very good humor. "That means that you have come from confessional."

"From discussing it with His Illustrious Lordship."

"Admirable!"

"And I warn you that I am resolved to defend myself."

"You have said just about enough."

"I warn you that if I lack reasons to answer your arguments, the Bishop is prepared to discuss the matter with you."

"Enough, I have said!" shouted Papa.

"Now you must come with me to visit him. He has granted me the grace of an audience so that we may agree definitely on the education of the family."

An electric spark does not set off a stick of dynamite more instantaneously. His face darkened under a wave of blood, his eyes wavering, his voice harsh and stammering as if his words were molds, too narrow to contain his impetuous anger, he said phrases without coherence or sense. Agustinita explained later that he tried to say that he never would tolerate intrusions in family affairs. But she got her own way. It seems that she answered that when the money does not come from the one who wears the
trousers, the one who wears the trousers does not give the orders. And as, in fact, all the capital is Mamma's, the result of the dispute was decisive. A tremendous blow of his fist ruined the curtain in the study. Then, as now, terror, agonized faces, the slamming of doors, and silence.

From that time dates Procopio's detachment from us. He has never occupied himself with our education, and it seems that all his fatherly affection has concentrated itself on only one being: he adores Lulú.

And this will explain why he treats Francisco José and me with almost pitying benevolence. Far from drawing us to him, he keeps us always at a distance; he also forgives our decided predilection for Agustinita.

Since then, Procopio's fondness for solitude and books has grown. He shut himself up in his apartment. I remember that once when I entered his study, I was surprised to see so many newspapers, magazines, illustrated periodicals, paper-bound books and others luxuriously bound, mixed up in piles on the floor. I observed, astonished, that the honor of the bookshelves was enjoyed by a volume while its pages were still unopened and that many, scarcely begun, went into the pile in order to relinquish their place on the shelves to a beautiful ear of corn, to a great head of wheat, or to rare and exquisite fruits, all select products of the hacienda. Up to what point Papa's
reading had influenced him in the managing of our interests, the fact is that it has given us much to think about. Once Pascual had Mamma examine the securities in the strong box, had a minute inspection of the account books done. Surprisingly, it was seen that the yearly income exceeded by fifty per cent that obtained normally by General Prado, my grandfather. But, where was that surplus? Secret information secured by Pascual himself disclosed that everything was being spent for general expenses. "There is no peon," he said, "that does not have so great a debt that, by working all his life in the service of the house, he could never pay. The overseers enjoy superior salaries to those of any administrator of the neighboring farms; they have their own houses and more comforts than any employee of a similar high category in the city. The sharecroppers possess chickens, goats, pigs, and all that they want to have. Many even own saddle horses. Apparently Procopio's aim is to make them participants, without they themselves realizing it, in the general profits of the farm and without any damage to their salaries. Where does this river of silver come from? Where will these quixotic things lead, if not to the ruin of the proprietor?"

"All that is true," answered Mamma, "but I can say nothing to him because his account books are always at my disposal, the same as the strong box, and never, not even
in Papa's time, did I command greater quantities of money than now."

I believe that, considering Procopio's sensitiveness in this particular, the most insignificant allusion would have brought an immediate and definite break.

Was the marriage of my progenitors for love? Once, these words from Agustinita's lips surprised me:

"My father, General Prado, was a rough man but of noble heart. When Procopio, through the death of his father, Don Albino, became an orphan, he had him come from the United States where he was being educated and placed him immediately in charge of the hacienda. A few months afterwards he learned how to win Papa's sympathies in such a way that he was given entrance to the house, not as any of the employees, but as a member of the family itself. He was an attractive man, exquisitely attentive, always respectful, and he devoured me with his eyes. He did not create a bad impression on me, of course! We had an understanding. Then came the catastrophe, a cerebral attack, paralysis, followed by death that snatched Papa from us. Before completing my period of mourning, I gave my hand to the young administrator of our hacienda. When I opened my eyes, all had been consummated. Procopio turned out to be a boy that did not even know how to make a knot in his tie; he liked to go to the door of the house in his shirt-sleeves and once he
presented himself in street clothes at a formal dance, and finished by being my constant disgrace, by his thoughtlessness, by his carelessness, and by his rude tone of voice in society. For that had they sent him to be educated in St. Louis, Missouri?"
CHAPTER XV.

After this scene, Procopio came to a decision:
"Come with me, Lulú.......

As they were leaving, Pascual entered. Procopio hardly held out his hand.

"He is in a frenzy," said Mamma in my brother-in-law's ear.

And she told him point by point what had occurred.

"And you haven't had breakfast yet?" he asked, trembling with indignation. He did not wait for a reply; he flew to the market and, a few minutes afterward, entered carrying a bag replete with foods already properly prepared. Agustinita could not hold back her tears. Francisco José threw himself in Pascual's arms and I had to restrain myself violently from kissing his feet as a sign of gratitude. We quieted our hunger as politely as possible. Then Pascual took many packages of paper money from his pockets; so much paper that, when it was poured like a cataract upon the dining room table, it made me remember the magicians who, with their arms bare, know how to take out flags and draperies sufficient to adorn a whole salon. Agustinita, astonished, observed:

"And if he refuses to sign the promissory note?"

"Your word is my best promissory note."
"You are sublime, Pascual!" exclaimed Francisco José, crying.

Pascual smiled slightly; "But he will not refuse. After what has happened he has, by this time, probably become as soft as silk."

"You didn't see him!"

"His anger is like the sparklers that the street urchins use to play with: the kind that burn in their very hands without doing them any harm."

As soon as he left, we rushed to devour the food that, only because of education and discipline, we had been able to keep intact until that moment.

Near noon, Procopio and Lulú returned smiling and chattering: she, with large bunches of flowers in her hands, and he with his pockets bursting with bills.

What extraordinary keen judgment, that of Pascual! That very afternoon and in his presence, Procopio signed the documents of the new debt without opening his lips. In spite of that, when my brother-in-law left us, there was a long, expectant silence which lasted until evening. When we had finished supper, Procopio asked:

"How much do these quantities of money delivered by Pascual amount to?"

Mamma brought many notes; calculations were made of
capital and interest, and Procopio commented coldly:

"By selling my watch chain now in San Angel, I have brought half of the money that we already owe to Pascual. My watch chain! Let him who has ears hear....."

"What it means," answered Mamma, "is that only by selling some one of our houses in Zacatecas....."

"It would be enough and more than enough to cover this debt if we had to pay for it in the same paper money and if you were able to dispose of but one clod of the properties now."

"Pascual has assured me, on his word of honor, that the clause relative to the specie of money in which the payment is to be made, is only a form that all commerce employs and accepts."

"On his word of honor!" repeated Papa as an echo. And he smiled bitterly.

One day we had a strange visitor. During the conversation following afternoon tea, a small, fat woman with deep-set eyes and a feline nose squeezed her way in. She even came into the dining room itself and, greeting us with impertinent familiarity, she took off a queer-looking mouse-colored coat, so long that it came down to her heels. Then she took a chair that nobody had offered her and said:
"Your surprise does not astonish me. It is natural that you don't remember me. I left Zacatecas twelve years ago, the exact length of time that I have been married to Payito."

She stopped an instant to take off her veil and a hat with stiff, vertical plumes that encircled her head as erect as the crest of the Eagle Knight in my history book.

"Now do you remember? Payito, a very charming young man of Zacatecas in the good old days, Agustinita. The small boy who used to hang around us when we were fifteen...a terrible child! He's nothing like that now. By my side he has become more gentle than a lamb."

She boldly crossed one leg over the other, took out cigarettes and matches and began to smoke calmly.

"Payito," she continued, speaking in a solemn voice, "is one of the most influential lawyers in the metropolitan courts of law. His connections are with the aristocracy. He is a member of the Jockey Club and counselor for several banks. Now he has no business because, as you know, the millionaires have suspended their operations."

(Archibaldo says that in Mexico there are two epidemics: typhus and megalomania. I confess that when I resolved to investigate this assertion through my own observations, I have been forced to confirm it.)
"Payito has good connections. We live in Roma Colony and have a country house in Coyoacan; the hacienda of El Tocolote in Morelos is ours and we are owners of some mining property in Pachuca. We have six automobiles. We intend to go to live in Havana or the United States because now, middle-class people can't live in Mexico. Now you have recognized me, haven't you? You have guessed who I am?"

"She has probably taken us for some band of Hungarians!" Archibaldo exclaimed in a whisper, provoking a smothered laugh from Lulú.

"Well, yes, I am Aurora Caloca de Tabardillo," she continued more spiritedly, "you and I were friends in school, Agustinita."

And as she continued giving so many intimate details of the family, we finished by being convinced of the veracity of her words.

"I have a very good memory; but as I take little notice of domestic help, I do not remember if this gentleman (pointing to Archibaldo) was with you then."

We bit our lips. "Now you are going to meet your match, Archibaldo." He had an immediate reply ready, but the imperious gesture and severe look of Agustinita checked him.
It was impossible to follow the thread of the conversation of this good woman. That Payito was a model gentleman; that as a husband he was unequaled. And at times it seemed to me that she was talking to us seriously and at times that she was making fun of us. Anyway, her chatter lulled me when she began to unfold the genealogical tree of her family, that had more branches than a huizache. Little by little my eyes closed; muscles and joints relaxed in the pleasure that is forerunner to unconsciousness. And when a look from Mamma, as penetrating as an X-ray, woke me up startled, I did not know if minutes or hours had passed. I made a titanic effort. And she did not stop:

"Heaven has not wished to bless our union with any blond cherubim; our dreams are reduced to waiting for a tranquil old age and 'to go to the sepulchre like the sheaf of wheat reaped in due time' as the Sacred Scriptures say."

Surprised, Agustinita raised her eyebrows in a Gothic arch and approved of the tear that was trying to glisten on the scanty eyelashes of Mrs. Tabardillo.

"Of course, we are not enjoying our fortune now. We don't have more resources than from the daily paper where I write the women's page."

She leaned over to Mamma's ear:

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12 huizache—a spiny tree found in Mexico.
"The same as you, these bandits of Carranza have robbed us of everything."

Mamma finished by softening; her hands kindly and effusively pressed those of her countrywoman.

"If I tell you that Payito and I don't have but one shirt to our backs, you will not believe me......"

"Oh, yes, Madam, that fact meets the eyes!" said Archibaldo at last, not being able to keep back his obnoxious thoughts.

Agustinita, very angry, invited him to go with Procopio who was alone in the living room.

At last, Mrs. Tabardillo asked earnestly for a loan of fifty pesos that she would return to us the first thing the next morning.
CHAPTER XVI.

In fact, she did return the next day. Not with the money, but indeed with great news:

"Carranza's bandits are on their way. They are not just going, they are being driven out. General Villa and the ex-Federalists are coming."

Notwithstanding the coat and hat, Mrs. Tabardillo was sublime.

"Yes, Agustinita, inside of a week we shall be purged of this filth."

Frantic with joy, Mamma rushed into Procopio's room and pulled him to the living room.

"Ah, rascal, how you have been hiding the truth from me! Now I understand why you were obstinate about going to present your respects to Carranza or Obregón. Still water runs deep! I forgive you, because of the thoughtfulness of your intentions; you wanted to give me the happiness of a surprise."

Procopio looked at us from head to foot.

"Yes, I know everything through this dear friend and countrywoman of ours that I am going to have the pleasure of presenting to you."

"I don't understand."

"Ah! Don't you know that General Villa with all the
Federalists is coming to throw Carranza and his bandits out of Mexico City?"

"And us....what happens to us?"

"Almost nothing! Let the Federalists enter here and we leave straight for Zacatecas."

While Frocopio's smile has the rare quality of stinging Agustinita like an asp when he is more quiet and content, there are gestures and words of Mamma's that provoke a certain hilarity in Frocopio at times when his humor is more bitter. Our neighborhood, submerged in the silence of ten o'clock, must have vibrated with Papa's stentorian laughter.

"I never imagined that Villa would catch Carranza by the hair solely for the pleasure of smoothing our way to Zacatecas."

Mamma shrugged her shoulders disdainfully, came to sit down at the side of our countrywoman, and did not pay any more attention to Frocopio. Now it was her turn. She chatted, recalling the good times of youth in Zacatecas. And when Mrs. Tabardillo, with tears in her eyes, asked for another hundred pesos because they did not have anything for breakfast, it was not a hundred pesos but a bundle of bills that she carried away in her hands.

"You will tell me, of course, the day and exact hour when the forces of Mr. Villa will enter Mexico City."
Procopio's spirit is to Lulú's what Agustinita's is to mine; nevertheless, I have never been able to understand the words "Mr. Villa" on Mamma's lips.

During the night strange noises awakened me. The shouting of those that stay out all night, the cries, the loud laughter, the insults and shots by the drunken carrancistas no longer succeeded in awakening me; but the noise of those hours was different: the quiet steps of a multitude on the march; cavalry in muffled confusion; automobiles that would stop a few moments to allow brief voices of command to be heard, then the motor would rattle again and the car leave at full speed.

The next day we went to visit the lairs of the carrancistas and we found only rubbish piles, dogs with raised hackles and protruding ribs, devouring bones.

"The entrance of the conquering forces," said Mrs. Tabardillo on her promised visit, "is going to be quite an event. There is more enthusiasm than when Madero entered."

"I should like to attend," said Mamma, "and carry flowers to throw in their path, as they say is done in Mexico City."

"Right now there are some people who are offering two hundred pesos for only one little balcony on Juárez Avenue; but I can get you one for the same money in Plateros
Street that is more elegant. I shall buy the flowers personally. When I leave here, I, myself, shall go to Xochimilco because in Mexico City one does not find any, even at the price of gold."

One hundred pesos for the flowers and two hundred pesos for renting the balcony went flying from Mamma's purse.
CHAPTER XVII.

But in this world there is no such thing as complete happiness, as Agustinita says, Mrs. Tabardillo left and Pascual and Berta entered in disorder:

"We come to tell you goodbye. Within half an hour we are leaving for Vera Cruz...."

"You? to Vera Cruz?"
"Yes, Agustinita, we are going with the First Chief."
"Who is that?"
"Mr. Carranza."

"Mr. Carranza" in the mouth of Pascual had the same effect on me as "Mr. Villa" in Mamma's. I tried to doubt the honesty of my senses but the gesture and words of Procopio convinced me that I had heard right.

"Bah!" he exclaimed jubilantly, "now equilibrium is reëstablished. Pascual a carrancista and Agustinita a villista......May all result in the welfare of the family."

Pascual bit his lips and Agustinita pretended not to hear.

"But, how is it possible, Pascual," said Mamma, "that you have anything in common with these bandits?"

Pascual said that, due to the repeated negotiations that he had had to make in order to contrive funds for us, he had dealt with many high chiefs of Constitutionalism and, as he had been seen with them in Mexico City, he was liable
to be a victim of Doroteo Arango, the troglodyte.

"Who is that Arango?"

"The bandit who now goes under the name of Francisco Villa."

"Well, what I know is that Mr. Villa is giving guarantees, returning confiscated properties, and respecting priests and religion."

"If Villa triumphs, I will be back within two weeks, as soon as reprisals are over; but if Carranza triumphs, we shall be back very soon and, at any rate, our influence will be in the family's favor."

He took out many packages of paper money and, after counting them, gave them to Agustinita.

"Here is this....for if my absence should be prolonged...."

"Let the receipt be drawn up then."

"You already know that from you I do not need any document. This money is mine and what is mine is yours."

But Agustinita would not let him get ahead of her in magnanimity and asked that there be drawn up immediately a receipt for twenty thousand pesos in gold.

"Yes," applauded Francisco José, whom all fine gestures moved deeply, "it will only be an act of elementary justice."
A smile of sarcasm curled the lips of Procopio. And when Pascual, astonishing us with his foresight, took from his pocket the promissory note already written, Procopio said to him:

"You are a great psychologist."

And signed.

"I warn you, dear," he said as soon as Berta and Pascual had left, "that with the documents that we have made out to Pascual, and with the present state of our interests, we are on the edge of an abyss."

Mrs. Tabardillo the next day wrote a note to Mamma to notify her that when she arrived at Xochimilco she was the victim of an accident; she was attacked and robbed of all that she carried with her; she had had to return to Mexico City on foot, barefoot, and was seriously ill. She asked for another two hundred pesos, "a sacred debt that I will pay as soon as the forces of Mr. Villa begin to return our interests to us."

Poor thing! No one heard from her again. When we remember her, Mamma makes us say an "Our Father" and a "Hail Mary" for the eternal rest of her soul.

Moreover, due to our recent grief for the tempestuous departure of Berta and Pascual, we could not now accept her good services. Thanks to the stubbornness and good luck
of Lulu, we were permitted to attend the parade at the Alameda, among the crowd so that no one would know us.

"Francisco José," advised Mamma, "the three of you hold hands tightly because there is going to be much confusion."

But, once in the street, who were Francisco José and César to set a limit on Lulú's wilfulness?

Chapultepec Avenue had been swarming with people since very early. It was a fresh and fragrant morning; the pale rays of the sun barely reddened the romantic pallor of my brother but made Lulú's cheeks look like ripe apples. Francisco José, his head bare, let the foliage caress his forehead of a thinker and make his abundant mane float on the air. With much chic, he inhaled the pure air and the odor of the damp earth. The sky was blue, as smooth and shiny as satin; to the northwest within the boundaries of the immense valley and above the snowy summits of the hills, tufts of ermine were rising.

From each side of the silver ribbon of the boulevard rippled groves of velvety dark-green and the cultivated fields; the tops of the houses showed white, emerging from a sea of green and the buildings of red brick glowed in the sun, completing the national colors. Green, white, and red adorned the tops of battlements, arches, and balustrades;
in long strips the colors waved over silvered roofs and minarets of slate, roofs of metal flakes, fluttering on rigid poles and spreading with profusion at the ends of electric, telegraph, and telephone poles, on the black chimneys, and among the scaffolding of the buildings under construction. Confetti was scattered like rain upon the silvered eaves, wainscoting gilded by the sun, small towers of steel, tanks, and on the very foliage of the trees. As if infected by our mad, Mexican joy, the banners of the foreign countries waved also over their legations and the luxurious homes of the diplomats.

People began to block the way. Those in charge of organizing the parade were already swarming in their autos, on bicycles and on horseback. Soldiers with coarse features, as greasy, bestial, and repugnant as those who had just abandoned the plaza. On the sidewalks were intermingled with the dark, masculine clothing, fresh muslins, silks, laces, and flowers. Nursemaids with very white aprons were moving back and forth pushing wicker baby carriages. The chubby babies were nearly lost among the white, blue, and pink foam, with scarcely their heads and large, surprised eyes peeping out. The accent of rejoicing was reflected in the numerous foreigners who were witnessing the parade. And we remembered that the Americans had paid for good
locations in El Paso, Texas, so that they could comfortably witness Madero's attack on Juárez.

"What a sad note for our country!" commented Francisco José.

"And worse for them that call themselves mentors of the people!" responded Archibaldo. We did not know at what time he had joined us.
CHAPTER XVIII.

"Come, César," Francisco José suddenly called to me, stopping before a ruined aqueduct.

"Ruins of the Viceroyalty period?" I answered desolately.

"This is admirable!"

"Archeology? I prefer to follow Lulú, even with Archibaldo."

Some days ago Francisco José had made me accompany him through the Arches of Belem. He kept me half an hour in the sun before a horrible heap of deteriorated stone. I had nearly died of sunstroke.

"Francisco José," I said to him with much annoyance, "those distorted stones that look like the twisted candy of Zacatecas, those fish with the slippery snouts, and those cross-eyed, noseless matrons of your marvellous monument won't let me sleep tonight. I swear to you that I have never seen an uglier thing in my whole life!"

When I looked around in search of Lulú and Archibaldo to join them, they had disappeared. I searched in different directions without finding them and, by making superlative efforts, opening a way for myself among the enormous agglomeration by strength of elbow, in no less than a half hour I succeeded in retracing the twenty-five steps that separated me from Francisco José. My moral responsibilities depressed
me, annihilated me.

"Lulú, Lulú is lost!" I said to him in a heartrending tone.

Absorbed in the contemplation of his stones, he did not care to answer me.

"Lulú and Archibaldo are lost! Look! Lulú and Archibaldo......"

"Let them alone......and me too."

I was amazed. But relieved of a heavy burden. "Since Francisco José, my older brother, is tolerant, I shall be tolerant also."

Suddenly, the far-off music of trumpets and drums could be heard.

"Will you wait for me here? I want to go to see, too, Francisco José."

"Until the end of time."

And I threw myself into the midst of that swelling sea. I reached a tight human rope, impenetrable. Moving hats and heads appeared black at the height of my nose. Impossible to see more. Near me some boys had climbed a tree. I remembered that in my childhood, urged by a reckless youth at the hacienda, I sometimes climbed the mesquites to rob the wild pigeons of their eggs, and nothing ever happened to me. I put to a test, then, my acrobatic daring, but with such bad luck that I left half of my
trousers among some tangled branches. I did not have time to reflect on the spanking with which Agustinita would receive me because the martial notes of the trumpets and the sonorous beating of the drums deafened me. The vanguard of the triumphant army appeared in the distant bend of splendid verdure. Sticking to the branch of the tree like a lizard, I could see that immense multitude that came like the arm of the sea, filling the street. By what aberration of my spirit did I feel vehement desires to be one of those sunburnt Indians with shining eyes and white teeth, with palmleaf hats; some naked and others dressed in rags, all with mud up to their eyes? What superior thing (I should like to say "sublime" if I did not fear making myself ridiculous) did those people have thus in common that drew from me a clamorous and spontaneous "Viva!" which was lost in the thundering applause of a multitude drunk with madness?

It was a slow, interminable parade. They passed, carrying their rifles indolently across their saddles, their arms and legs lax, indifferent, as if the event was entirely abhorrent to them. There were moments when I almost recognized them. Wasn't that Zanón, for example, the one who was riding a cinnamon-colored stallion that was half-asleep at the end of a squadron? I seemed to see familiar faces in all those that were passing. Bonifacio, the milker, with
his eternally complacent face; Mr. Luis, the teamster, who used to hold me on his lap as he hauled in loads of grain from the fields on the cold February afternoons after the harvest; Petronilo, the old hunchbacked and long-legged one who, in late afternoon when the cattle were returning, used to mount me on the backs of the cows; Uncle Crucito, the octogenarian in whose arms I used to fall asleep listening to him tell the story of the enchanted hill that was supported by four bricks of gold that only the eyes of the Indians could see.

And, although these people were surely not they, yet they were the same. And how was it possible that such good people, so affectionate, so loyal, so simple and humble, could be capable of committing the horrible crimes that Agustinita and Pascual attributed to them?

"Lulú, Archibaldo, guess where I am!"

They passed like dry leaves moved by a raging torrent. They disappeared immediately. But with the hope of making myself heard by them, I shouted again:

"Francisco José is waiting for us in the Hermitage!"

But my words were surely lost in the shouting of a half-million voices: "Long live Francisco Villa! Long live General Angeles! Long live Emiliano Zapata!"
CHAPTER XIX.

Suddenly the branch that held me shook and I noticed that two other idlers trying to climb were swinging it. They did not give me time to advise them of the inconvenience of their aims, the tree cracked and the three of us fell in a heap, among guffaws, insults, and slaps. I escaped without more misfortune than having the back end of my trousers remain suspended from a branch.

In the Hermitage I found the imperturbable Francisco José and together we threw ourselves into the human torrent. The enthusiasm of the people knew no bounds. The most serene and pondering yielded to the contagion: I swear that my brother Francisco José shouted many times: "Viva Francisco Villa! Viva Emiliano Zapata!" however much that he now persists in denying it. The applause came like flashes of storm and when, from time to time, the shouting lessened a trifle, the murmur of the great human beehive made a harmonious background for the chiming of the bells in the churches, from the happy and playful ringing of the small bells to the solemn, grave, sumptuous one of the Holy Cathedral; the whistles of infinite tones and blends from hundreds of locomotives in their stations, of factories, shops, bath-houses, etc., the martial stridence of the bugles and the harsh, sonorous, and rhythmic beat of the drums.
The streets could not hold a larger multitude; the buildings were crowned with people, not only in the balconies and on the roofs, but on the very edge of the railings, between the merlons and dentils and upon the eaves of the porticos. Thousands of hands were waving ceaselessly in resonant applause at the passing of the squadrons. A rain of confetti and serpentine were falling upon those indolent beings that had begun passing at mid-day and still were not finished at the setting of the sun.

We reached home in a pitiful state: without having tasted a mouthful of food and sunstruck. Agustinita gave us a good dressing down. Procopio defended us saying that in this turmoil nobody is responsible for what might happen to him. And as soon as we began to eat, we told Papa what we had just seen, without omitting a period or a comma. He remained thoughtful and then said, smiling:

"Mexico City was bound to express the affection that it felt for Don Venustiano in some way!"

And then I realized that I, myself, had applauded as much as the rest did, but I didn't know why.

After a week, Agustinita said:

"It is very strange that no one brings us news of our house; I have read in the newspapers that trains from Juárez are arriving now."
"I believe that soon we shall have trustworthy news," responded Papa, quieting her. "I have already written to the bookkeeper to come here as soon as possible."

But as the first week passed, so passed two more. And Mamma had become extremely anxious when Pomposita came to see us, the lady that a year ago was in charge of the sale of milk from our dairy.

"I am mortified to tell you what has happened; but you can be sure that I do not exaggerate anything to you and that all exaggeration would be hardly the shadow of what happened in Zacatecas."

I felt cold; Agustinita became the color of lead and her lips trembled.

"But it is better that you know it. The night of the looting they did not leave anything. In your house, some generals gave a grand dinner. It was sad the next day to see the stream of feathers from your turkeys, herons, parrakeets, macaws, and the rest of the fine, domestic birds that those men ate up. There was a tapestry of a thousand colors from one sidewalk to the other."

Our sorrow became agitation when we learned that through the rubbish dumps the photographs from our family album often roamed, grotesquely disfigured by the infamous pencils of some of those monsters. That there had been
recognized among shapeless pieces of stone, the noseless
and blind heads of the Prado generals.

When that woman left, I felt that the air was again
breathable. I do not know what strange eagerness and what
infernal joy I surprised in her eyes and on her lips, but
she surely enjoyed herself goading our pain with a narration
full of the most cruel details. And I shouted with all my
strength:

"All that Pomposa tells is a lie!"

Francisco José ratified my words, but Mamma, drowned
in sorrow, was not listening to us.

"Remember, Mamma," said Lulú, "that the Pomposa has
borne us ill-will since the day you took the milk delivery
from her."

"Who is the Pomposa?" said Francisco José. "In Zaca-
tecas everyone calls her 'The Gossip Column.'"

Our insistence was in vain; Mamma began to twist in
convulsions. The attack! Papa was not at home, Lulú is
good for nothing and Francisco José almost a Lulú. I quickly
put on my coat and ran in search of a doctor. Ay! Two hours
of running through the streets, of going up and down stairs,
only to be definitely convinced that in this odious metrop-
olis, no one took me seriously and that our name had no
meaning whatsoever.
On my return, Procopio was already devoting his attentions to Mamma. The doctor came and prescribed pills and medicine. When Mamma had become calm, Procopio sat at her side and said to her:

"I have reason to believe that there is some exaggeration, at least, in what that woman has told you. If there are any properties that have some probability of being respected, they are ours. Because one must see things as they really are, dear. This revolution is a reprisal by our country people, so exploited and robbed by their landlords and bosses. And, well, no one in the state pays salaries superior to those that we pay. We have the best working people because no farm provides so many advantages for the day-laborers as we give them. He who once is a share-cropper continues being one. This winter, for example, all were very contented because they were supplied with wool blankets without anything being charged to their accounts. For two years the hacienda has had an agreement of free medical service and supplies for our domestic help. All enjoy decent lodging. And our administrator, Roque, this year received the most marked service in the person of his elderly father, who, without the costly operation that was performed in our own house and the personal care by the family, would have surely died."
"That is very true, Lulú acted as his nurse," exclaimed Mamma, wiping away her tears.

"And you think that those men will become our enemies even though the services that they have received from us are of the most strict justice?"

"They would be evil monsters!"

Thus, then, the grimace of skepticism with which Agustinita heard the first words of Procopio was followed by hope and joy. Mamma asked that the benefits which the hacienda was accustomed to give to the poor be told in detail.
CHAPTER XX.

Agustinita, sobbing, called us to her:

"Children, I have been unjust with your father. Forgive me and may God forgive me also. I hope that the good that Procopio has known how to do may save us from catastrophe!"

And a very abrupt change was produced. For many days our sorrows were not only bearable, but we came to love them as the bitter potion that returns health. The sorrow purified us from old sins. Agustinita repeated to us: "To him we shall owe the salvation of our interests." And Procopio grew and became extraordinary in our eyes. Now his actions and his manners, that formerly seemed so blameworthy to us, found a just explanation and even our sincere admiration.

Procopio did not disdain to remain a few minutes conversing with us. Was Heaven pitying, at last, our misery and blessing our home with union and peace?

I observed, nevertheless, that while Agustinita was only thinking about the hacienda and the money, Francisco José about a new poem, and Lulú about Archibaldo, Procopio was wearing a mask to deceive us all. Frequently, I found him pensive and absent-minded. I saw how each day he was becoming more pale and thin. He became very careless in his
dress. And he, who always gave proof of a great serenity of spirit, now was hesitant about everything.

One afternoon the enchantment was broken in the most brutal way. An old man, dressed after the fashion of our region, knocked at the door. His large, straw hat scarcely fit, his trousers of chamois skin were yellower than the flower of the huizache. We went out to meet him and embraced him. It was Victoriano, the oldest and most petted of our servants. We effusively pressed his calloused and powerful hand; we made him take a seat and with great anxiety we asked him about our things.

The poor old man, who up to that moment had been very happy, became embarrassed; the white ivory of his teeth disappeared, the wrinkles in his forehead deepened, his eyes darkened, and his tongue tightened; he could not find where to begin. Papa, himself, questioned him with serenity and firmness. The old man sighed noisily, spit into the patio, and made a solemn gesture of fatality. We were all silent, hanging on his lips, on those words that could not come forth. He shook his rough and dusty head once more and, trembling and stammering, said:

"Well, nothing, Master.....nothing... They got in and they didn't leave even enough corn for the chickens. Cartloads and cartloads made a line to the station. Not
even one animal now remains in the pastures; they have shipped everything to the United States. The mine is ruined. I don't think they could take the machines apart and so they put in dynamite and...blew them up! No more than heaps of iron are left. Now there is only the land, because there was no way to carry it off.

"And Roque?"

"The master Don Roque, the same as always. He continues to be in command as before, only now he is a gentleman with an automobile and does not pry himself loose, for anything, from the generals who are going and coming at the hacienda."

Agustinita's eyes, like flames, were searching for Procopio. But Procopio, beaten, would not raise his head.

And, as Victoriano became absorbed in more details, Papa invited him to come in and eat while he barricaded himself in his study.

"He is dying of grief," exclaimed Mamma with rare insight, "but certainly not for the great losses that we have suffered; that would not matter to him except for the mortal blow that his pride has suffered."

Francisco José, understanding Agustinita's intention, added:

"Of course! What is going to be thought of him now, of the 'connoisseur of our people, of the very noble
disposition of the race, and of the laws of our social and economic development?"

If Agustinita's pain did not dissolve into weeping on this occasion, it was because it found relief in sharp, wounding words, cracking like the lash of a whip.

One more among the many very sad days of our lives. In the sorrowful silence of the house, one could hear only the feverish scribbling of the strong and agile pen of Francisco José. "What could that man be writing now?" I asked myself, astonished. And, secretly, I approached to read over his shoulder the epigraph of a new poem: "These, Favio, oh sorrow! that you see now, fields of solitude, withered hillock...."

But what my brother Francisco José has in depth, Lulú has in frivolity. When it was growing dark, she broke the magnificent silence of our dwelling with her fine and delicate voice singing "Abandonado."

"Who is singing?" asked Agustinita, surprised and greatly displeased.

Then she shook her head and exclaimed with fatality: "She is her father's daughter!"

And that melancholy air of our dear native land continued falling like a drizzle of sorrow on the darkness of our hearts.
Sorrow refines sensitiveness extraordinarily. I never saw Lulú more beautiful than that night. Her graceful silhouette gliding through the dimness, without raising her eyes from her embroidery, step by step she entered the living room where we all were desolately sitting. Her floating sapphire-blue frock, flowered with roses, emphasized the delicate purity of her profile, the smooth ivory of her throat, her cheeks, and her forehead; the burnished gold of her curly hair and her long lashes. Without considering our whispering, she occupied an armchair in the circle; then, as the light was already extinguished in the piece of dark-purple sky that peeped in through the window panes, she got up, pressed the electric button and imperturbably returned to her sewing.

I counted the griffons on the carpet ten times. Did a half-hour pass, a day, or a century? The silence, the confined air bothered me. I got up and opened the window; but not even the fresh air of the night relieved the oppression in my heart. I went to the door of the bedroom and drew the shade. There, in one of the rooms in the rear, in the half-light of an oil lamp, Procopio was sitting motionless, his head in his hands and a dejected look in his eyes.

"Come, César, don't grieve so. This will pass."

Agustinita's fingers, softer than ermine, rested upon
my tousled hair. She had understood my anguish, because for her my mind and my heart were always as clear as crystal.

"How much more worthwhile it would be to go to speak with Mr. Villa and not act like such a ninny."

"Don't you say that about him," burst out Lulú, turning pale.

Almost without precedent. Agustinita excused herself:

"I have not tried to offend him, child; but one must tell the truth......"

"My father is a worthy man....."

Mamma's disconcerting humility was the best punishment that Lulú could receive. And, in fact, she burst out crying.

"Mamma dear, Lulú didn't intend to offend you either. Perhaps, her affection for Papa...."

Then, Agustinita, infuriated, turned on me:

"Since when do the children of this house take part in the intimate affairs of the family? What times, sir, what times! Everything has been lost, even discipline."

One word, one glance, one gesture of mine had sufficed to unleash the storm, suspended as by a miracle over our heads.

Silence reigned again. Archibaldo, who had remained at my side without speaking, said to me very softly:
"Only a spirit tempered at the forge of your father's soul will be able to ascend this Calvary."

And I answered him: "And are we in a bath of roses?"
"An unbelievable amount of money is being spent," said Agustinita. "Bernabé has become intimate with the landlady and that is a very serious matter."

The best servants, those who come from the Interior, become infected as soon as they come in contact with these cunning servants from the capital and soon excel them, reaching a state of incredible perversity. Agustinita, then, overcoming the instinctive repugnance that the inferior classes inspire in her, made me accompany her to the market to make her purchases personally. From such a test Bernabé came out as clean as a china cup. All is the maltreatment by the merchants which exceeds the very limits of decency. The Spaniard in the bakery, for example, pilfered a five-peso bill in making change. "You are a disgrace to your color, blood, and race!" "You are the same as these naked, wild Indians that have put us in this beggarly position!" burst out Agustinita, not being able to contain her anger any longer. The milk vendor, after selling us at a fabulous price a mess of starch and water and God knows what, left half of the milk in the bottom of the measure. In vain, Mamma recalled to him the great moment in which all of us will have to appear before the presence of the Supreme Judge to give an account of our actions. "Do you hear, you who have no soul to save?" she bitterly chided the pork vendor who,
Instead of loin, gave us some noxious skins.

Such just protests only resulted in noisy ridicule. They called us "rotos,"13 "reactionaries," "científicos,"14 besides the broadside of obscenities that is the only language with which these unhappy ones succeed in understanding each other. A crowd of filthy, lousy children formed a circle around us and, shouting and whistling at us, accompanied us to the door of our house.

"What is happening?" asked Archibaldo, surprised by Agustinita's anger.

"That riffraff! It isn't enough for them to barely leave us the clothes on our backs; now they propose to starve us to death. I even doubt God's justice!"

"Mamma dear!" I gave a cry of fear.

And I raised my terrified eyes. Nothing! The sky shone serenely; a little white cloud floated in the infinite vault. In truth, it would have been difficult to obtain a streak of lightning, even for punishment. For which fact, filled with gratitude to the Supreme Judge Creator and overflowing with joy, I exclaimed:

"Mamma dear, the Lord will not forsake us. 'The leaf

13 roto--a low-class person.

14 científicos--a group that appeared during the Díaz regime which believed that Mexico should be governed by white men and civilized by the importation of foreign capital.
of the tree does not move without the will of God.'"

"César," she said to me, "count the money that Pascual has left us and make an approximate calculation of how long it can last us."

And she scattered upon the carpet a basket-full of Constitutionalist paper which, because of the pressure of time, we had valued by bulk and not by count. It was the task of the whole afternoon to be able to say at last:

"Supposing that the raise in price for the articles of prime necessity reaches one hundred per cent, we shall have enough for six months."

"And six months from now, of course! These bandits will probably have finished by devouring each other and Mr. Huerta, with all the honorable people of Mexico, will be governing us, as is just."

Six months? No, sir, twenty-four hours. Archibaldo came in with his jaw sagging and livid with the news:

"A decree has just appeared. Carranza is annulling his paper money."

Procopio's eyes burned somberly. The rest of us looked at each other, terrified. What words, or what laments, or what tears would have interpreted the effect of such an unprecedented blow? Agustinita slipped out without even letting the rustle of her skirt be heard. Through inertia, Francisco José followed her; then at a sign from
Procopio, Lulú left also. Only I, thanks to my insignificance that permits me, at least, to be confused with any object of adornment or decoration, I remained motionless in my chair in a dark angle of the living room.

"And now?" murmured Archibaldo.

"I don't know.....I don't know....."

And the two remained with their eyes lowered and in silence. The smile of Procopio had evaporated. And Procopio without his smile is the same as Archibaldo without his frivolity, they are not Procopio nor Archibaldo. I felt something indefinable. These abrupt changes are somewhat intolerable for my nerves. I was feeling of a mind to speak or to leave when Archibaldo broke the silence:

"You are the one who ought to decide everything, Uncle Procopio."

"Yes...yes.....I ought....and frankly I don't know, nothing occurs to me."

I contrasted the lively excitement of Archibaldo with the debility and almost stupefaction of Procopio.

"The matter is for immediate resolution," insisted Archibaldo.

"I have lost the faculty of thinking, of working.....I have no will....Tell me, advise me."

"I have my plan already, but yours is a problem of this very day."
"Of this very day, it is true."

There was silence again as each was absorbed in thought. Suddenly, Procopio stood up and said:

"Archibaldo...."

His eyes burned intensely. And I saw how that light was going to concentrate on another much more brilliant: that of the diamond that sparkled on one of his fingers. Then his smile appeared again on his lips and I was able to breathe at last.

"Archibaldo, do me a great service. Go and sell this at once...."

"The ring of General Don Ventura Prado?"

A smile passed between them both. And I was glad that Agustinita had not been spying on them.

"Good, we have found the solution for the moment. Now, tell me, what is your idea, Archibaldo?"

"Very simple: to go and get money from where everyone gets it now."

"A soldier?"

"Why not?"

"I should be sorry for your dignity. The barracks is the school of absolute servility."

Archibaldo shrugged his shoulders with supreme indifference, picked up his hat and went out saying:
"The important thing now is to sell this. I'll see you this afternoon, Uncle Procopio."

When Papa was alone, he suddenly noticed me and, very excited, I do not know if from surprise, anger, or shame, without saying one word to me, he took me by the ear and conducted me to the nearby bedroom.
CHAPTER XXII.

Since the last occurrences mentioned up to this date, it has rained. Infinite discouragement weighs upon my brain and hand. Nobody takes the trouble to encourage me to continue my journal and, if today I take up my pen again, it is by impulse, a product of the utter idleness in which I live.

It is not my mission to narrate historical nor political events, but the happenings are linked with the intimate progress of our private situation in such a way that I find myself compelled to touch upon them. As soon as the zapatistas were expelled from the capital by Don Pablo González, our hopes in Carranza were disappointed: Pascual did not come with the carrancistas as we hoped; Carranza refused to recognize the paper money issued by him a second time, with the same unprecedented shamelessness with which he had ordered the banks robbed. I lament Pascual's absence because he would have explained a great deal about the situation to us. Procopio says: "This story of blood and rapacity on the part of some; of misery and abjection on the part of others, stains us all equally; we are all acting a role more or less wicked or miserable." I apologize to say that we are not in accord with the final assertion of his opinion, as we neither are with Archibaldo's opinion. Before going with the zapatistas, he said: "Carranza's followers have proposed with their infamies to cleanse the stains of
the assassin Huerta and retinue, leaving them whiter than ermine." And we do not agree because it means an insult to Mr. Huerta and his colleagues.

This long period of revolutionary governments, and the same pre-Constitutional one that still afflicts us, has been a sorrowful Calvary which we are ascending without respite, and we are atoning a hundred and a thousand times, not only for our sins, but for those of all our generations. Thanks to Mamma's jewels and the fact that we were able to exchange them for two baskets of the latest paper money issued by the bandit from Cuatro Ciénegas,¹⁵ we are still living. Nevertheless, the fear of a day dawning with a new decree and the consequent plundering has made us leave our apartment on the street of Arquitectos and reduced us to the humble place that we now inhabit in this poor district. In the matter of food, so many economies have been introduced that the beggars who, in the times of honorable people, used to come to the doors of our house, were fed better with those left-overs than we are now.

Since the last dispute between Procopio and Agustinita there has been a simulation of tolerance, along with a pretense of cordiality. Beneath the surface, the cord is so

¹⁵ A town in the State of Coahuila where Carranza once lived.
taut that it will have to break.

Agustinita is now everything in the house. She maintains our failing energies, constantly revives our faith, and feeds our hopes with the illusion that Don Felix Díaz 16 "is going to capture the plaza the first of next month." And for a year, he has been capturing it!

Procopio's calmness is a farce. His stupefaction and apathy are very apparent. He does nothing but smoke cigarrets and read the trashy books which the grocer on the corner lends him. And we are all desolated to see his astonishing indifference to our horrible descent to mendicancy.

Lulú has become pale and thin, in other words, ugly. But not so much because of our penury as because of the absence of that Archibaldo. They say that he is fighting in the ranks of Zapata. A worthy end for such a wonderful person!

Yesterday morning, a loud ringing of bells in the parish church of Los Angeles awakened Francisco José. His eyes filled with tears and, his heart overflowing with sadness and bitterness, he said:

"César, brother of mine, did you hear? The bells of

16 Don Felix Díaz was a nephew of Porfirio Díaz and a reactionary.
"They sound much like them," I answered, moving lazily beneath my quilt.

Plaintive, Francisco José told me of the mystic language of the bells: "The solemn and sumptuous ones of the Cathedral on the three great Thursdays of the year, Corpus, Ascension, and Holy Thursday; those of the village at vespers, in the tranquility of a mountain city; those of the districts on the eve of fiesta, with inharmonious orchestras, discordant fanfares, flageolets, drums, skyrockets, and bombs; the panting of eccentric dancers and the noise of multitudes, caught up in simple, provincial joy."

"Bravo, Francisco José! I bet that you have forgotten that for twenty-four hours we have had nothing but air in our stomachs."

"I have not reached the point of sufficient imbecility from hunger to prevent me from becoming excited at the voice of the magnificent bells."

"You are shrewd, brother; you know how to take advantage even of hunger. Your empty stomach has freed you, in fact, from two calamities, the headaches and the eternal aspirin."

"Be quiet, you simple, common person; listen to the bells!"

"I confess to you that in this endless hubbub of the
capital, in this atmosphere of banality, the chimes are dull and harsh. In my soul, the feeling for music has already been extinguished. Above all, that business of hearing them every day, both morning and afternoon, to celebrate 'the triumph of the loyalists' is somewhat like a cold shower for my enthusiasm."

"You are right, César, in the agitation of this Mexico City, all is lost. The monster devours everything, good and bad. Only we, those who lulled our tender years to the sound of the village bells, know of this celestial music. Our deepest sorrows and our most intimate joys are indissolubly associated in our memories with the sound of the bells."

The district evoked in us many memories: from the rough wall surrounding the parish church of Los Angeles, with its dusty door of mesquite under the half-point arch; the glass rosette mended with moldy tin and gray with spiderwebs; the dwarf towers like the small forts erected in each angle of our hacienda; to the prolonged and melancholy bawlings of the calves in the stables of the poor and quiet suburb.

That day we could have dispensed with the trouble of leaving our beds, but the force of habit got us up at the regular hour.

I said to Mamma:
"Mamma dear, will you give us permission to go out into the street?"

"Not now nor ever. What will you look for in the street?"

"The same that I look for here, Mamma dear."

"Not a month ago a carrancista made a tortilla out of a poor child that was playing in Chapultepec Park, under the tires of his automobile."

I gave Mamma a look that meant: "What's the difference between dying run over by an auto or being consumed by hunger?"

But she understood it in another way:

"Ah, you doubt it?"

Suddenly, she went to her bedroom, took a package of clippings from a newspaper and, unfolding one, read me the detailed narration of one Savage crime of those that the hordes of Carranza commit daily.

"Mamma dear, word of honor that I shall not go to Chapultepec."

"But the danger is everywhere," she answered me resolutely. "A few days ago the students from official schools and colleges were obliged to compete in a sham battle and those carrancista assassins and bandits, with the bestiality and cowardice that characterizes them, assassinated twenty defenseless boys."
And, as if I were able to doubt her words, she took out a news clipping and read me all of it.

"I shall not be one who adds my name to the list of those fathers of families, idiots, and criminals who entrust the lives of their children to these monsters of evil."

"But now there is no sham battle, nor am I a student at any college."

(The maternal composure should not seem strange, because hunger impresses profound modifications on an individual's manner of being. I, for example, have lost much of my primitive timidity and am a perfect hypocrite.)

I confess my desire to argue as equal to equal with Agustinita. But there came, to take us out of a situation that was becoming jeopardized, the glorious entrance of Procopio with a basket stuffed with rolls and sweet corn bread, and a pitcher brimming with milk.

It would be useless to relate in detail the voracity with which we all made it disappear, without even waiting to get to the dining room.

"You have surely sold what I wished never to touch," murmured Agustinita, resigned, "the golden shrine with the authentic bones of the Holy Martyrs that my uncles, the Prado generals, brought to us from the Holy Land. Let it be for the love of God!"

I was too busy with my last corn cake to worry about
Mamma's scruples. But it seems that Procopio received some money in a somewhat strange and mysterious way. The truth is that he arrived in a very good humor and when he learned the reason for our discussion, he resolutely took my part:

"Yes, dear, let him go out. General Don Pablo González assures us all kinds of guarantees. If you read the paper you will see that now only the generals, the colonels, the majors, and the captains kill; only in the prisons, in the cemeteries, in the public offices, in the theaters, in the restaurants, and, particularly, in their favorite lairs......"

"Enough!" interrupted Mamma, indignant, "I, indeed, know to what houses you wish to refer and it is not necessary that you designate them by their names here in front of the children. What a state of laxity we have come to! Well then, I say and repeat that César is going to take a walk, because César is a decent boy that has nothing to do with those centers of perdition. Let him go and let Iulú go with him."

Have I not said that hunger has transformed us?
CHAPTER XXIII.

At the end of the street the dark-green angle of the Alameda and the square bastions of the National Theater converged in a thick mass. We were walking hand in hand and in an almost religious silence. We were afraid to be so happy. The blood flowed through my veins, I was filled with new sap; my lungs were dilating to breathe the air of the street, the sun was an unutterable caress for my pale, almost parchment-like skin. New and disconcerting ideas, sentiments, and impressions were flowing to my brain. At the sight of the Pegasus of steel that, from the top of the theater, seemed running away toward the silver gray of the clouds, I intuitively felt the meaning of life and I, also, was carried away:

"Ah, Lulú, how beautiful is eating!"

"But, where are you taking me?"

"How do I know! Let our feet lead us. These moments of happiness are so rare!"

"What a pity that we cannot all be as happy as you!"

"What is troubling you now, Lulú?"

"Papa, who suffers more than all of us put together."

"It is probably not your fault nor mine.

"Selfish one!"

"You have your point of view...Procopio's."

"And you have Agustinita's..."
"Look, Lulú, I am not in favor of oversentimentalities nor sighs now."

A motly multitude was going through the street: women crowned with grasses and roses, their long hair loose and damp; men with flowers in their lapels and in their hat-bands. Flowers and greenery adorned the trains, the coaches and the autos; even the shabby pulque carts flaunted brightly colored flowers set in clusters of green leaves.

"It is the feast of Santa Anita," Lulú told me; "that is why the bells have been ringing so much in all the churches."

"Ringing for a religious festival? I don't believe it. Those crocodiles that govern us would not permit it! However, it may be that it is this way: these politicians never had any qualms about grovelling at the feet of any of these men whom they hate so much, if that is the only way to satisfy their brutish appetites. It will be reason enough that one of them should have a good-looking girl in his home."

For half an hour we remained in the Alameda, listening to the water splashing in the stone basin of the fountain, and a half hour in the semicircle of Juárez. The luxurious avenue now was only being traveled by carloads of carrancista pigs and their females.

"Now, let's go through the street of Madero," Lulú said to me.
"No, it's better through the Fifth of May. I don't want to see those ridiculous hulks that they call arches of triumph, that have been waiting for Don Venustiano for a year now! As for that coarse muslin, dyed in distemper, and cardboard glued together, I have seen better in the most grotesquely decorated small village of my homeland."

We pushed along and stopped a moment to read one of the inscriptions that crowned the first triumphal arch: "Hero of Peace, your liberated people salute you."

We laughed willingly:

"Yes, let him come to see his liberated people along the streets, forming a cue under the burning rays of the sun, their tongues hanging out like tired dogs, waiting since dawn to be sold a liter of maize or a kilo of damp, dirty-brown sugar."

I patted my stomach with satisfaction and praised God. They were far from inspiring any compassion in me, that rabble of lousy, naked people who, half dead from hunger, were stretched out along the sidewalks in the very heart of the metropolis with scarcely enough strength to wait for a crumb of bread. I said to myself: "Now they have the government they wanted, the confounded fools!"

"How different from the Mexico City that we knew, isn't it, César?"

We remembered our first vacation trip to the capital.
The echoing streets, a double file of carriages drawn by very beautiful horses, women dazzling in their beauty and elegance. One did not know where to turn his eyes, whether on the arms, breasts, or heads sparkling with precious stones, or on the show windows like pools of gold and diamonds under the cataracts of electric lights.

Our souls were crushed with sorrow when we saw those enormous windows shattered by stones or bullets. Some were still preserved, supported by abominable patches of tin and sheet iron. And instead of the artistic and rich objects, the show windows displayed heaps of hairy onions, mounds of dropsical tomatoes, barricades of potatoes, unrefined sugar, and bread more anemic than those who, from without, were looking at it, licking their lips. By this, I have stated that misery has lost even modesty. The more daring storekeepers, those who escape the authority of the Provost, were showing the remainder of their left-overs: hats of the time of His Serene Highness, shoes of Leonese manufacture that in the heat of mid-day, emitted a fetidity sufficient to penetrate the inch-thick glass. And as the crowning joke, dress suits, ancient and hideous garments at fabulous prices.

"César," exclaimed Lulú when we entered the Plaza of the Constitution, "the Calvary of Holy Thursday!"

"It is most extraordinary," I responded, "bell ringing, flowers, and now the altar of the Passion in the Zócalo
itself. I swear that I do not understand."

I took her hand and we walked toward the center. The plaza had been converted into a leveled plot of ground where dust storms constantly arose to obscure the cathedral itself. For a perfect resemblance to any village plaza there was lacking only the files of equipment near the great fires where the mule drivers warm their provisions, and the pack animals trampling about in the loose earth.

"Lulú, the author of this prodigious monument is a general without any doubt, but I could swear that yesterday he was a sacristan. Observe that only to a technician of sacristy could occur this cheap imitation of the Passion. Except that instead of the symbolic ladder, the cross, the holy altar cloths, the nails, and the cock, there is a wrecked streetcar, some exploded mines, a burned bridge, and telegraph poles lying on the ground. Beautiful! The author must have said to himself: 'I prefer truth to art.'"

"Hush," whispered someone at my side, pulling me by the jacket.

I turned my head.

"A spy.....they are listening....."

I turned to the other side. A plump, old woman with bristly white hair and bulging, myopic eyes, was making a kind of laudation of Constitutionalism and the First Chief to four or five idiots who were loitering there.
"A heroine, rival of Doña Leona Vicario, or of Doña Josefa Ortíz de Domínguez?" I asked the stranger.

"Yes, one of the heroines of today: the ex-cook from the Rincón Gallardo house and now of the secret police of Don Venus."

I thanked the stranger, and Lulú and I more than quickly departed in the direction of the Sacrarium. Now in front of the Cathedral the deafening noise of cavalry and the sharp notes of a bugle stopped us. We scarcely had time to take a step backward so as not to be swept away when an enormous automobile passed like a flash.

"He!" I shouted, my voice choked with emotion.

"Yes, it is he," exclaimed Lulú.

We had both recognized him in an instant: his enormous, black glasses, his nose like a Manila mango, his beard as brilliant as yellow agave fiber.

He looked out of the window and put out his hand of a gargoyle, saluting with his Texas hat. Whom? We never succeeded in finding out. There followed at full gallop a platoon of cavalry with an officer at the head who shouted with the accent of an idiot: "Long live the First Chief!"

His shout was lost in the atmosphere of glacial indifference. I looked for the old woman with the bulging eyes and the white hair and I could answer without fear:
"Now I can see which way the wind is blowing."

Like one who is fleeing, like one who seeks refuge from grave persecution, like one who escapes from imminent danger, like one who furtively is sneaking into someone else's house, thus Yellow-beard slipped through the great Mariana door of the Palace.

The bells of the Cathedral were swinging slowly. I, my senses dulled, stood in the middle of the street at the risk of being flattened like a tortilla by the coaches that continued passing, opened my eyes like an idiot, and looked on all sides. And nothing happened: neither the venerable massiveness of the Holy Cathedral Church, nor the cold stones of Cortez' palace emerged from their drowsiness, nor did the filigrees and mosaic stone lace of the Municipal Palace even blush.

Last night I had a fever. I Cagachitas, pursued by the Ogre with the hundred-league boots. And the Ogre had an enormous nose like a mango, ferocious black glasses, and a long beard like agave fiber.

They awoke to my cries: "Ay.......ay.......the basilisk............."
THE TRIUMPH OF PROCOPIO

CHAPTER I.

On Chapultepec Avenue, facing an arrogant facade, Berta went through the iron lattice gate and mounted the marble steps, resting her delicate hand indolently upon the bronze railing adorned with bougainvilleas. The polished stucco, the veneer of aromatic wood on the walls and cornices, the showy tiles, the vivid multicolors of a marquee, awakened the eyes of the provincial rich girl, kindling in them a sparkle of joy. But when she passed through the hall to one of the salons, she stopped astonished. Marbles, bronzes, porcelains, exquisite carvings, sumptuous tapestries; a profusion of harmonious forms and warm colors, reproduced to infinity in heavy Venetian mirrors framed in red plush and scintillating gold.

The contrast was so harsh that, like flint struck by steel, from Berta's heart leaped a spark of protest. Because there remained with her other images: the slow and tedious pilgrimage of the Venustianic court in its triumphal trip from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Towns and squalid villages in a Dantesque procession: Orizaba, Jalapa, Córdoba, Tampico, San Luis Potosí, Querétaro, and Mexico City; the entire country struggling in its ruin. Human masses like a dense cloud of rags waiting on the sidewalks from the early hours of dawn for a piece of hard bread and a handful
of beans or wormy corn. Earthy, wasted faces, hiding their sorrow as one hides a shameful thing; tousled hair; angry faces, worried glances, blasphemous mouths. The working classes bursting with carrancista money, but half-dead from hunger; humble employees, dressmakers, small income groups, orphans, the infirm: the middle class condemned to a double torture in intimate contact with the low masses and rabble, for whom it was never better nor worse, and who now, puffed up with pride, spit their insolent saliva in the faces of these others.

But Berta, a rich Christian, reasoned: "This luxury, however, has nothing to do with the misery out there;" not suspecting that the bizarre-like style of her salons was the legitimate result of the looting by the newly rich. Therefore, peace returned quickly to her easily frightened conscience.

Her small feet were buried in the soft carpets, her eyes shone upon the agglomeration of furniture and ornaments; her hands touched them like old and well-known friends, not seen for many years. But when, after an hour of ecstasy, she felt that all was dormant around her, that the cold atmosphere, the silence, and the loneliness were blowing the breath of the tomb upon her face, small lines wrinkled her forehead, two furrows appeared in her sad cheeks, and upon her clear eyes, so inexpressive in themselves, descended a
veil of melancholy, revealing an old pain.

Smothering a sigh, she let herself fall onto a divan just as the telephone began to ring. She went to answer it immediately. At the first words her face was transfigured: "Yes, Pascual, here I am....Beautiful!.....It is a palace, yes....No, I never even imagined it......Yess, very happy, if the best thing were not lacking......Who?......Yes, without you I find it all bleak, I don't know how to explain it to you.....You will really come?......Yes, come with whomever you wish, but come now, for Heaven's sake!.......Yes, why should I have to deny it? Your ministers, your generals, all those new friends of yours are guilty and that is why I despise them....No, I'll not say more; but be careful about deceiving me again now...."

The heavy draperies of the adjoining room were opened and, ceremoniously, a servant announced Mrs. Tabardillo:

"Mrs. who? I don't know that person. Say that I am not receiving anyone."

Berta, filled with joy, went to the dining room to give orders. The lackey presented himself again. Mrs. Tabardillo insisted upon being received; she brought news of Berta's family.

"Ah! My family; then let her enter at once."

Very interested, Berta, herself went out to receive her. Gasping, the Tabardillo woman let herself fall into an
armchair whose seat half-way broke under the weight of her gross buttocks, and rested a few moments. She dilated her nose and opened her mouth; her lungs swelled in a tremendous inhalation, as if they wished to absorb not only the air, but the furniture, tapestries, archways, pavements, all the wealth of the grand house that her amazed eyes did not tire of contemplating.

The reality, in fact, surpassed the suppositions and conjectures that she had made upon reading in "The Democrat" the news that Pascual, major official of a ministry, had just taken charge of the same.

In only three hours she had succeeded in finding her illustrious country people and her emotion did not leave her. "Payito in one of Pascual's positions of confidence, and we shall leave this miserable way of life forever!"

The mentality of Mrs. Tabardillo did not differ one iota from the average metropolitan. The fever of riches is endemic; who could escape the contagion if there are being seen daily, and by the hundreds, landowners, industrialists, and magnates, the same poor devils that one or two weeks before were accustomed to spend the night in filthy, lousy rooms at a cartón a night? The improvisation of a fortune by assault on the highways has passed to the dominion of legend; but if Porfirio Díaz did not leave highways, he left the barracka and public offices; and there was no
initiated follower of Villa, Zapata, or Carranza that did not know for what purpose those served. The secret of the rich followers of porfirismo was brutally divulged by the men of the revolution and to their own advantage.

"And Mamma? And my brothers? I bear the great pain of not having seen them yet and we have already been a week in Mexico City! But Pascual is overwhelmed with work and I am very useless."

"Pascual is a very high employee of the government, Berta. I come to congratulate you for that beautiful triumph, so well deserved."

"He has been lucky to fall into favor with Mr. Carranza."

"This luxury tells me everything. Your house is a palace, and still you will be able to reach higher if you wish. Pascual is a very intelligent young man who lacks only a good advisor, a person who is well acquainted with Mexico. You can't imagine how honorable and what a gentleman Payito, my husband, is! If you should wish to speak a favorable word to Pascual....."

"In those matters, Madam, I do not take any part."

"Payito's references? The banks, industry, commerce, oil, railroads.....The truth is that he doesn't lack for appointments."
"What can you tell me of my family? I am very impatient."

"You are right, dear friend....only that...that is to say, for the moment....I cannot....."

"Oh, what do you mean? What mystery stops you?"

"It isn't that, Berta, I say...."

"You are hiding something from me....Heavens!"

"The truth is that since I stopped seeing you in your house in Arquitectos....."

"That is what I want to know. What has happened to them since then?"

"I should like well to inform you, but the truth is that....for the moment, at least....."

"Something very serious has happened that you do not dare to reveal to me. I understand it. By the holy memory of your parents, Madam, tell me all at once; don't keep me in this agony."

"It's just that I....."

"Some has died. I feel it....."

"You are deceived by your own fears. The truth is that I have not seen them since they left the colony of San Rafael."

"Then, what are you seeking here? Why do you present yourself, promising news of my family?"

"Be calm, Berta, be calm. Servants understand things
badly. The porter informed me that you hadn't had any news of your family and I simply offered to look for them. I am in an exceptional position to get information of any resident in Mexico City within twenty-four hours. Don't be amazed, Payito is the head of an agency for private information. A great North American company! There, one can earn what he wants to. Do you doubt it? Then I am going to demonstrate how I, Aurora Caloca de Tabardillo, know Mexico right and left. Look, this furniture that we are occupying used to belong in the salons of the rich, opulent Spaniard, Don Iñigo Noriega. Do I lie? Those Japanese vases, those Persian tapestries, and those porcelains from Sevres decorated the residence of the minister Limantour. Do I lie? Oh, don't look at me like that! What idea have you had about us?"

The stifled voice of Berta, her dry hands trembling under the sleeves of her kimona, her disturbed face, abruptly cut short the scarcely begun list.

"Good Lord! You have probably thought that some mischievous spirit is guiding me! Then, in whom have we put our hopes now, if not in Pascual? Payito, for example, your husband's private secretary and I, well, I would be content with even one class in the Conservatory. Hear me and judge me."

A long, mouse-colored coat, Aztec plumes moving in
the gold and crimson background of the draperies and curtains. Mrs. Tabardillo seated herself at the piano and, through the silent confines of the house, exploded the first measures of the quartette from Rigoletto.

Pale, trembling with anger, Berta bit her lips. Mrs. Tabardillo closed the piano suddenly and, overflowing with satisfaction, came to sit down at her side.

"What kind of a face is that? Come here, my babydoll, come close, so that I may kiss your forehead, your cheeks, your eyes, that pretty mouth...Bah! You are truly a child still! Look, Pascual is an intelligent man, shrewd, knows his business; fortune has knocked on his door and he has simply opened it. One need not notice the rest."

"You tell me words that he has said to me many times. How do you know that?"

"Ha! ha! ha! It is as clear as the sun that comes through the window. Only an idiot would not do the same."

"You frighten me. You repeat his very words to me."

Half an hour later Mrs. Tabardillo was entrusted with the mission of searching for the Vázquez Prado family, carrying away with her three hidalgos\(^{17}\) with such cunning that it was Berta who had had to thank her.

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\(^{17}\) hidalgo—a gold coin worth ten pesos.
CHAPTER II.

A car stopped abruptly. "It is he," thought Berta and, anxious, she ran to the window. Two silhouettes alighted from the vehicle and continued on foot, slowly, in the shade of the trees.

Berta closed the window abruptly and turned back to the salon, her hand clutching her breast. The flush of her cheeks had been extinguished, the lines of her gentle profile were broken and her eyes filled with tears. Because, in her mind, it was not right here, but in the suburbs of Zacatecas at the close of the afternoon. And those who descended from the car were she, herself, and Pascual. The two held hands tightly, leaning towards each other, continuing step by step among the trees while their vehicle rolled slowly after them. One afternoon? No, many; every afternoon of a perfect dream life from which she suddenly awakened surprised and anguished. When she recovered the notion of time and space, swallowing her sorrow, she spoke with the mute statues and the motionless paintings. "What am I doing here? This is not my house, nothing of what is here was ever mine. Pascual, what are we still doing here? Let us go to Zacatecas; let us go to our house. Return to me the only thing that I asked of you in exchange for my hand, your heart!"

Two musical peals of a bell were lost in the thick
carpets and tapestries. Berta ceased crying. In her mind she grasped the telephone receiver. The imminence of the eternal excuse: "Berta, I am not coming for dinner; General B, the Minister J, my distinguished colleague N, invite me to eat with them now. It would be an unpardonable offence."

And they were always the same: the hated Texas hats, the odious riding breeches, the leggings of crude leather; all the abominable undertow that shrewdly had been taking possession of Pascual since the wretched trip to Vera Cruz. And in the exaltation of her mind, she sensed the murmur of laughter, the breath of jokes, and like a madwoman she threw herself upon the first picture that came to view. Fragments of gilded plaster spotted the carpets, Francisco the First and his pretty favorites, intact after the catastrophe, continued looking at her with jocose irony. Then she tried to destroy immediately as much as was within reach of her hands, she pulled a curtain, she thrust her sharp fingers into the threads of the cloth and, at the moment when a collection of paintings fell with a crash, she came to herself and realized her error; Pascual’s automobile stopped outside and masculine voices were heard immediately on the stairway. And the eternal miracle: the radiant sun after the black storm, the frenzied fleeing of the bad thoughts and of all the shadows from her heart. Like creations of a sick brain, she threw from herself doubts and suspicions, fears and recriminations,
all which tormented her in her interminable hours of idleness and abandonment. She went to meet her husband with open arms:

"I am very happy; soon we shall have news of Mamma. Do you remember a Mrs. Tabardillo?"

And while she was referring minutely to her interview, General Covarrubias, Pascual's guest, let his cold, almost indifferent glance travel over the confines of the salon.

"Let us go to the dining room soon," interrupted Pascual, "only the general is with us. Don Ulpiano is coming only for coffee."

The table linen shone white; the flowers, china, crystal, and silver glistened, even the negro dwarf with the curved back and the napkin on his arm.

Pascual and the general spoke a great deal of politics and finances, a conversation of riddles for Berta. For her, the nearness of Pascual was enough: to hear his sonorous, clear voice; to look at his shining eyes; to be enchanted by his temperate and distinguished face.

There was, however, a moment in which certain phrases attracted her attention.

"All our plan is a castle of cards without the signature of the old man," said General Covarrubias, passing a rapid glance over her.

"We shall get the signature of Don Ulpiano, cost what
it may," replied Pascual with metallic resonance.

And the two sentences kept repeating themselves in Berta's mind with strange obstinacy. Perhaps because of the prolonged silence that followed them? Perhaps because Pascual also gave her a rapid and intense look? Pascual, in contrast to Procopio, was not one of those men that discussed everything with their wives. What had she, then, to do with that?

If Pascual's new friends weighed upon Berta like the links of a convict's chain, Don Ulpiano had on her the effect of a catapult. If Pascual knew! For had not the insolent, old idiot dared to make love to her? To her! Good Heavens! A married woman!

When Don Ulpiano Pío presented himself, like a fawning poodle, Berta stiffened haughtily. Her face burned, but in the mirror of the sideboard her cheeks did not appear flushed. The effect of the screened light through the green, violet, or amber glass of the chandelier were only the shadows of her own hidden sorrow. Her face among the flowers, fruits, mirrors, steel, and repousse work was the sad face of a little, sick bird. In the mirror the perfect oval of her face was broken by an elongated chin, prominent cheekbones; the light in her eyes had a feverish luster; her lips were thin and pale; her hair rough and disheveled; her neck and breast unnatural by the strained
projection of bones and tendons.

"Punctual as always....punctual as a broken watch. Hee, hee, hee! Berta, at your service....a little pale but divine anyhow!"

He sucked his lips and his boisterous, stupid laughter rang out.

Pascual scowled at Berta, who had risen instantly without answering the compliments of the ridiculous, old man.

At seventy years, Don Ulpiano Pío continued to be a man of the nature of John Jacob, at least in the perpetuation of his kind. "The Siren, Fine Aged Pulques," Patent No. 3500 of the Board of Health, and its forty branches duly distributed through the districts and populace of the Federal District, were so many other pasture grounds, if not harems, where he who might attempt to untangle the skein of the paternity of the latest offspring of the servant body would find himself digging deeply, indeed; because with equal right the children could go by the name of their parents, the same as of their brothers, nephews, uncles, or of their same grandfather, Don Ulpiano Pío, the great breed bull of the herd.

Miserly to an improbable degree, from the day that he saw his establishments served, without any salary, only by members of his numerous progeny, there budded on his lips a
smile of Buddhistic beatitude, that of the supreme happiness of one who lives in contemplation of his prosperous belly. Since then, Don Ulpiano Pío was always smiling, and the secret of his smile was precisely the poem of his life.

But Berta, crushed by her perennial sorrow, could only be an incentive to the gallantries of a seventy-year-old satyr. The day that General Covarrubias presented him to her: "Here is the man who laughs," she said to herself: "He isn't the man who laughs, but the pig who grunts," with the usual sagacity of her sex. Soon afterwards, she realized that she had not been mistaken.

The coffee served, there began a long and mysterious conference in subdued voices. Mysterious for them only: the collusion of carrancismo with the merchant to take possession of the few purses that still remained virgin to the general pillage was of the most impudent shamelessness. The fields desolated, the public coffers exhausted, the banks robbed, private funds assaulted, even the most base, bronze money having disappeared from the market, the "new men" in a fit of genius, the only one that carrancismo had in its glorious career, discovered the egg of Columbus. The military man who had already buried his talons in the centers of production, in the railways, highways, roads, and trails; owner of all kinds of vehibles, conceived the idea of becoming a merchant. It was not necessary to display
new energies, it was enough now to settle his claws upon
the markets. In one moment the lives and purses of sixteen
million cowardly, weak-willed, and degenerate human beings
were at the mercy of a mere thousand bandits. The miracle
was renewed: crystalline water did not leap from the rocks
nor did manna of all flavors rain from the sky; but the
sweat of the poor, the tears and hunger of the widow, of the
orphan, of the infirm, were converted into a river of gold
that would go to empty itself in the vessel of the Danaidès:
the greed of the merchant and the rapacity of the military
man, supreme kings of the bilimbique.

The carrancista iniquity, wooer of stupidity in its
apotheosis. The work of the revolution smashed to bits.
The paper money of the government repaying, with interest,
gold into the strong boxes of the wealthy; their irrecon-
cilable enemy of yesterday, "Capital," receiving now in its
hands the elements of the most formidable revenge. With
the bilimbiques, the few honest activities that still
struggled in the nation were at the mercy of the military-
merchant. And, if for the working man there were some

18 The fifty daughters of Danaidès, all but one of
whom killed their husbands at their father's command. For
this they were forever doomed to fill a broken cistern in
Hades.

19 bilimbique—paper money issued by various chiefs
during the revolution. It was very often worthless.
miserable grains of maize, which were strictly necessary so as not to starve to death the hen that laid the golden eggs, the rest, the orphan, the widow, the sick, the old, had no other comfort than that of their pitiful cry of desperation and helplessness, smothered in the shouting of the traders. And from the homes of the unfortunate came forth, in an accursed procession toward the market place, articles ranging from the most indispensable household utensils to the most sacred family relics. It seemed but the curse of Luis Cabrera, the brain of carrancismo: "Woe to those who in a tear or in a drop of blood see only the gold into which it may be converted," was the spittle flung to Heaven that was to bathe the faces of all the gang.
CHAPTER III.

Two days afterwards, Mrs. Tabardillo had herself announced. Anxiously, Berta came out to receive her:

"At last! What have you learned?"

"See what marvellous earrings! Rubies, emeralds, and the great diamond in the center. Notice the setting. What luster, what filigree! Don't you think so? Of course there are more than enough interested persons and they make persistent offers, but I will fix it up so that you get them."

"That doesn't interest me, Madam. Pascual has bought me enough jewels since we were in Vera Cruz."

"You haven't showed them to me. I have a passion for jewels."

"What have you learned of my family?"

"I almost have my hands on them. A little patience and then you'll see. Perhaps tomorrow I'll know everything. But, for Heaven's sake, Berta, don't miss this opportunity. Even as a simple business matter it is a good idea to buy these earrings. Five hundred pesos, no more. And they are five hundred pesos that, as soon as silver is circulating again, will surely be tripled. Of course, there isn't any urgency for the money. If you prefer, just a card from you to Pascual would be enough for me. I'll take charge of collecting."
"I never do anything without consulting my husband."

"Did you speak, Berta, to Pascual of my recommenda-
tion as we had agreed?"

"I gave you a commission that I shall pay you for;
that is all our agreement," replied Berta spiritedly.

"Good Lord, what nerves! Tomorrow when dear Mamma
is here, you'll speak to me in another way. It's a pity
that you will not take this jewel, Berta. Pascual won't
forgive you for having passed up such a good chance......
and, by the way, show me your jewels now."

Under the strange fascination of the woman, prey to
an inexplicable weakness, Berta took her at once to her
room and showed her the jewels so as to cut short the
impertinent visit.

For the rest of the time, Mrs. Tabardillo was irre-
proachable. She revealed rare knowledge of gold and silver
work and succeeded in implanting in Berta's mind, when she
took leave of her, a most favorable impression.

The oblique rays of the sun were tinting the opales-
cent hall with rose when the old woman, like a dirty and
muddy red owl, crossed it. She went down the white steps
and, as she put her hand on the iron gate of the garden, a
Ford stopped abruptly at the door.

Through habit, Mrs. Tabardillo drew back quickly and
hid behind some azaleas. It was an old man in a long and
sweat-stained frock coat with frayed edges. Unpolished boots with worn soles and heels. From beneath a tobacco-colored felt hat peeped out some sparse locks of dyed hair in stiff tufts. His sharp little eyes immediately discovered the bulky form that was sneaking away from him.

"Eh! Listen, you! You who are hiding! Take up my card at once!"

"You here?" asked Mrs. Tabardillo, very much surprised, coming out of her hiding place.

"And you? Do we have cheese? You are not a rat who falls asleep."

"Now we will talk....."

Meanwhile the porter had approached:

"Madam is not at home."

"I know it. Announce me anyway," the old man said insolently in his nasal voice.

The porter went toward the interior of the house. For some minutes Don Ulpiano and Mrs. Tabardillo remained looking at each other and smiling maliciously, but without saying a word. She showed no sign of leaving. Insane curiosity burned in her eyes. Until a servant shouted from the vestibule discourteously:

"Madam is not receiving anyone!"

Don Ulpiano puffed out his cheeks and wrinkled his brow, while the Tabardillo woman, fixing her beady, black
eyes on him, raised her hands to her mouth to hold back a guffaw:

"Now do you see how without me you aren't good for anything? Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Let's get out of here."

They left and both got in the car and went in the direction of Chapultepec woods.

A week passed. Berta, half sitting up in bed, called. A maid appeared immediately with linen; she put a flowered dressing gown on her mistress; lifting her hair from the nape of her neck to her forehead, she made a thick knot of the abundant tresses. Berta let it be done, still in a state of lethargy; prey to invincible weariness, her eyelids chafed and reddened, her lips white and dry.

"You weren't able to sleep again last night?"

Berta did not answer. A delicate perfume was diffused through the warm confines of the bedroom. The cologne water, rubbed vigorously on her neck and limbs, little by little restored her lucidity.

"Raise the blind."

A puff of morning air impregnated with resinous aromas suddenly entered through the balcony.

"A lady is waiting for you," said the maid, beginning to dress her.

The eternal nuisance. Unknown people making requests
at all hours.

"I think it's the person you've been waiting for."

Berta's confused thoughts and her tangled memories began to coordinate themselves, to become clear. Agustinita, Procopio, César, Francisco José, and the fraud, Mrs. Tabardillo, who had swindled her out of five more hidalgos last week.

"She is coming after money. Let her come in."

Now she was resolved to stop her game. Even to send her to the police station, if necessary.

"Joy! Joy! Now I know everything. I have their address and, if you wish, we shall go to see them right away."

Mrs. Tabardillo had abruptly burst into the bedroom. Berta distrustfully pushed aside the arms that tried to imprison her waist.

"Give them a surprise, Berta. They do not even suspect that you are in Mexico City."

Irresolute, Berta did not know what position to take.

"But, you are not deceiving me again? Tell me, where do they live?"

"I, myself, would accompany you if I hadn't left home this morning without breakfast."

"Come to the dining room. Then we shall go."

Berta took her by the hand and led her to the table.
At the same time, she gave orders to bring the car around immediately.

"Is what you are telling me true?"

"You can't imagine the effort it has cost me to find them. The landlady at Arquitectos refused me any information. The neighbors knew nothing about them. Commissariats, gendarmes, secret police: a closed door. Until Payito told me: 'Take that emblem of power that will open all doors for you.' Thus it was: money here, money there, money everywhere. An atrocity! But it doesn't matter, it was all to attain what we wanted."

"And you will be paid for everything, but your favor will be paid solely with my gratitude...."

"Hush! What are you saying! What better pay than the friendship with which you honor us? And by the way, Payito told me to give you the earrings. 'Give them to her,' he said, 'the favors that we expect from them are worth more.' For nothing in the world does he want any other person to have such a precious jewel. 'You have done a good deed proposing me for service to Pascual. It will be a mutual reward. If he now finds me useful, when he knows me, he will find me irreplaceable. Moreover, don't worry about the salary.'"

And while Berta was scarcely touching her lips to the rim of a glass of milk, Mrs. Tabardillo gobbled all the food
that was placed within reach, without ceasing to heap praise upon Payito.

When Berta left to change her clothes, Mrs. Tabardillo cleaned up everything on the table.

"Very good!" she cried, belching with satisfaction.
"You have done very well to dress modestly. Your family is not prosperous and they would feel humiliated if...."

When Berta came down the last step into the bright light of the sun, she turned pale; she felt her legs doubling and would have surely fallen if Mrs. Tabardillo had not quickly supported her in her arms. She almost bodily carried her to the car.

"To the garden of Los Angeles," she ordered the chauffeur, emphatically.

Berta raised a dainty handkerchief to her forehead; her translucent cheeks began to redden and, little by little, she was recovering.

"You are not happy, Berta. You are suffering."
"Oh, yes, much more than anyone imagines!"
"Pascual makes you suffer."

Berta was deeply disturbed. The owlish eyes of the woman were fixed on hers.

"How do you know? Who has told you?"
"There are things that one can guess."

Secretly, Berta made the sign of the cross, thinking:
"For this woman there is nothing hidden, neither in my mind nor in my heart."

"You frighten me, Madam."

"But it is the truth that Pascual has known how to put you in a superior position, and an enviable one. Not only has he given you all the advantages that you can demand because of your rank, but the luxury and pomp of a true millionaire besides. What more can you ask of him?"

"The only thing that belongs to me: his heart...."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! A honeymoon of five years and in this revolution? How cute you are, Berta!"

"Of what use is money to me if it robs me of his soul?"

"Realize, child, that Pascual lives in a world where good customs are not the best recommendation to attain a goal."

"What?"

"Would you be capable of demanding that he scorn the good luck that comes his way, solely to satisfy the whims of a child?"

"I am not a child; I am his wife and I have sacred rights over him."

Mrs. Tabardillo, splitting her sides with laughter, scarcely had room enough in the car.

"What does glory, honor, and wealth matter to me if
I am to carry a dead heart within my breast? My life is my life!" moaned Berta vehemently, shaken by a spasm of sorrow.

"Good, and if your afflictions are without any foundation? You are so nervous! You have such a quick imagination!"

"What would I give for it to be like that! I would be born to life again."

"Proof is in your hand."

"I don't understand."

"Awaken his self-esteem. Come, make him jealous."

"This woman is a devil," thought Berta, crossing herself again.

"You have let yourself go a little now, but being willing....You are beautiful, elegant. Pascual has many friends and more than one has probably....."

"Enough!"

"Perhaps at this very moment some old millionaire adores you madly."

"Be quiet. Understand that you are speaking to an honorable woman."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Well, what have you believed that I am going to propose to you, Berta? When I say that you have a tremendous imagination!......Horrors! No, child, do not even think of it. Ha, ha, ha! It's the question of playing a farce, that's all."
"Not even in jest am I capable of such things. Now be still."

"Only a farce to awaken Pascual from his drowsiness, dearie. If he opens his eyes, if suspicions make him ask for explanations, if he suspects, if he even comes to make a scene, wonderful! What more surety could you have from him?"

"You tempt me like the devil himself."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"For Heaven's sake, woman, don't laugh like that, you frighten me very much."

"Poor girl! Now I understand it all: Pascual has never learned how to awaken the woman that is sleeping in you. Otherwise, you would have cast out very far that dead heart that burdens you so much."

"Be quiet!"

"I'll be quiet. Continue with your doubts, your hesitations, your voluntary and useless martyrdom."

At a word from Mrs. Tabardillo as they abruptly turned into the plaza of Los Angeles, the car stopped.

"It's Berta, Mamma!" cried Lulú from behind the blurred glass of the small windows, very surprised.

Everyone rushed to the entrance hall to receive her.
CHAPTER IV.

They drew apart, their cheeks red and tearstained.
"You didn't know, then?" moaned Agustinita.
"About whom, Mother dear?"
"My poor César! It was the very day that Don Venustiano entered Mexico City, that ill-fated man. From the Zócalo he returned to die."

Agustinita began the minute relation of César's illness, but as Mrs. Tabardillo did not feel any desire to weep, and as that number did not form part of her program for the day, she interrupted them:

"We strangers are in the way at moments as solemn as this one. You have my heartfelt sympathy and, at the same time, my congratulations because I have reunited you all."

"Thanks, Madam, my car will take you to your house. Give me your address so that I may send you a gift and the price of the earrings."

"Don't trouble yourself about that, Berta. I will come to see you tomorrow."

"And you knew nothing of our return to Mexico?" asked Berta when Agustinita ended her interminable story.

"Not a word."

"Then you don't know that Pascual has a high position in Mr. Carranza's government?"

"Not until now, when you tell us."
"Why, his picture, or interviews and statements of his appear in the newspapers almost every day."

"Newspapers!" signed Francisco José.

"Some time ago that item disappeared from our budget," added Procopio, smiling.

With a rapid glance, Berta looked over the walls and furniture of the small living room: three chairs without backs, another with a broken cane seat which spread out like a fan; a plank, supported by an old packing box, served as a table; all that had not been accepted in the Tepito market.

"It's this way, then, everything pawned? All sold? This is wicked, darling Mamma. We in luxury and you in...."

The word stopped on her lips, burning her tongue:

"Let us go home at once. Pascual will know what to do."

"Do you think that through his influence we will have our properties returned to us?" asked Agustinita trembling.

"All. It is one of the branches that depend directly on him."

"Property controlled by the government?"

"Yes, Papa; he has complete authority. You can't imagine....."

On Procopio's wasted face shone a tragic smile. Lulú was on the verge of tears.

"Let's not waste time, Mamma. Go and dress, and you,
"I can't, Berta; I have to look after Papa."

"The car will bring you back within an hour. I want so much to talk with you! You will see what an exquisite house, Lulú."

"Another day, Berta," replied Lulú in a dull voice.

"Go in and put on another dress," Agustinita ordered dryly.

The other dresses were not less tattered, they were the same, only cleaner.

When the car returned from delivering Mrs. Tabardillo, Agustinita and Berta were already impatiently waiting for it. Lulled by the rocking motion, rolling swiftly over the pavement, Agustinita ceased talking, carried away by her ardent imagination to a realm of the most fantastic projects. The reconstruction of her farms; Pascual managing everything and putting his valuable official influence at the service of the house. Naturally, modern machinery would be installed that, without the payment of freight and duty, would be very cheap; breeding animals would be brought from the United States; modern farming methods would be introduced. With those activities, together with the skill that Pascual knew how to put into business affairs, it was very sure that in the first harvest all the damage suffered because of the revolution would be amply compensated. Poor Procopio! His
inability, his lack of judgment, for a long time had retired him to the place that he always should have occupied at home.

The idea of her irremissible downfall harassed Berta. Suddenly, her cheeks were covered with small, red blotches. "Why did that old woman speak to me of the old millionaire madly in love with me? Who is she? I should never again receive her in my house. A servant shall pay her peso by peso all that she wishes to charge, but I shall forbid them to even announce her to me. She is a wicked woman! Satan himself!"

And Lulú, who also seemed very abstracted, was really thinking of nothing.

Open-mouthed, Agustinita ascended the steps of her daughter's residence. Her eyes were enchanted by the panelling, by the colored glass of the marquee, struck brilliantly by the rays of the sun; by the plants of the conservatory, spaced between graceful, marble statues, bronzes, and metal work of gold and silver.

Lulú saw it all, amazed also. Only that everywhere she saw before her eyes the face of a madman, twisted with insane laughter: the portrait of Procopio in hideous caricature. And closing her eyes tightly so as not to cry, she thought: "They in wealth and we in misery!"

Berta was talking on the telephone:
"Yes, it is I. I have great news for you. We found them this morning. They are here now. Yes Mamma and Lulú. Yes, Lulú. What? Her? Lulú? I'll tell her. Surely; why would she refuse? Leave it to me. I'm so glad that you are coming. Bye, bye. Lulú, Pascual wants you to have dinner with us. General Covarrubias will come too."

"Oh, no!"

"He is a genteel young man," protested Agustinita.

"I prefer to be with you some day when you are eating alone."

"I promised Pascual that you would stay."

"Lulú, you ought to stay. We owe Pascual for many favors."

"Let it be some other time, Mamma dear."

Lulú approached and whispered in her ear:

"They aren't inviting you. Will you stand for that insult?"

But Agustinita shrugged her shoulders and replied aloud:

"I order you to stay. I shall return to prepare dinner for your father and Francisco José. I am going to have plenty of time. Now I am not going to want to leave this palace. And you, Berta, don't forget to speak to Pascual about our affairs. You can't imagine how impatiently I am
going to be, waiting for your news from Lulú."

"Don't worry about that, Mamma. That matter is already taken care of."

Agustinita found Procopio reading.

"Pascual has a very high post in the government," she told him with very solemn emotion. "His house is a palace; he has servants in livery and his automobile at the door. I suppose that he did not accompany Berta to this hovel because of his sensitiveness, so as not to humiliate you."

With supreme indifference, Procopio took the cigarette from his lips, interrupted his reading and spoke slowly and calmly:

"The future certainly belongs to men like Pascual."

"Without a doubt. If he did not deserve it because of his intellectual gifts of the first quality, he would deserve it because of his fine education and exquisite social behavior."

"Marvellous judgment!" applauded Procopio, gay and animatedly raising his glasses above his eyebrows. "The improvisation of a fortune is realized now by primitive means. But the future, I repeat, is for men like Pascual. By his fine manners and exquisite education, he knew how to open the doors of our house the day that he wished; by his fine education and exquisite manners he will succeed in
opening as many doors as he needs. It is that exactly, his
exquisite education and his fine manners, the only thing
that makes him different from the other bandits."

Agustinita drew back, bristling. Procopio, accentu­
tuating his irony, proceeded:

"The perfect bandit must begin by being a perfect
gentleman."

Then an embarrassing silence.

"It looks like a little justice has been done at
last: the number of rascals enriched by the revolution
already exceeds the number of rascals impoverished by it."

Agustinita's eyes threw out sparks.

"Society, I mean the moneyed class, the middle class,
the intellectuals, have showed themselves to be a little
harsh with bandits. Not precisely because they are bandits,
but because of their methods which are at variance with
tradition and customs. The robber and the assassin of
today do not blush at being called by those names in Con­
gress, in the press, in public or private meetings; far
from it, they are even surprised that people try to dishon­
or them by such trivial qualifications. Because in the
time of General Díaz, the robbers and assassins belonged to
the privileged classes: they wore the white glove, they
shaved daily, they knew how to knot a tie and to wear the
dress coat and the top hat; they spoke the most pure
Castillian and wrote it irreproachably. Society, nevertheless, always abstained from touching them. Robbery and assassination do not make society indignant except when the robbery and assassination are committed by people inferior to its class. The crude, ill-bred fellow in the sandals, he of the white trousers and palm-leaf hat, embarrasses it; but it glories in gold-braided uniforms. Coarse methods are the ones that wound it and make it blush. Victoriano Huerta is of the school of the crude and ill-bred, however much the eminent poet Díaz Mirón has said, when the troglodyte assassin of Madero visited the offices of El Imparcial: 'General Huerta visited our newspaper offices yesterday, leaving in his wake a perfume of glory'; however much the Jockey Club has celebrated the deeds of the savage with a much talked-about banquet. Victoriano Huerta never gained for himself a gesture like the delightful one by that group of ladies from our highest aristocracy, who adorned the Red Cross Hospital with flowers and received with loud applause two famous assassins who came in to visit the wounded from the Ciudadela\(^{17}\), with their hands wet with blood, treason, and infamy. Well, Pascual is the forerunner of the grandees.

---

17 A fort in Mexico City where the army which revolted against Madero took refuge and carried on their warfare. Félix Díaz and Bernardo Reyes were the leaders of the rebels.
of tomorrow. The Pascuals of tomorrow will be able to kill and rob with impunity. Society will clamor always for their powers. The future is for men like him."

Agustinita's indignation numbed her jaws, paralyzed her tongue, leaving her unable to speak.

Francisco José, as was his custom, went to shelter his esthetics in the bathroom.
CHAPTER V.

The ridiculous old man entered first, talking loudly and laughing uproariously, a habit acquired in his saloons with his clerks and fellow associates. He emphasized his words convinced of their importance and made each period of his discourse end with an idiotic burst of laughter that he believed to be of the most refined smartness. From under his misshapen, dirty felt hat straggled his blackened locks of hair, his shifty eyes of a hobgoblin glittered like live coals, and an eternal smile turned up his snub nose and long chin.

"He looks like a swineherd!" whispered Lulú, with loathing, in her sister's ear.

"He was one in his youth," replied Berta, without turning her eyes.

Don Ulpiano Pío, who damned the lower classes, forgetting that the revolution of Tuxtepec\(^{18}\) had carried him from a pigsty to a hacienda, believed himself to be a genuine aristocrat. The word "bandit" was constantly on his lips when he spoke of the revolutions of Madero and Carranza.

Fascual presented the old man and the general to Lulú.

"I have already had the pleasure of meeting Lulú,"

---

\(^{18}\) The revolution of Tuxtepec was instrumental in putting Porfirio Díaz in power.
said the latter. "Who is going to forget those eyes after having once seen them?"

Lulú abruptly withdrew her fingers which had been imprisoned by the large hands of General Covarrubias. She turned her eyes in anger and resentment toward Berta who blushed also.

"The girl is very charming," exclaimed Don Ulpiano, saluting her and patting her cheek.

A sexagenarian is able to do that without offending society, although he often hides the warm ashes of senile lasciviousness behind the mask of paternal affection.

Lulú made a gesture of horror at the contact of the old man's hands, as if they had placed upon her face the cold and slimy abdomen of a toad.

"Pepe Covarrubias was only a captain when I presented him to you, Lulú; but now he is a general....and not one of the sidewalk kind. He has won his rank by killing many of Villa's and Zapata's crowd."

"Two bullets in the chest and this stiff arm I owe to the reaction," observed the general, modestly.

"Then praised be the reaction that permits you not only to preserve your properties, but to increase them in safety," answered Lulu, sarcastically.

"You have a good memory!" applauded Pascual.

"I congratulate myself for being a part of it,"
added the general, flushing.

"In your place, I would not congratulate myself."

The general bit his lips. But Lulú began to laugh as if she, herself, did not realize the scope of her words.

Then Pascual served glasses of cognac and, when he approached Lulú, he said in a low voice:

"It is a game that suits you...."

Lulú fixed her eyes on the general. His skin, browned by the sun of the coast, his blond moustache more crisp and curly than when he was a simple captain, his legs like steel springs beneath the fitted, gray corduroy trousers and the leggings of yellow leather, gave him a complete martial aspect.

Absently, Lulú said:

"Archibaldo has also become a soldier...Pst!"

"He hates us as much as that?"

"Hates you? That is not exactly the word."

"The same as your father, Lulú," Pascual interrupted her; "always in the ranks of the opposition."

"If Lulú is the opposition, I will betray Carranza," exclaimed the general, very happy with his find.

"At last, man!" exclaimed Don Ulpiano Pío, clapping his hand to his forehead, catching the phrase without understanding it. "Indeed, that is what you ought to do, abandon Carranza. That is what I am always thinking and what I never
had spirit enough to say. You young, decent men of good family in these gangs of bandits!"

Neither Pascual nor the general paid any attention to the old man, hanging only on Lulú's sharp goading.

"Well, what does your Papa think of the soldier?"

"I have heard him say many times that the barracks is the school of perfect abjectness, and that the soldier either has to be a wolf or he has to be a sheep: in a herd, at any rate."

"To the table, to the table," Pascual cut in abruptly, displeased with the turn that the conversation was taking, "you are talking about things that you don't understand, Lulú."

"What attention does anyone pay to me!" she answered, catching Pascual's hand hastily before the general could offer her his arm.

They all entered the dining room. The first glass of wine was scarcely emptied when Don Ulpiano began his lecture:

"Well, gentlemen, there is the Monroe Doctrine, Carranza has his doctrine, and I also have mine...."

"We know it by heart, Don Ulpiano," General Covarrubias interrupted him discourteously, "we can better talk about Lulú's eyes."

"Ha, ha, ha! How angry it makes the carrancistas
when one knows their secret! It is useless for them to deny it, but Carranza is in agreement with President Wilson to deliver this nation to them without one single inhabitant, because the Yankees want Mexico without it costing them even one drop of blood. Therefore, each of Carranza's soldiers has the obligation of killing ten Mexican civilians; after these, the ones that remain alive will kill us with hunger and it will be the end. Here is the explanation of so much robbery, of so much assassination, of such brutal taxes, of the considerable rise of merchandise, and of the impossible life for all the middle-class people. Of course, I have never been affected by it. I was educated in the United States and was a fellow student of Wilson. A medium in New York told me this more than twenty years ago; all that has happened. Ha, ha, ha! What expressions they get on their faces! It makes them very angry for me to guess their secret. I also know what is thought in Japan. Be careful! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a beast of a man!" murmured Lulú in Berta's ear.

Nevertheless, all that was tolerable; but, at dessert, when the alcohol had gone to their heads and the gentlemen tried to express their emotions in a vulgar manner, the fictitious harmony was abruptly shattered. Indignant, and without excuses, Lulú retired hastily
from her chair at the table, her eyes blazing at the general who had drunk to excess and had turned as red as a tomato.

Berta gave the pretext of going to bring some wine that Pascual had sent that morning and, very pale, went out followed by Lulú. The men remained, laughing uproariously.

"What shall I tell Mamma?" asked Lulú, when they had scarcely crossed the threshold.

"You are going, Lulú?"

"At once."

"Your anger is very just, sister. I could not imagine this ever...."

"Hurry, quick, tell me. For your house does me harm; it has ever since I set foot in it!"

"Lulú!"

"Go to Pascual or I am going now...."

In anguish, Berta returned to the dining room and called Pascual aside. The conference was brief. Pascual returned joyfully to the dining room and Berta, inconsolable, said to Lulú:

"Tell Mamma that it is very difficult to arrange what she wants."

"I understand it all....Goodbye."

In a flood of tears, Berta tried to restrain her.

"Oh, don't go like this!"

"What more do you want of me?"
"Ay, Lulú, they have changed him! He didn't used to be like this!"

Suddenly moved to pity, Lulú caught her sister in her arms and covered her with kisses:

"My poor dear sister! The one who has changed is you! He? Pst! He is the same as always!"

"You know?"

"That now you are beginning to open your eyes."

"But, you have understood, Lulú?"

Berta had stopped crying and, straightening up, looked with astonishment at Lulú:

"I understand what I have always understood: what Papa has always believed of Pascual......."

"What has he thought of him?"

"That he is a despicable person...and a scoundrel!"

"Lulú!"

"My poor sister!"

"Lulú, that is not true. Pascual has a fault, a fault that matters to me alone; but he is a gentleman..... Lulú, don't go away, don't leave in the midst of what I am trying to tell you...Lulú, one moment, listen to me......."

The sound of Lulú's quick steps rapidly descending the staircase was her reply.

When Berta reappeared in the vestibule to offer her the car from the window, she was already far away. She was
running, flying, without feeling the sun that was softening
the asphalt and attacking the dense foliage of the treetops,
because another fire was burning her soul.

Motionless as a statue of sorrow, Berta saw her move
away, grow smaller and disappear finally in the shimmering
distances of the street. Then there came to her mind, as the
last hope of salvation, the abominable thought. She saw her
fatal and unique path traced. Frightened of herself, she
took a step back and her breast expanded as if in the whole
garden there was not an atom of oxygen for it. Her eyes
dilated, her face rigid, her legs trembling, decided, inex-
orable, she entered the wine cellar, took some bottles, and
then returned to the dining room. She opened the door,
looked around, uncertain and reckless in turn, and, in the
midst of the immense surprise of the others, she took a seat
at the side of Don Ulpiano Pío and said with great serenity:

"Pascual, serve me some wine."
"When?" panted Don Ulpiano, now so near that his bristly moustache pricked Berta's cheeks, two flaming spots of shame.

In a gesture of uncontainable loathing, rather than of fear, with one hand she overturned her bubbling glass of wine while with the other she restrained the old man.

In her chaste ears were ringing the coarse jokes and obscenities of the tavern. And she was afraid. The farce was going beyond the boundaries to which she had wished to limit it.

"Mother of Mercy, help me! Lord of Penitence, protect me! I suffer a just punishment. I have listened to the voices of the wicked enemy...."

Heaven suddenly became deaf. Don Ulpiano Pío seized her forcefully in his weak arms.

"Pascual!" she moaned.

A smothered moan. She was afraid of Pascual and she was afraid of herself. The scene of blood with which such an abominable farce could be finished. The innocent victims of a tragedy that she had provoked!

But Pascual, enveloped in the gray smoke of his cigar, his eyes closed, was sleeping a heavy sleep of drunkeness.

Like a snake that was twining itself around her waist, she felt the skinny and leathery arms that imprisoned her,
that surrounded her, drawing her near with a strength each
moment greater.

Beside herself, she turned her imploring eyes toward
the general.

He gave her a lascivious and impudent look. Because
General Covarrubias, son of a decent family, rich man of
the frontier, a revolutionary to defend his interests, like
others of his kind, did not differ morally from any other
of the refuse washed up by the revolution from the dung-
hills of the Bolsa and Santa Julia, for example. His psy-
chology was equal to that of any murderous pickpocket who,
in the revolution, saw that a rich treasure could be a-
chieved by deeds that, instead of ending in the Maria Is-
lands19, had their merited reward in some one of the Minis-
tries, in the Senate, in some representation in foreign
countries or, at least, in the Chamber of Deputies. His
name was bruited about, more than on the field of battle,
in the gambling houses and brothels. A name stained with
the blood of defenseless victims, but a celebrity more than
sufficient to come before the wise and far-seeing eyes of
the Constitutionalist First Chief, who knew how to distin-
guish and reward such rich talents with the best posts in
his government.

19 A penal colony.
On the general's lips a cynical and sinister smile lighted up. It was the work of an instant. Silks and gauzes floated in the air like brilliant birds, and the chestnut threads of loosened tresses. A row of white, sharp teeth, like ivory, bit into pale, dry lips. Berta scarcely could hold back a scream. Like a dragonfly caught by two red owls, she disappeared from the dining room in the arms of the two ruffians.

But when she felt herself on her soft bed, like a spring that is suddenly released, she escaped from the arms that were tormenting her. The old man rolled on his face on the carpet and a rude slap resounded on the fat, shepherd-like cheeks of the general.

When the latter, recovering from his surprise, tried to take revenge on his own account, two sharp, shining points of steel restrained him, returning him to perfect lucidity.

Erect, transfigured, Berta in the middle of the bedroom waited for the attack with her right arm extended and her fingers gripping the handles of some open, flashing scissors.

It all occurred in the most discreet silence. When Pascual awakened from his heavy sleep with a smile of beatitude on his lips, he exclaimed:

"I think that we have duly done the honors to this
wine, haven't we?"

Stretching himself, he took out his watch, got up, and exclaimed surprised:

"Five o'clock! Gentlemen, pardon me, I have very important affairs in the Ministry...."

As solemn as defeated fighting cocks, the general and Don Ulpiano kept some distance from the table without answering.

"I also have something to do," said the old man, finally, pulling his greasy, gray felt hat down to his ears.

Grunting, he left first. His legs were trembling now more than usual. When he crossed the garden, the general from a window made him turn his head:

"Be careful with that one that is loose! Have them tie it up!"

In her room, kneeling before the image of Our Lady of Mercy, Berta heard the stentorian laughter of the general and, feeling something very strange in her head and in her breast, began to laugh also while, at the same time, an unconquerable tremor shook her whole body. Her laughter, badly checked at the beginning, was growing in intensity until it ended in sharp hysterics. A very alarmed servant approached:

"What is the matter, Ma'am?"

Berta could not answer. Her lips trembled, her jaws
were immovable because of a painful contraction; her whole
body struggled in convulsions and spasms, her enormous eyes
dilated and filled with tears.

The girl picked up a flask of alcohol of mint and
emptied it over the chilled body, rubbing her vigorously
from her feet to her head.

Little by little, Berta became quiet; her convulsions
lessened, the lines of her face became normal, her breathing
was more free and, finally, in her warmed bed, she fell into
a deep sleep.

When she opened her eyes at dawn on the following day,
she felt as though a lead weight was pressing against her
temples; her throat burned and her lips were like cardboard.
In the silence of the bedroom a lamp was swinging rhythmical-
ly, projecting the bell-shaped shadow of its violet glass
shade on the walls hung with gold and silver tapestries and
on the clear gilt of the waxed furniture.

"Where am I? What time is it?"

"Five o'clock."

Startled upon hearing that fresh, juvenile voice at
the foot of her bed, she sat up with a jump:

"Who is it? What are you doing there?"

"I slept here on the rug...in case you might have
needed me, Ma'am."

"Ah, yes! Thank you....."
"What shame," she thought, "that the servants themselves have seen me like this! What crime have I committed, Lord, for you to punish me in this way?"

"A glass of water," she asked, unconsciously obeying an imperious physical necessity.

When the maid came with the water, she put a letter in Berta's hands:

"The master left this for you last night."

"A letter? Open the window at once."

The morning light entered in a wide adamantine band. Outside, the birds were singing and the rising sun was tinting the crests of the trees with rose.

"Expect me at dusk. We have to talk of something very serious," read Berta, and her heart turned over.

"Very well!"

All her remorse, all her troubles were erased in an instant.

"It gave results! It gave results!"
CHAPTER VII.

As soon as she heard Pascual's voice, she could hardly control herself; she almost fainted. She had counted the minutes and seconds since the gold watch on her wrist marked the hour of seven. Without an instant more of tranquillity, when the doorbell rang and the deliberate steps of Pascual were heard climbing the steps, her arms fell inertly to her sides and she bowed her head. Moments of infinite anguish. Pascual put his hat and his cane on a rack, walked slowly towards her, took an armchair, and moved it near the divan where she was resting.

He, such a master of himself always, now was hesitating, doubting. He did not know exactly where or how to begin. Berta, upon seeing that beautiful forehead, usually so serene, now furrowed, felt a mixture of profound compassion and very rare joy. That sainted madness of hers that would thus return life to her, the true life: her husband!

"Berta," Pascual spoke at last.

In the silence of the alcove during a moment that seemed like a century, the buzzing of a mosquito was heard. "Berta," he said again after swallowing, "I have observed that Don Ulpiano Pío....."

Berta wanted to laugh, but it was necessary to carry the joke to an end. A gesture of astonishment dilated her clear eyes; she raised her head, quivering, almost losing
her equilibrium.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you have been kind to him...perhaps too kind...."

The delight that the torture by Pascual caused her was so exquisite that she felt her amber skin tingle in a wave of delicious chill. Voluptuously stretched on the cushions of crimson plush, wearing a magnificent kimona of white silk, she looked like a broken lily in a sea of blood.

"Answer me, Berta. Why are you silent?"

If Pascual would weep a single tear, only one tear, she would forget forever the torrents of tears that he had made her shed. She would feel cured forever.

Like a vague lunar phantom she sat up in the uncertain light of the room. Then she stood up:

"How dare you censure my conduct, you who have abandoned me for entire weeks and months? What do I mean, then, to you?"

Pascual, humbled, lowered his eyes.

"Am I just a thing to you? Are you the only one who has a right to live your life?"

Pascual raised his eyes surprised. A flash of lightning illumined them intensely.

And Berta, whose energies were now spent, made a powerful effort to finish.
"He whose dissipated life is the scandal of Mexico City asks me to account for my actions? What a mistake! Aren't you the one who is so intelligent? I also want to live! In me exists a woman that you, you poor thing, have never known how to awaken...."

Pascual opened his eyes wide, astonished.

And she, horrified at herself, hid her thin, pale face between her hands that were like dry stalks, and let herself fall back again. Why should there come to her mind at that moment the disturbing phrase of the demon woman who incited her to such an iniquitous farce?

Her head was buried in the cushion, her features grew pinched, her eyes disappeared in their grayish sockets in a face that was damp with a cold sweat.

Pascual, without emerging from his stupor, looked at her penetratingly. And when he came to himself, believing to have guessed everything, he said very slowly and solemnly:

"Berta, now, indeed, we can speak clearly."

Berta opened her eyes. The tear did not yet shine in Pascual's eyes; but why prolong his suffering if she had already acquired the full conviction of his innocence or, at least, of his absolute repentance? In a movement of violent impulse, she got up and threw herself at his feet; she caught his knees, hugged them lovingly, kissed them, and exclaimed:

"Pascual, forgive me!"
"Bah! Little fool, get up! Come to my arms, for I am the one who ought to beg your pardon. I, who in the years that I have lived with you, never suspected that woman who was sleeping inside you. What a fine lesson! Berta, I confess that I believed you to be the inferior one of your family. What a joke! Berta, I don't have to tell you, but now, indeed, we shall succeed."

Without blinking, holding her breath, her heart scarcely beating, Berta looked at him in consternation.

"You were the only obstacle to our real, definite triumph. Only one short spell of old Carranza's ill humor and we are in the street. It is necessary to assure a situation that does not depend on others and by whatever means possible. These goods that we now possess, the former owners may recover with a signature of Don Venustiano. But the business that we are now going to undertake is different. A merely commercial matter of a million and a half pesos. But for which the signature of a merchant foreign to the revolution is an absolute necessity, you understand? And that man we have found in Don Ulpiano Pío. He has unheard-of stubbornness, but he has showed me his vulnerable point and with that he is now ours, you understand? Your obstinacy had me desperate, but now, come to my arms! Only one piece of advice. A piece of advice that now is more than enough, but that perhaps tomorrow you ought to carry well engraved
in your memory. We are allies. In these things, Berta, one must put only the mind, never the heart. But I am a fool. What advice are you going to need from me?"

Filled with satisfaction, without noticing the effect of his words, Pascual got up, picked up his cane and his hat, he looked at himself in the mirror and carefully arranged the knot of his tie, smoothed the rebellious hair that danced on his forehead, humming a foxtrot. Outside the room, as if struck by remorse, he turned rapidly on his heel and, running on tiptoe, came again to Berta and chastely imprinted a kiss upon her bowed, white neck.

When she was able to open her eyes, she moved her hands uncertainly, searching for the precise spot where the asp had stung her. Swaying, she stood up and went to the wash basin; she soaked her handkerchief in cold water and put it upon her burning neck.

In vain. The poison went very far within. But now not a sob, not a tear. Only cold, a cold that was not of the silent and dismal atmosphere of her sitting room, but another cold like steel that had penetrated into the depths of her soul.
CHAPTER VIII.

A servant contemptuously put five hidalgos in Mrs. Tabardillo's hands and said to her rudely:

"And don't come around here again. Madam has forbidden us to even announce you."

One morning, as she returned from the mass of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Berta, upon alighting from her car, was suddenly surprised by an attack:

"Forgive me this discourteous manner, but, as you have some very stupid and rude servants, this is the only way that I can speak to you."

Taking advantage of the moment of surprise and Berta's weakness, Mrs. Tabardillo stuck to her like a leech and entered the house with her.

"I have been begging to talk with you for three days and they always refuse me."

"Do we still owe you something?" answered Berta, in the antechamber, raising the fine, black-dotted veil from her transparent face and the dark-shadowed eyes.

"More than with money you have paid me with kindness and with such good will."

A challenging look answered the insolent threat of the intruder whose teeth were bared in a cruel smile.

"In such a case....."

"I am not wanted here, am I?"
Like a butterfly that had shed its wings to become a chrysalis again, Berta emerged from her magnificent fur coat lined with silk and raised her head with unprecedented pride before Mrs. Tabardillo.

"I find you very changed, Berta honey. What spider has bitten you?"

"Enough! I'll not permit you to talk to me like that. Understand that we are not equals. You want money, more money still; speak then and let's not waste time."

"I will begin by recalling to you the favor that you offered me to find a proper place for Payito."

"I never recommend people that I do not know."

"Aha! That means that all has finished between us?"

"?"

"Perhaps not, girl, if I don't want it to."

"There is the door!"

"And if first I should like to tell you two words that might succeed in softening your heart and, at least, quench your bad humor?"

"Get out of here...."

"And if I were to tell what happened here a few days ago between you and your husband's friends?"

"You miserable thing! You are all against me!"

Mrs. Tabardillo checked a burst of laughter, because Berta pressed a button.
"Wait. Have you carefully thought over what you are going to do?"

"I do not permit any familiarities with me. Get out of here."

"You realize that I can tell a few things."

"A few things about what? To whom? Indeed, you are all vile, you are despicable. What does it matter to me, then, what you say?"

"I've gone too far," thought Mrs. Tabardillo, confusedly.

Berta, her face buried in her hands, was holding back the torrent of tears and lamentations accumulated in so many days and months of abandonment and desolation. But she could endure no more; she sank into a chair and wept bitterly.

"Bring her a cup of linden tea," the old woman said arrogantly to the servant who appeared.

When Berta, somewhat recovered, stood up, she was surprised to see the woman still near her and she exclaimed:

"What are you doing here? Are you waiting for me to call the servants and have them throw you out like a dog?"

"Oh, Madam? I didn't want to go without your forgiveness. I am a wretched person! I didn't know how to foretell the saintly and chaste wife. All that I have done with you is criminal, I realize it. Send me to prison, I deserve it
and more still; but, in the name of God in Heaven, first
give me your pardon, give me your blessing, because my great-
est punishment will be to know that you hate me! I swear to
you that your curse would pain me much more than many years
in jail! Pardon! Pardon!"

"Get up. Leave me in peace."

Berta drew back, but Mrs. Tabardillo, dragging her-
self on her knees across the carpet, followed her, embraced
her legs, kissed the hem of her skirt, ardently caught her
hands and kissed them with frenzy."

"Get up!"

"Pardon! Pardon!"

"Promise me never to return to my house."

"I swear it," whined Mrs. Tabardillo, getting up with
a gesture of great tragedy.

Like a repentant and downcast Capuchin nun, her hands
clasped upon her breast, Mrs. Tabardillo went out, making
genuflections even at the gardiner himself.

It was many hours later when Berta noticed that the
drawers of a little writing desk were open and that her
jewels had disappeared forever, like Mrs. Tabardillo.
CHAPTER IX.

A harsh blow, the door was rudely pushed open and, by the light that suddenly filtered in from the street in a weak gleam, a silhouette was outlined.

"It is Pascual!" cried Agustinita, her voice overcome with emotion. "Didn't you say that he would never come, Lulú?"

"Pascual!" repeated Francisco José, quaking with joy. "Lulú did not answer; neither did Procopio. Both remained sullen and motionless in the darkest corner of the room.

"And Berta? How is my daughter? Why didn't you bring her, Pascual? Where is my daughter?"

Annoyed by the questions, standing motionless in the middle of the small living room, his eyes dilated, Pascual called attention to the lack of illumination.

"We have now acquired the habit of darkness," observed Procopio, striking a match against the wall.

He lighted the stub of a candle that for months back had served at night only at the exact moment for each one to look for his corner and his blanket and lie down on the floor to sleep.

Pascual looked around, from the floor of rotted and porous wood to the peeling walls and decaying ceiling; from the wretched furnishings to the ragged clothing.
The sad flame of the tallow candle, fluttering in the plaintive wind from the garden, also added its dismal note.

"If, by chance, you see some lighted house in this district," observed Procopio in a hoarse voice, "you can bet that it is the residence of a merchant or a carrancista. Only those happy mortals are now permitted luxuries of such magnitude."

The misery of the surroundings, the vehement voice of Procopio, the anxiety of everyone, greatly annoyed Pascual. His luxurious imported English suit, his Stetson hat, his heavy, gold watchchain, his patent leather American shoes, made a brutal contrast.

"Berta will come tomorrow, she will come tomorrow," he responded impatiently to the avalanche of questions which Agustinita hurled at him. Then, resolved to end his business quickly, he said:

"I come with bad news. Your family appears on the list of personal enemies of Mr. Carranza. And, as you know, Mr. Carranza is not capable of ever pardoning them."

There was a brief silence of stupefaction.

"Who can affirm that?" inquired Procopio.

"I know."

"But you know that it is a lie."

"Unfortunately, unimpeachable evidence exists."

"What proofs do they have?"
"A loan that the Vázquez Prado family made to Huerta's government in hard cash."

"It's a lie!"

"The voucher has passed through my hands."

"Then you are lying also."

"I lie? Be careful, for...."

"For what?"

"For you may have to repent...for I can oblige you to retract."

"I am one of those who never retract. I repeat that you lie."

Pascual shrugged his shoulders, smiling sympathetically.

"You lie as you have always lied; because your life has been nothing but a lie."

"Proofs, not words..."

"You want them?"

"I don't want them; I demand them."

"I will give them to you alone. I don't want to make you blush before anyone but yourself."

"I ask you for them out in the open. And if you don't give them to me....."

"What?"

"Then you will be the liar...."

"Hush, Pascual," Lulú interrupted, becoming angry and
confronting him.

"Therefore, one should think before speaking," re­plied Pascual, energetically.

"He who leaves home with only the clothes that he is wearing," said Procopio, advancing a step towards Pascual, "and returns rich....if he doesn't have callouses on his hands, he must have some very thick ones on his soul. Show me yours...."

Pascual let puffs of air escape through his lips, like the hissing of a snake.

"Robber!"

"Leech!"

The darkness of the room was propitious to the un­leashing of a mortal hatred, barely restrained. In the full light of day, the insults that were exchanged there would not have poured forth.

"You will not repeat those words outside of this house, cur. Go out so that I can spit in your face what I've told you...."

Procopio rushed toward the vestibule with his fists clenched while Pascual, intensely pale, with a sinister smile on his lips, remained motionless.

And, as Procopio, in the paroxism of his anger, had boldly advanced upon him, Agustinita intervened:

"Enough! I have to tell the truth. What Pascual
affirms is true. I am the only one responsible...."

"You?"

"Yes, I. I loaned twenty thousand pesos to Mr. Huerta's government. Pascual has told the truth. We are compromised."

Like a corralled animal, Procopio gasped, let escape a groan of sorrow, or rage, and of helplessness.

"I never told you, Procopio, because you were an irreconcilable enemy of that government. The money box was always open for me and I managed not to give you time to make an inventory of the securities before leaving Zacatecas."

Procopio's breathing was heard, short and panting.

"It would be better if you never set foot in this house again!" exclaimed Lulú, confronting Pascual.

"I am going, yes; but first, I must make clear something that is of interest to you. Agustinita, examine these papers."

"Our promissory notes. I assure you that as soon as they return our properties to us...."

"Magnificent hope! Realize that in payment of this debt I could, if I wished, attach all your property. But as I have never intended to do you any harm, as someone has dared to insinuate, look well at what I am going to do."

Stupefied, Agustinita and Francisco José, opening their eyes excessively wide, saw how Pascual crumpled the
documents that Agustinita had returned to him, how he made a fagot with them and, taking it by one end with the tips of his fingers, he asked Francisco José for the candle. Great flames leaped up, sadly illuminating the house. A livid band of light lay across the street and, in that background of a forge, shone the plump and neatly shaved face of Pascual, blazed troubled faces, burning eyes and conflicting expressions.

The fire was already burning Pascual's fingers when he blew strongly. Ashes and crackling, yellowish fragments were carried away by the wind.

In the shadows, the small, flickering flame of the candle, that was momentarily wasting away, shone again.

Procopio was astonished. Lulu's countenance burned in feverish excitement; Agustinita and Francisco José had to restrain themselves violently from throwing themselves at the feet of Pascual, their savior.

"Now you don't owe a cent...to me or anyone...I am through and I am going."

"Don't leave like this. We must talk first....I must make amends for my offense," said Procopio, approaching with incoherent movements.

His humble, trembling voice had the unsteady brilliance of lightning.

"I have offended you," he added, "and I owe you an
apology, therefore. I can't permit you to go thus. I am
honorable above everything else. Forgive me, Pascual."

"No, Father," interrupted Lulú, impetuously, "he is
guilty of all this."

"Silence, Lulú!" exploded Agustinita.

"It is my duty, my child. I have offended him; I
feel that here within me is something that is doing me much
harm. I need Pascual to pardon me."

"You recognize your mistake just now. You have al­
ways been wrong about me."

"Churl! Don't you talk to Papa like that!"

"Lulú, leave here immediately."

"I'll not obey you, Mother, because you are all abus­
ing him. I will not leave here."

"I want to show you," said Pascual with unheard-of
calm, "the only means of saving your capital. It is the
only thing that keeps me here."

"Tell us, hurry, tell us," exclaimed Agustinita and
Francisco José in one voice.

"You must simulate a bill of sale of all your prop­
erties, with a date previous to the revolution. I have a
well thought-out plan; but the reception that you have given
me here has not permitted me....."

"In the name of God, my darling son, forget the in­sults that they have given you! For our sake! For Berta's
sake! Procopio, the poor thing, is extremely feeble, he doesn't realize.... All that you say will be done."

"Will be done! repeated Francisco José, relentlessly.

"Then it is all very easy. Here is the deed. It is only necessary to fill in the blank precisely with the name of a person of absolute confidence in whose hands you will intrust all your fortune."

"And who else but you could be that one?" interrupted Agustinita, delirious with joy.

"After what has happened, the mere act of thinking of another person would increase the injury done you," affirmed Francisco José, doctorally.

"But that is exactly the condition that I make; that neither you, Agustinita, nor Francisco José be the one to designate him, but only and exclusively Procopio."

"What a gesture!" exclaimed Francisco José, striking his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"Procopio," Agustinita said jubilantly then, "here is the opportunity of making the greatest amends to Pascual."

"No, Papa dear, not he.... not to him...." murmured Lulú in her ear.

Procopio turned his dejected eyes, first to Agustinita, then to Lulú. They had to repeat the words many times. His brain was like a stopped watch. When he approached the table
and picked up the pen, his movements were like those of a
somnambulist.

"Write in these blanks the name of the fictitious
buyer," said Pascual with a clear voice and perfect serenity.

"Write Pascual," Agustinita ordered dryly.

"Pascual," repeated Francisco José, panting.

And Procopio put the name of Pascual in all the
places that they pointed out to him.

Dancing and clapping her hands like an eight-year-old
child, Agustinita liberally bestowed caresses upon her hus-
band:

"Finally Our Lord God has had pity on us! Now, indeed,
we are going to be happy again!"

Francisco José announced a poem, "Resurrexit," a
starting point of a stage that was slowly being elaborated
in him. No more laments nor constant crying: full confi-
dence in life that is good and beautiful, to sing it after
the manner of those of the Nuevo Barco. 20

Then they obliged Procopio and Pascual to embrace.

Lulú went out, writhing in convulsions of sorrow and
helplessness.

20 A literary club.
CHAPTER X.

Scarcely had the doors closed behind Pascual when Lulú came out of the darkness and said in a voice like the strokes of a hammer:

"Pascual has robbed us!"

Agustinita, without considering these words, threw herself into Procopio's arms, who permitted it to be done in perfect unconsciousness.

"Thank you, husband of mine, thank you because you have been just at last and have returned peace and joy to us. I rightly thought: 'Procopio isn't a bad man; he can't be. Procopio has a noble heart, the trouble is that the poor old man doesn't know much about things, it isn't his fault. It can't be...' Oh, thank you, my darling husband! We forgive you all that you have made us suffer and all the evils that you have caused us, and only because of this most beautiful act of your life."

Procopio drew back like an automaton; in the dark, he reached the straw bed where, nightly, he was accustomed to sleep; he kept silent and motionless, standing for some moments. Suddenly, like a drunken man in a coma, he collapsed upon the rough floor.

At the clatter, Lulú rushed forward with the light in her hands. Face up, with his eyes closed and his mouth half-open, Procopio was rigid, a superficial and uncertain
breathing was moving his chest. The ravages of sorrow were
now manifest in that strong nature that knew how to hide
everything under the lines of a gentle and ironic smile.
Two deep furrows appeared at each side of his pure and
serene nose, two vertical lines were deepened, and in his
rough, curly black hair shone many threads of silver.

"Papa, dear Papa!"

Lulú caught his head and raised it in her arms.
Agustinita came with water and sprinkled some on his face.
At the contact of the cold liquid, Procopio opened his eyes.
He observed the faces filled with worry that surrounded him;
he heard Lulú's sobs.

"What? What is the matter?"

"What happened to you, Papa dear?"

"No, I don't think it was anything. Bah! I feel all
right; go to bed."

And his habitual, kindly smile inspired more tran­
quility than his own words. They all retired.

Procopio slept and dreamed. He had not dreamed for
a long time. He was in Zacatecas, at the head of his busi­
ness affairs, counting money, all the money of his strong
box. How much money! Gold; heavy, shining gold. Gold in
compact piles: hidalgos, half-hidalgos, American eagles,
all in rigorous formation. But so tightly packed that there
was not room to insert a pin. In truth, better than piles,
they were mounds, hills that were crumbling little by little. And, while he hurried to lighten the contents of the box more, taking out the gold by the handfuls, the quantity became so great that it boiled over and fell upon the floor, until there was no room to place his hands to hold it back. And with his hands opened, he was checking that cataract of gold that was striking him on the chest and knees, was piling up to his feet and was climbing, climbing to the point of fastening him in his seat. Gold in a cascade that soon came to his waist. He felt panic and turned his eyes in search of salvation. But through the windows entered rivers of gold and from the roof fell a torrent of gold. And he felt that the gold had reached his chest, his mouth, that it was suffocating him, that it made breathing impossible, that it was smothering him. And he made a colossal effort, superhuman and definite. Dripping with sweat, panting, anxious, with his hands clasped upon his breast to protect his heart, he sat up in his miserable bed.

Clearly and distinctly, he heard the bells of Los Angeles. One...two... Then complete silence.

Two hours of rest were sufficient to make him recover his perfect lucidity. He heard the four o'clock bells when he awoke again. And the words pronounced by Lulú were repeated with absolute clarity:

"Pascual has robbed us!"
He sat up, quietly searched for his clothes, dressed himself in silence, went out on tiptoe and opened the vestibule.

"Yes, she has understood it all."

Solemn solitude. From the central lamp of the garden of Los Angeles, a weak and milky light was diffused. The sky was ornamented with stars. There in the distance, by Santiago, came the muffled sound of the first pulque carts. He hurried himself, turned by one side of the house and, bit by bit, picked up the fragments of half-burned paper, scattered on the sidewalk. He returned and entered noiselessly.

"Did you hear noises last night?" asked Agustinita when they were eating breakfast. "I think that someone got up, or I was dreaming. As I had passed a sleepless night, I fell asleep at once."

Instead of answering, Procopio asked:

"What evidence exists in writing of the loan that you made to the government of Victoriano Huerta?"

Agustinita looked at Francisco José and a slight smile passed between them; she made a gesture of impatience and then another of resignation:

"It was a secret from everyone with the exception of Pascual, who delivered the money, and of the Chief of the Plaza of Zacatecas, who received it."

"What it means is that only Pascual has been able to
reveal that secret to Carranza, or that all this is a miserable lie."

"That is evident!" affirmed Lulú.

Agustinita and Francisco José again exchanged smiles of infinite pity.

"I hope that you can always smile like that!"

"My dear boy, you ought to consult a doctor. It is natural that after the blows that we have suffered, your brain does not function properly."

"How much better it would be if this were just a crazy idea of mine!"

"But is it possible that you still doubt Pascual, after what happened last night?"

"I did doubt, now I don't doubt. Now I say that he has cynically made fun of all of us."

"For goodness sake, Procopio!"

"Pascual is a scoundrel...Pascual is a robber...." "Procopio!"

"Here is the proof..."

He took from his pockets some fragments of paper, blackened and burned at the edges. On one corner, blistered by the heat, were some tax stamps, still intact.

All approached curiously, to see. Agustinita and Francisco José, deeply stricken with amazement.

"I see that you don't understand anything. Notice
that the stamps are this year's: look at them well. And what does this mean? That these documents are false, that they are not the ones that we signed in 1914, that he has arranged them to deal us a master blow. Do you understand now?"

"Wretch!" exclaimed Lulú in a veiled voice.

"So, then, your darling little son, besides being a great actor is also a great bandit."

Agustinita let escape a disconcerting burst of laughter. Then her eyes shone like those of a wolf-cub, and her teeth like the fangs of a viper. And she said:

"Well, I have more confidence in a bandit like Pascual ... than in my upright husband...a good-for-nothing!"

"Mother!" Lulú cried, clenching her fists.

Through Procopio's veins ran something like melted lead. His cheeks and his lips were the color of lead. In his ears, his blood ceased buzzing at high pressure and he did not see nor feel even Lulú, who was hanging on his neck in the desperation of her sorrow, trying to contain him with all her strength.
CHAPTER XI.

He realized the distance that he had come, only because the agglomeration of pedestrians, coaches, and street-cars intercepted his passage on the corner of the Postoffice. But when the traffic resumed, he continued his quickened pace, absorbed, without anything or anyone disturbing the silence and solitude of his soul. The same as moments before, he had gone through the great streets filled with a noisy and swarming multitude with his spirit absent, without his senses noticing the magnificent profusion of many-colored lights in the great office and business buildings, the luxurious dress of the women or the exciting perfumes of those who often bumped against him, neither did he now perceive the silence of the obscure and deserted paths of the Alameda nor the fragrant blossoms of the capito tree, that open at night. Without hesitating, he crossed the Alameda until he came out at the left of the Semicircle of Juárez, whose marble statue reflected brilliantly the light of the nearby clusters of streetlamps. He went back until he entered the alley of Dolores and immediately was lost in the crowd.

He stopped facing the enormous door of a dirty and ill-smelling tenement. He dried the sweat that bathed his face, hesitated a few minutes and then, decided, he took a narrow, dark passageway where a crowd of boys were running and romping about, howling like cats in the mating season. Feeble
lights fluttered, escaping through partly-opened doors on either side. In the middle of the patio a group of gossips in council were blocking the way. Farther along, others were solemnly witnessing a quarrel. "Pardon me," he said, very politely. But they neither yielded the passage nor even noticed him. He had to wait until the end of the fight. From insults, the quarreling women had now descended to deeds. One of them had her chest and arms bare, the rags of her clothing blended with the filth of her body. The other wore a fine coat of astrakan, her shabby boots unfastened, her hair disheveled and hanging loose. They seized each other by the hair, fell rolling on the cement, their teeth fastened in each other's skin, in the midst of a solemn, almost religious silence. Procopio repeated his "Pardon me," and jumped over them almost without noticing and without being noticed by anyone. Farther along, a cord from a network of intertwined clotheslines snatched off his hat which sailed into a carved stone basin in the center of the patio. He drained it carefully, undisturbed, and with it in his hands, he advanced to the rotted and porous doors of the private rooms, where a bleary, small lantern diffused a very miserable light, as if to soften the poverty and filth of a whole district condensed into a big, old house. He stopped before a miserable pigsty, lighted a match, examined the numbers closely and knocked softly on the wavering timbers.
"He isn't in," he thought, after waiting a few minutes. He peered through the cracks in the door and, in the quivering light of a small oil lamp, he saw a man stretched out upon the bare springs of a cot. "It is he," he said to himself, trying to still the pounding of his heart. And then he knocked loudly.

Upon seeing the gleam of a pistol barrel at the same moment that the door was opened, he drew back:

"It is I, Archibaldo!"

"You here, Uncle Procopio?"

"I know that you are here incognito. You are a deserter from the State of Morelos."

"How did you know?"

"Three nights ago I saw you in the streets of Tacuba; I followed you because I wanted to know what you were doing and where you were living. The rest is easy to guess. But my business is something else. Lend me your pistol, Archibaldo."

"My pistol?" answered Archibaldo, even more surprised.

"It is the first favor that I have asked of you. Will you refuse me?"

"But, what are you going to do?"

"Nothing, but I have heard a noise on the rooftops of the house and...I fear...."

"An assault?"
Archibaldo felt tempted to laugh merrily, but at that very instant he realized that Procopio's hat was dripping wet; he noticed his strange look, the odd tone of his voice, and the obvious vagueness of his gestures and his movements. "He has either committed a crime or he is going to commit one," he thought.

"Come, man, don't hesitate; lend me your pistol."

Archibaldo walked to his bed. "I am a blind fool! The poor old man is a horrible actor and he doesn't want me to suspect that he doesn't even have anything for breakfast tomorrow. My poor pistol is going to the Monte de Piedad.21 Let it be for the sake of God!"

And with promptness, he took from under the pillows the last of his money. He turned towards Procopio and, at the same time that he put the pistol in his hands, he slipped the money furtively into the pocket of his coat.

Procopio scarcely felt the cold contact of the pistol when he smiled somberly. He left the room without even a goodbye, without a gesture of thanks.

That disconcerted Archibaldo. "And if he doesn't want it for the purpose I think? If what he is trying is to escape once and for all from the fight?" The terrible suspicion then passed through his alert imagination, and

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21 The national pawnshop, operated by the government.
without allowing himself a second more of conjectures, he caught up his hat, quickly threw on his coat, and went out running.

At the risk of being hit by the automobiles that at that hour were passing ceaselessly in opposite directions, he crossed Juárez Avenue in a straight line. When he entered the Alameda, he saw appear and disappear the austere shadow of Procopio, vividly illuminated by the great voltaic light of a glorieta circle. Like an arrow he sped to overtake him. A gendarme tried to stop him, but, with one slap, the blue light of his lantern flew up to shine among the high branches and the guardian was face-down on the grass.

"Now the responsibility rests directly on me." His feet almost did not touch the ground until, at last, he reached Procopio and put his hand on his shoulder.

Procopio's eyes, like deep wells, became disturbed.

"Uncle Procopio, I have come running to bring you the bullets; that pistol is unloaded."

"Bah, man, how grateful I am to you! Give them to me."

His eyes shone sullenly; the tone of his voice was not his.

"Thanks, thanks, Now you can go."

"Uncle Procopio, allow me to go with you to your house."

"Chist! I am not going there. It is another matter."
Leave me, immediately."

"I will go where you are going...."

"Impossible, it is something private."

"I promise the most absolute discretion."

"It is useless, dear Archibaldo. Thanks, go home and leave me alone."

"I have nothing to do and your company has always been very pleasing to me."

"A thousand devils, chatterbox, let me alone. I don't want anyone to go with me."

"Uncle, you are going to fight and I want to be a witness."

"Fool, I am not fighting with anyone, I am not a bully. Go to the devil!"

"Good, Uncle, then I will go where you go. It's useless to get angry."

"Oh! I never thought you were such a beast! Let's go home then."

"Yes, Uncle, let's go home."

There was more than a half-hour of perfect silence. In the neighborhood of Los Angeles, Archibaldo paused briefly and, by the light of an electric bulb, wrote two lines on a leaf torn from his billfold. Procopio, abstracted, did not notice.

When they arrived at the entrance of the house, he
said in a dull voice:

"Do you want to come in, Archibaldo?"

"I'll greet them and then I'll leave, Uncle."

"Come in, then."

Procopio fixed his searching eyes on Archibaldo, opened the door and let him enter.

"Archibaldo, here!" cried Lulu.

"Archibaldo!" they all exclaimed, surprised.

No one had believed him to be in the capital.

The visit was short. When he said goodbye to Lulu, Archibaldo slipped into her fingers a small, folded paper.

Procopio accompanied him to the corner and said to him very gently:

"I saw everything, Archibaldo. Thanks, you can go in peace."

Archibaldo was surprised and his eyes met Procopio's in a look that said everything.

"Thanks to you, Uncle Procopio...for yourself and for...her."

Meanwhile, Lulu had retired to the dining room and read: "Be careful of your father; he came to ask me for the pistol. Don't leave him alone, even for a moment."

Lulu's eyes dilated. She waited to regain her strength to return to the living room.

"Are you going with us to pray?" asked Agustinita.
"I prefer to go with Papa."

"As you wish."

Agustinita took Francisco José's arm and they left. The division of the family was completed and no longer was a mystery, even to themselves.
CHAPTER XII.

"Heavens, Papa dear, today you have so much gray hair that it looks as though ashes had been sprinkled on your head!"

"All fighting against the years is in vain, Lulú."

"The years? Scarcely twenty-four hours ago your hair was as black as mine."

"There are hours that are as long as years."

"That is true."

The flickering light of the candle was shining, enveloping the sorrowful group in a reddish, shadowy halo. Procopio was seated in the chair with the broken seat; Lulú, wearing a colorless, wrinkled, patched dressing gown, was gently stroking the forehead and temples of that head which had turned gray overnight.

"And look at what a face! And how many wrinkles! Where can Papa's good laugh be hidden?"

Her voice broke; a flood of tears came and smothered the last words, scarcely modulated.

Deeply dejected, Procopio bent his head, his eyes dull, let his limbs fall lax, inert.

"Be quiet, child!"

"Will it be the child that now has to give lessons to her teacher? Why, Papa darling, do you declare yourself beaten, if we have never even begun to fight?"

Procopio straightened up; astonishment was written on
his face. His eyes met Lulú's which were overflowing with tears.

"Selfish one! Don't you have a daughter who adores you? Ah, surely you are no longer my father!"

Procopio raised his head. Lulú's face was burning; her eyes flashed:

"No, you aren't my father. Mine taught me that laughter is always good. He always knew how to laugh. You don't laugh, and he said to me many times, 'Lulú, one must know how to face life squarely and with a laugh on his lips.' Isn't it true that that Papa no longer exists? Because Papa didn't lie; Papa wasn't one of those people who is purely words and more words."

"Be still, Lulú, be still!"

"Didn't you say to me once: 'Lulú, the secret of happiness is not to ask life for more than life can give us?'"

Humbled, dejected, defeated, he finally reacted:

"Lulú, you shouldn't judge me like that. You can't comprehend the magnitude of my torments. Who will help me endure this last blow?"

"And is my father the one who thus speaks to me now? And are those his strong arms? And that level head? And are these my hands?"

"Your hands!"
Procopio took them, raised them to his lips and devoutly let drop upon them a bitter tear. Lulú let her head fall upon the convulsed breast of her father. And the two wept for a time that no one measured.

When Agustinita and Francisco José returned from Los Angeles where they had prayed, Lulú, palpitating with joy, was kneeling before a cheap religious picture that was fastened to the wall, giving thanks to God.

Procopio went to bed. The tears, so abundantly shed, had been a beneficial rain. In Lulú's forceful words, he had just dimly seen a new course of life. And that night, Lulú slept with the serenity of a child, and he slept with the weariness of the lion, clawed in a tremendous battle, but triumphant at last, always the victor.

He awoke at dawn. His brain was clear; his heart was beating slowly. He turned over many times on his straw bed, but not being able to induce sleep, he dressed himself and went out immediately. He was putting the key in the lock when Lulú appeared, kindly, smiling, and gracious.

"You, daughter?"

"From now on, always with you...."

Procopio smiled tenderly.

"Where do you want us to go?"

"Where were you going?"

"You know that I like to get up at dawn and go out
without a fixed direction."

"Let us go."

The day was beginning to clear. The dark panels of the doors and windows were reflecting parallel lines on the sidewalks and, at a short distance, all was hidden, the sharp edges, the friezes, reliefs, and facades, in a heavy mist that reached to the sky; a mist that blotted out the trees, the houses, the air, and the clouds in a dirty, gray tone. In the distance, the red lantern of a drugstore was shining; in another street were blinking the tiny, many-colored lights of a small hotel. Two gleaming eyes, emitting flashes of light, appeared at the end of a street, turned soon after and, mingling with the light sounds of the awakening morning, there was heard the humming of a faraway automobile.

The bronze bells of a church were vibrating in the fresh air. They struck five o'clock. Afterwards began the ringing in the belfry that called to mass.

"Shall we go?" she asked.

"I will go where you wish," answered Procopio with absolute serenity.

And the two disappeared in the cold obscurity of a temple whose heavy doors had just creaked open.
CHAPTER XIII.

Procopio came out of the church, transformed. In his voice vibrated the vigor and the smile, lost for such a long time. His gestures and his movements were easier.

They returned in silence, but with such haste that they were panting when they reached the house.

After Procopio finished his cup of black coffee, he asked for water, soap, and brushes and entered his room. He had sufficient calmness to devote two hours to the inspection of his ancient and shiny clothes and to his personal cleanliness.

"Why don't you talk, Papa dear?" asked Lulú, who was helping him.

"Quiet, quiet. Here within I carry something new. You will soon know."

And when he appeared, looking younger, he said with an accent that was foreign to him:

"I absolutely forbid anyone in this house to set foot in the house of Pascual again."

"And Berta?" observed Agustinita, instantly.

"This is our house and Berta's house."

And he went out to the street.

"Is he finally going to look for someone who will adjust his head?" murmured Agustinita, smiling and confused at the same time.
"It is not he who needs it most," answered Lulú.
"Is it possible that you were once my daughter?"
Within a week, Procopio placed in his wife's hands three heavy pieces of gold:
"For the week's expenses."
Four pesos a day!
They all looked at each other astonished. Who had seen thirty pesos together and in real money since two years ago?

Procopio hid his satisfaction and his joy. And a retrospective glance made him astonished, not at the present, but at the past. By what miracle had they not lacked for a single day at least a cup of bean broth, a small dish of boiled potatoes, and a dozen tortillas? The last of Lulú's jewels, the mysterious monthly allowance coming through the shopkeeper on the corner—a monthly allowance whose disappearance coincided exactly with Archibaldo's desertion from the ranks of the zapatistas.

As soon as they had finished eating, Lulú accompanied him to the vestibule. Procopio kissed her forehead when he took leave of her and said:

"Now, Lulú, we are going to build a new house."

Agustinita, who was spying on the gestures and words of Procopio very intrigued, called her daughter and asked her:

"What secret did he tell you when he said goodbye?"
"No secret, Mamma. Only these words: 'Now we are going to build a new house.'"

Agustinita blinked her eyes quizzically, searching for the meaning of the phrase. Meanwhile, the hidalgos were passing from one hand to the other, making a pleasant tinkling sound.

"To build a new house" she was pronouncing mechanically, and her glance distractedly moved over the confines of the dining room.

And the miracle of gold began. In her morose and disturbed spirit were excited vague desires; her thoughts took form and were made manifest. The objects that surrounded her acquired precise significance suddenly. She was surprised, as if she were seeing them for the first time, and she exclaimed in consternation:

"Holy Father, what a loathsome house!"

And she ran to a small store for soap, lye, and scrubbing brushes. "To build a new house," she repeated between her teeth. She brought a pail of water and within it stirred about some unenameled, pewter plates, chipped glasses, cups without handles, rusty platters of odd sizes. And she commenced to work "to build a new house."

Her hands became red, swollen. She attacked with real fury the miserable table service: lye and brush, ashes and pumice stone, removing all the rust of time and complete neglect.
Little by little, all was becoming clean, shining.

In the late afternoon she finished her task, lining up the objects symmetrically upon some shelves of rough pine that served as a sideboard. She contemplated them at a distance with a certain melancholy and a sign escaped from her lips at the exact moment that a light flashed in her mind. "Bah! Now I understand it all! Pascual has obtained the restitution of our properties or, at least, of some good sum. From where else could this money come? Procopio is too proud to confess his errors and resorts to subterfuges like that of 'one has to build a new house.' I could have said better: 'one must rebuild all the buildings that the bandits have demolished.' Let us wait until he comes to his senses, for even a fish opens his mouth once too often."

Two weeks later there were not thirty pesos, but a tight little roll of half-hidalgos. In a rapture of joy, Agustinita was going to throw herself into Procopio's arms, but the harsh and abrupt tone of her husband had the effect of a cold shower on her.

"From tomorrow on, dinner is to be ready at half-past one sharp."

If the words were plain and the gesture temperate, his imperative tone did not leave room for a reply. Agustinita bit her lips. And that day, Procopio, when he took leave as always from Lulú who accompanied him to the
vestibule, said to her as soon as he kissed her forehead:

"Now, indeed, Lulú, we are saved."

Agustinita, crazy with joy, went to carry the good news to Francisco José.

"Procopio has said that we are saved. The thing is clear: either Procopio has obtained the restitution of our farms, or the Germans have won, or Don Félix Díaz, who is only waiting for that event, is now coming to capture the plaza."

And, overflowing with enthusiasm, she added:

"After all, Procopio is not a bad man, is he, Francisco José?"

Then she took the formal determination of heroically pardoning the faults of her husband, to whose obstinate stubbornness all of the family's hardships were due. She decided to break the block of ice that kept them apart, although it might be at the sacrifice of her own dignity. Why keep hostilities open if already the cause of their vexations had disappeared? Only, when Procopio returned that evening and they barely exchanged indifferent words, occasionally, she felt deeply frustrated. The perverse, authoritative tone that Procopio had acquired, not only killed his former and easy impulsiveness, but deprived her of all liberty. So, the premeditated discourse of harmony remained choked in a silence of uneasiness and anxiety.
Thus, elapsed days and weeks. But as the money continued arriving with regularity and each week increased, and the modest house furnishing followed clothing for the street; as Francisco José, in spite of his neo-romanticist enterprises, was developing cheeks the color of a California apple; as Bernabé, herself, made up for the bad times by reviewing all her culinary wisdom and all her inventiveness in new dishes every day, Agustinita felt her pain diminish to the point of delivering herself blindly to her destiny.

She thought: "We can't go to see Berta because it is severely prohibited, but Berta can come to see us. It is only the case of advising her. I wonder why she hasn't come back? Can it be possible that Procopio's grudge reaches the point of being a crime? But it isn't just and no one is obliged to commit acts against nature itself and the law of God.

On the other hand, this is an occasion to inaugurate my silk dress."

"Francisco José, put on your new suit and go with me to visit Berta."

When they were all dressed up and at the street door, prey to unrestrainable worry and suddenly becoming fully conscious of the fact that her husband had ceased to be the puppet of the house, Agustinita exclaimed, burning with anger:

"We must speak seriously with Procopio."
And the two returned and took off their new clothes.

Nevertheless, the terror that Procopio inspired in Agustinita was founded on pure suppositions. Because if, in fact, he assumed for the first time his attitude of master of the house, he never pronounced any disagreeable words. Only, indeed, more soberness in his gesture and more plainness in his speech. His habits left off being those of an idle man. At six o'clock sharp he would eat breakfast and go out into the street, not to return until one. He would have dinner and again go out. He would have supper at eight and go to his room. After locking the door, he would write in large account books until very late at night.

"They must be the books of the hacienda," said Agustinita. "Everything must be very muddled. Pascual surely demands a very minute settlement so as to force from the government the exact payment of the damages and injuries that the revolution has done."

Francisco José suggested the idea of investigating visually the contents of such books, but the occasion did not present itself because Procopio never left them.

They continued living in the mystery of a silent Procopio and an inaccessible Berta, hoping to decipher it all as soon as the "extras" of the press appeared, announcing finally the triumph of the Germans and the presence of Don Félix in the environs of Mexico City.
CHAPTER XIV.

One Sunday, when the last bells were ringing for the
nine o'clock mass, a luxurious automobile stopped at the
doors of the old and dusty parochial church of Los Angeles.
A veiled lady descended, of frail and sickly aspect, but of
distinguished bearing and dressed in the latest fashion.
She entered the temple at the moment that the priest, in
purple and gold vestments, was beginning mass before the
flaming altar. But she barely dipped her fingers into the
font of holy water, crossed herself, and went out to the
street, murmuring a prayer.

"Wait for me at that small door," she ordered her
chauffeur.

When she crossed the garden, her amber forehead and
cheeks took vague, spectral reflections behind the very fine
veil that shaded them, as if the tender leaves of the trees
were mirrored there. She crossed the street; beneath the
ruinous portico, she pounded a rough, rusty knocker.

"Berta!"
"Papa!"
"How you've changed!"
"And my mother? And my brother and sister? Where are
they?"

"Then your absence from the city was because of your
illness?"
"A colic of which I thought I was going to die, Papa. Then two endless months in Tehuacan... and now, here again, the same as when I went away, because my illness is not exactly physical. So many letters I have written to Mamma and no answer. No one comes to visit me. Mamma, the only one who can console me, also abandons me. What evil thing have I done?"

Procopio waited until the sobs stopped shaking that poor, flat, angular breast and then spoke:

"Do not blame your mother. She didn't know anything."

"What?"

"I intercepted your letters....."

"Oh!"

"It was necessary."

"Even that?"

"Don't ask me why. It was necessary that way, because on it depended, not only my dignity, but that of all the family, your own."

"But the fact is that I ought to know....."

"The same tone as your mother."

Procopio smiled bitterly and in his eyes roamed a shadow of infinite sadness.

"Don't speak to me thus, Berta. Realize that if I am silent, it is so as not to add one more sorrow to yours."

"And what means one more drop of water in the sea?"
"He makes you suffer also? The scoundrel!"

"Why me also? What does that mean? Only me! Me alone!"

"Then you haven't suspected what passed between Pascual and us. He hasn't said anything?"

"I don't understand..."

"Berta, I have forbidden anyone from this house to again set foot in the house of your husband."

"Oh, how wicked, how wicked you are! Ah! Now I understand...."

"The house of a thief."

Berta gave a discordant cry and raised her hands, horrified, as if to check the words of her father.

"Yes, of the thief that has robbed us of everything."

"Not that! Not that! Hush! You oblige me to be disrespectful. Pascual isn't a thief; he may be an abominable husband, but he is and will always be a perfect gentleman. I'll defend him from you."

"Defend your own assassin and the thief enriched by our property..."

"My God, how shameful! Be still...We, he and I, enriched by killing you with hunger?"

"No, Berta. That is not true either. Hunger fled from this house the same day that the thief was discovered."

"Papa!"
"Does your husband inspire more confidence in you than your own father? Do you doubt me?"

"I do not doubt, I deny. Why didn't I know this before? How shameful! Let me go!"

"I am not stopping you; but you can wait here as long as you like, because this is and always will be your house, your true home. Wait for your mother, your brother and sister...."

"I don't want to see them. I should lack the courage to tell them that I swear never to return here again. I don't have the courage to tell them that you...that you are lying!"

And she rushed to the door. But she was so weak that she had to accept the support of her father's arm to climb into her auto.

The motor roared, the car abruptly turned the corner, and Procopio, absorbed in thought, did not come to himself until a small hand rested like a caress upon one of his shoulders.

"We have come from mass now, Papa dear. Didn't you go?"

"Yes.....I mean, no...."

And as even the accent of his voice might betray him, he chose silence. Agustinita and Francisco José arrived
afterwards, puffed up like peacocks.

No one learned of Berta's visit.
CHAPTER XV.

Among a multitude of heads, effeminate fops, fat-cheeked carrancistas perspiring alcohol and lasciviousness, affected and clean-shaven actors, chorus girls like the wire and paper flowers from China, was raised a lean face with keen eyes which followed fixedly the silhouette of a man who was passing among a crowd of pedestrians on the opposite sidewalk.

"My Uncle Procopio! A new suit, a collar of fresh linen, shining boots, and still more shining is the rejoicing that is being emitted by his eyes, his mouth, and every pore in his body. Something has happened! And I must find out at once."

Archibaldo opened a passage among the ticket speculators, artists, and idlers that daily congregated at the doors of the "Principal" at the hour that rehearsals began.

"Uncle Procopio, good morning."

"Hello, Archibaldo, you around here!"

"My congratulations, Uncle; you have taken at least ten years off your age."

"And to think that you are my redeemer!"

"Don't joke, Uncle!"

"I owe you two debts: the money that soon I shall pay you and the other....that I shall never pay you..."
Procopio, who had stopped at first, caught his arm and they continued walking.

"I have gone to look for you and nobody knew how to direct me to your new residence. Nor have you stopped by the house again."

Archibaldo related the latest events that had occurred to him in his room in the street of Dolores. An accusation that had forced him to quickly escape to Morelos and, at a later date, a happy opportunity that permitted him to receive amnesty and to return with security to Mexico City.

"I have been here only two weeks. But how can you ask me to present myself at your house looking like this?"

"Very soon, perhaps this very week, I can provide you with about one hundred pesos so that you may buy yourself some clothes."

"Uncle Procopio, don't offend me...."

"But, it is your money, it is the money that you have been sending from Cuernavaca during my most difficult times."

"That's why I became a soldier. Tomorrow, I collect my first ten days' pay here."

"Here? You are working, then?"

"I am working at last, Uncle Procopio. Right there in the 'Principal' theater."

"You, an actor? Ha, ha, ha! No, man, that is not good. Wait for me at one o'clock sharp in this same place."
They had just stopped at the doors of "La Gran Ciudad de Hamburgo."

"I can do something for you. And I must leave you because it is time to go to the offices."

"What offices?"

"I am cashier for this firm. So then, at one o'clock harp."

"I will be punctual, Uncle Procopio."

"Bah!" thought Archibaldo, "my uncle is working like my unfortunate employee. And what does this mean? Of course: that the capital of the Vázquez Prados went to the ottom. Caramba! It's as if I had won the lottery! What happiness! I am working as second prompter at the 'Princípal'; I earn three pesos a day and I have a brilliant prospect for tomorrow....or, what is the same, I can now marry one of a family who possesses a capital similar to mine. I can hardly believe such a happy event."

Anxious, he was, therefore, very punctual at the appointment. Procopio took him by the arm and together they walked through Santa María la Redonda.

"Now you will see what happened, Archibaldo. Since that stormy night when you saved my life, I have felt like another person. One of those profound and definite changes whose magnitude can only be appreciated by the very one who has experienced them. Pride, dignity, fear, worry: all
was finished. But you can imagine the tremendous struggles preceding my definite resolution. Confusion of ideas, countless hesitations, unheard-of torments only in thinking of it. How difficult it is to divest oneself of the cursed pride that becomes so deeply rooted in one who has, at some time, had money."

"I have been doing that for so many years," interrupted Archibaldo, as if he were dreaming, "that now I have even forgotten it."

"Perhaps without the very tremendous crisis that I had to pass through, I would never have dared. It was necessary for a blow of such magnitude to awaken me. To see friends and colleagues of former times suddenly converted into harsh chiefs and landlords who hardly condescend to answer with an abrupt word or with an unintelligible murmur. To solicit employment, after confessing the sorrow, the humiliation of a family in misery, in ruin......... After beginning as a teller, clerk, watchman; to ascend slowly and laboriously step by step.... Because, if at the end of two months one happy chance event put me at the head of the cashier's office, the brief days that I discharged the more modest jobs were for me incalculable years. How cruelly the family dignity was punished! But, on the other hand, what an immense satisfaction, that of fighting hand to hand with adverse destiny! To feel hostility in the human swarm
that buzz outside; hostility in the friends that flee from us; hostility in the very beings that we love most and who withdraw their trust from us; hostility in the greatest and most powerful of all our enemies, that 'I,' cunning and cowardly, that resists seizing the fuse, as if the cannon must forcibly explode between its own hands, that rebellious 'I,' from whom it is necessary to tear, without compassion, the sublime and omnipotent word 'wish'--the word always eternally the conqueror...."

"And you resigned yourself to work?"

"Chat! Resigned myself? No, I work and in work I have found happiness, because in work I found myself. Do you understand? Listen to me with attention."

His look animated, his gesture quick, as loquacious as a student, he now got down to intimate confidences. He, who six months before was hoarse because of not speaking, was now overflowing!

"I had lost everything; I had lost myself. I let the best years of my life slide and I scorned my best energies in the unconsciousness of a merely passive labor. In my own house, I only signified a useful resistance, nothing more. Later events made me step down to become a figure in the background, a decorative object; later, neither voice nor vote. Finally, a nobody....."
Archibaldo was listening to him very nervously, but his thoughts were very different. He was lying in wait only for the chance of a pause, in order to talk. But, an extraordinary thing, the opportunity presented itself often and he did not do it, because he felt as though his tongue were cardboard, stuck to the roof of his mouth.

"Because now," continued Procopio, overproud with joy, "I provide the sustenance of my wife and children; because now I speak like the head of the house ought to speak, when I wish and what I wish. Because, now, I am. Money! That cursed scarecrow interposed eternally between my wife and me, always keeping me at a distance, frustrated, belittled, and often annulled. And the sad thing is that I didn't even fully realize my poor role. I learned of the yoke that bent me when I took the pieces of it in my hands. Yes, money was the thief of my happiness."

"What you are telling me," interrupted Archibaldo at last, "fills me with happiness and joy."

"What do you mean?"

"That money has also been for me the dike interposed between....Uncle, for the third time, I ask you for Lulú's hand."

"Archibaldo, don't abuse...."

"I swear to you by the sacred memory of my mother that I have thought and I have calculated a great deal before
resolving to say this to you. If you have lost your fortune, why couldn't I marry Lulú now?"

"Money has not been the obstacle, Archibaldo...You, yourself, have been it."

"I don't understand."

"I love you well, and you know it. But you have never been a serious man."

"Ah! And what is that business of being a serious man, Uncle Procopio? Similar to Pascual, for example?"

"I understand you. Enough! Archibaldo, would you be capable of making the happiness of Lulú, whom I love most in the world?"

"Pst! That question I cannot answer for her; she is the one who must answer."

They were silent. Their outstretched hands joined in a handclasp and there passed through them a strange vibration, a deep and mysterious trembling. Perhaps those twin spirits that believed themselves to be travelling by opposite paths of life, had just understood that they were following parallel lines.

They quietly separated and the same smile and the same sigh died away on their lips and in their hearts.
CHAPTER XVI.

The aromatic atmosphere of Havana tobacco, mahogany, and Russian leather of the elegant private office of the proprietors no longer affected the convalescent emotions of Procopio. He could remain standing, unchangeable, for entire hours waiting for a resolution or a decision, like any errand boy. On their part, the proprietors did not interrupt their conversations in the presence of the cashier, all formality and discretion.

That day, good humor reigned and champagne was being drunk. From the mixture of voices, half German, half Spanish, half English, one might deduce the principal motive of that rejoicing. A customs concession, skillfully acquired from the government, to import articles of silk and linen—a half a million pesos of certain and immediate profits. And all in exchange for a banquet and two thousand dollars for Carranza's new minister.

_Carrancismo_ had been exposed, in that period, in all its immodest abjectness. It was not the great plunder of the entire nation with paper money, nor that of the millions extracted from the banks. No, now it was stealing like thieves do, concessions of railroad cars, for example, at two hundred pesos each. And all those vile tricks were authorized by the autograph of the President of the Republic, the autograph of Carranza, the great man, who in his own
sudden burst of cleverness, had conceded his signature as a precious gift—sublime symbol!—to the soldiers of the revolution, the night of the 25th of December of 1918. The Christmas present to the soldiery.

"The intervention of the consul was very useful," said an enormous redhead who was overflowing his chair.

"Undoubtedly," replied another, "but the Minister decided it all with the concessions that he gave us. He is truly a genteel person; he is well-known in Zacatecan circles. A gentleman in every way."

"It seems, then," said the Spaniard, "that old Carranza has decided in favor of the upper class people at last."

"And that is what the Minister is, without any doubt."

Procopio took the portfolio with the documents that he had been waiting for and went out, followed by his young clerk.

"All that is said of the new Minister is true," commented the employee; "he is very charming. He did not grant me the position that I was asking for, but he received me personally and that is something I never attained from Villa's or Zapata's governors. I am filled with hope, as is natural!"

And the coxcomb, his quince-like face eroded by parasitism, the mark of all his class, was rubbing his hands and jumping about like a circus monkey.
gold in the most stupid of their books, and will erect marble
and bronze statues that will perpetuate the one who knew how
to incarnate its sentiments, its ideas, and its ambitions.
And he will deserve it, at least, for having had the courage
to be conscious of those sentiments, those ideas, and those
ambitions that hypocritical society will not ever dare to
confess, even to itself.

Without asking permission of anyone, he suddenly
closed his office, took his hat, and went to the street.
He yielded to one of those exceptional outbursts of his life,
that was so disconcerting, not only to his household, but to
all the upperclass people, among whom he enjoyed the repu-
tation of being a man of great prudence.

"Through the Paseo de la Reforma."

The Ford stopped ten minutes later before the arrogant
portico of the residence of the Minister.

With a firm step, Procopio ascended the stairway, gave
his name in a vibrant voice, and entered.

"Madam is at church; she always returns before one
o'clock."

"And the master?"

"I think that he prefers to talk only in his offices."

Attentive and ceremonious, however, the servant con-
ducted him to a luxurious small salon where Procopio took a
seat, disposed to wait all day, if necessary. Wait? Wait
for what? For whom? He would have been perplexed if it had occurred to him to formulate those questions. The unknown force that had carried him inexorably there did not interest him. Nor was he even conscious of it.

Although the servant answered all his questions loquaciously, soon he had no need of him. The things around him began to take on life and to speak to him in a more exact and eloquent sense. When the servant retired and the echo of his words, that like arrows had gone to lose themselves in the stucco and pannelling of the sonorous arched roof, faded away; there spoke to him the solemn, magnificent silence of the rugs and tapestries, of the porcelains, of the marble and bronze statues, of all the things that feign life and truth. And there spoke to him the cold that seemed crystallized in the sumptuous Venetian mirrors asleep in their hopeless idleness. It was a cold more cold that that of the tombs, because upon the sepulchres themselves grain grows, buds burst forth, and grass takes root. Another more intense, the cold of a dead soul. The consummated suicide of the ambitious and selfish spirit at the precise moment of the realization of its only ideal. The cursed soul of one who, when he reaches the peak of his ambitions, topples over into the void of satiety and his hypertrophic and solitary "I."

And a sorrowful shadow behind him: the abandoned
companion, innocent martyr that will follow him without rest and without another destiny than that of a drop of bitterness in the glass overflowing with her mortal weariness.

And, as Procopio now understood everything, the same fit of mental derangement that caused him to leave the desk of his office, now flung him from Pascual's house like a deluded person.

Two sentiments clashed in his mind: the submission to the mystery of justice, the always mocked and indefectible conqueror; and the cruel pain in his paternal breast from the wound in his heart.
CHAPTER XVII.

"You ought to follow him. I will be uneasy, not knowing for certain where he goes every day."

"It is enough that he does it, so that it is well done," answered Lulú without raising her eyes from her work.

"If you were a good daughter, as you boast, you would obey me."

Tired of Agustinita's persistence, she got up abruptly, took her hat and went out:

"I'll go, then, to follow him."

Procopio had left for work moments before. In those little-travelled streets, it was necessary for Lulú to guard herself from being discovered by taking refuge in groups of people or behind lampposts. But now downtown, she could walk a short distance from him, losing herself easily among the numerous slender and smartly dressed working girls that were assembling from all Mexico City, going towards offices, bureaus, and shops. She was within arm's length of him when a voice made her swerve:

"Lulú!"

"Archibaldo! You here? I am very angry!"

"It is not my fault. Wait, so I can explain to you. You will see...."

"You are lying as always. Why didn't you ever write me? Heavens, you have distracted me and now I've lost sight
of him! A half-hour of coming along here at a heart-breaking pace!"

"Who are you looking for?"

"Who else could it be, man? Papa."

"Ah, then, don't worry. I will tell where you can find him! Is it urgent?"

"It is urgent that he doesn't see me. I only need to know where he goes."

"It is eight o'clock. He can't be anywhere but in his office."

"In what office? You know, then?"

"Exactly three days ago we met in this same street and we talked formally of something that concerns you and me very directly. Hasn't he told you?"

"Absolutely nothing. Ah, listen, now I remember something. Yes, he seemed to me to be uneasy. As if he wished to talk to me and was hesitating. I wanted to ask him; but I fear my own indiscretions."

"Worthy daughter of his, as he is a worthy father of yours."

"Leave off the praises and tell me what you talked about."

"Just anything! I asked him once more for your hand."

"And he?"

"Since the money has disappeared, that was what used
to bother us . . . ."

"You know that also."

"He told me."

"Well, and how did he answer you?"

"'Archibaldo, you know that I love you well: would you be capable of making the happiness of Lulú, whom I love most in the world?'"

Lulú's eyes filled with tears; her hand squeezed Archibaldo's.

"I told him: 'Uncle Procopio, that question she alone can answer.'"

They were pretending to look at the wax figures in the show windows of "La Palestina" and they were holding hands, tightly.

Lulú, abstracted some moments, disengaged herself from him soon and asked him gravely:

"Tell me, Archibaldo, are you working?"

Archibaldo hesitated an instant; then answered decisively:

"I am a prompter at the 'Principal.'"

"Horrors! Then you surely see the legs of all those . . . . bad women?"

"The same that you and I are seeing right now passing by, both good and bad."

"Be quiet. Your jokes aren't funny. Resign at once
from that occupation; better said, don't set foot again in any theater."

"You prefer then that I be a soldier."

"Neither. Listen, why is Papa so long in these offices?"

"He will not leave until all the employees leave."

"Why, he isn't an employee."

"He is merely the cashier of the firm."

"What are you saying? Papa the cashier of this business house?"

"Of the Gran Ciudad de Hamburgo... Caramba! Why I've probably done a stupid thing! You didn't know anything about this and, if he had kept it a secret, it must be for some reason."

"So he is the cashier of the Gran Ciudad de Hamburgo?"

"Caramba! What a blunder I've made! Listen, at least, don't let him know that I told you."

"Don't worry, you have done very well."

Then, thoughtfully, but changing the conversation abruptly, she made Archibaldo tell her about his latest adventures. Archibaldo observed that Lulú was listening to him, her eyes very attentive but looking off in space, absolutely unaware of what he was telling her.

"Lulú!"

"Go on, go on... that is very interesting."
"But you are not listening to me."

"Forgive me, it is true. Listen, now it is urgent for me to speak with Papa immediately. Leave me."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. But I think that until I have obtained a good job for you...."

"Lulú!"

"Don't detain me, man; I have a great idea. Look for me tomorrow evening at eight o'clock. Through the window at the side, you understand? Goodbye."

Ecstatic, Archibaldo's eyes followed the small and graceful silhouette of his sweetheart that disappeared through the great door of the warehouse of the "Gran Ciudad de Hamburgo."
CHAPTER XVIII.

Ideas were flitting like butterflies in Lulú's mind without any stability as yet.

She entered by chance and asked the janitor:

"Whom does one see about employment?"

"You can go up right now to the manager. Second floor, a hall, and to the right."

After she left the elevator, Lulú went up to him:

"Sir, I need a job for myself."

Surprised, the high chief turned his head. Such a singular procedure was not the best recommendation; nevertheless, the grace and the ingenuity of Lulú almost disarmed him. But for a moment only. He who, from sweeping offices, has climbed step by step to the managership of a great mercantile house has learned how to acquire more science than a whole library. Having taken possession, then, of the importance of his position, he answered rudely:

"Haven't you read those signs?"

"Yes, they shout that there are no vacancies, but the fact is, it is urgent that I get work."

A slight smile was stirring behind the rough, gray moustache. His small, penetrating eyes fixed themselves on the girl.

"Give me your name, Miss, I will bear it in mind for the first opportunity."
"But, do you think that Mamma is going to permit me to come every day to find out?"

"Then?"

"Why, that's clear! First, the job with you and, afterwards, whether she approves or not, there's nothing she can do."

The manager was intrigued:

"Well, what do you know? In what business houses have you served? What recommendation do you bring or, at least, what references can you show me?"

"Heavens, sir! What recommendations do you want me to give you except that because of the revolution we lost all our money and now, just to barely support the family, my father works like a negro?"

The manager had noticed in certain gestures and in the timbre of Lulú's voice something that reminded him of one of his employees, without being able to make sure exactly who. He remembered and suddenly he understood everything.

"The natural thing would be, miss, for your Papa himself to come to ask for the job."

"You don't know Papa. If I do not take it by storm and commit myself to everyone, it's certain that they would never permit me to, at home. But, doesn't it seem to you that in the home of a poor man, he who does not work is a thief from his own family?"
"Do you know shorthand?"

"No, sir, but I will learn it."

"Can you type?"

"Four years ago I used to help Papa with his correspondence."

The manager scratched his ear, smiled shrewdly, then, taking the telephone receiver, he spoke with the cashier's department.

"Go up to the third floor."

Crazy with joy, Lulu pressed between her hands the vigorous ones of the manager. She went out and, in three jumps, was before the iron grating of the office.

"What did you want, miss?"

"The manager sent me."

"Ah, yes! Come in and please wait."

Standing for an interminable half hour, Lulu waited for the head cashier to look up from the papers on his desk.

"What, Lulu! You here? What does this mean?"

"I am your stenographer, Papa dear."

"But...."

Lulu drew near to give him an explanation in a low voice while, slyly, the personnel of the department remained in expectation.

"Mamma sent me to spy on you and to learn where you go. When I was here the idea occurred to me of...And now
CHAPTER XIX.

The unvarnished truth and in the full light of day is neither the truth nor anything else for the mentally blind. Therefore, Agustina and Francisco José, far from feeling their hopes and illusions shattered when Procopio's mystery so brutally was revealed, were inspired by new enterprises, a growing vigor that soon would turn into prime actions. Things would have taken their obliged and definite courses if the events that occurred on the following day had not given them a turn as violent as it was unexpected. That morning the messenger boy of the Gran Ciudad de Hamburgo went up quickly to the cashier's office and, incoherent and pale, he said that the cashier was lying on the second floor in a pool of blood.

"Papa? Is he hurt?"

"I think he's dead."

Lulú fainted. A doctor came, the police were notified, and while some raised the body of Procopio, others devoted their attention to Lulú.

When, after emitting a few weak sobs she came to, she found herself on a divan attended personally by the manager of the firm.

"Are you all right now? Just be calm! That brute of a Zacarias! I have kicked him out into the street...."

"My Papa, where is he?"
"It was only a slight wound."

"I want to see him."

It was useless to try to restrain her. She got up and didn't stop until she found Procopio whom the doctor had just bandaged. It was something insignificant, that in less than two weeks would be healed.

Although Procopio was very pale and a shadow made his dark eyes look hollow, his smile immediately gave back his habitual expression to his face.

"I am perfectly all right," he said in a weak voice; "I shall go up to the office at once. Wait for me there calmly, Lulú."

But she refused to leave him alone even for an instant. Together they went up, and once installed in their places, ready to begin their ordinary tasks, Lulú asked him how the fall had occurred. He could not explain it, because he was ignorant as to whether he had actually stumbled or not.

Lulú, who remained uneasy and preoccupied, told him when they were leaving:

"Let us go and have a doctor examine you."

"For what purpose? Didn't the one who came say that this is of no importance?"

"He didn't even examine you."

"And what do you want me to say if I don't feel
"What childish frivolity! What did you do?"

"Very simple. I spoke to the manager and obtained the job the same as you did, who knows when."

When Lulú returned home at midday, she entered crying out with joy:

"Good news! We have positions in the Gran Ciudad de Hamburg! Papa is the cashier and I am his stenographer."

"What do you mean?"

Agustinita and Francisco José looked at each other, stupefied.

"I mean," answered Lulú, taking off her hat and arranging her hair before a small hand mirror, "that he who does not work in the house of a poor man is a thief from his own family."

"You are lying!" exclaimed Francisco José, livid.

"Francisco José is writing a book," replied Agustina with the aspect of the Furies.

"Why, I didn't want to hurt anyone."

There wasn't time to prolong the dispute, because Procopio, who had stopped at the corner grocery store to buy ham, eggs, cheese, and beer, appeared in the vestibule.
anything, if I am as well and as healthy as you?"

"You should say exactly the contrary: that you are ill, although you don't feel anything or know what's wrong."

Procopio began to laugh; but Lulú persisted to such an extent that she made him follow her to one of the most famous doctor's offices.

"He is a good doctor, one of the best in Mexico City, according to what I have heard," murmured Lulú when they were ascending the stairs.

"Then, if he is a famous doctor, he will pay less attention to me as soon as he diagnoses that my poor monthly salary, under no pretext, will pass completely from my pockets to his."

Procopio's festive tone did not succeed in smoothing Lulú's forehead nor in making her yield in her intentions. She stayed at his side until she saw him disappear, when his turn came, into the consulting office.

The examination was of an irritating minuteness. Like all persons who have been healthy, Procopio professed a profound disdain for doctors and their medicines. He found superfluous, stupid, and ridiculous, all the practices of the diagnosis. But the habit of civility made him submit to all of them, without protest. And when he now believed himself free of the intruder who, with so much effrontery, inquired about his most intimate customs, as
well as the most insignificant trifles of his organic life, he was made to enter the room of X-rays and laboratory analyses. His head was whirling; he felt a profound emptiness in his stomach. Still, he was made to pass to another room. He diverted his bad humor by reading the inscriptions at the bottom of large pictures of anatomy, which were hanging on the walls; but those big livid blotches, those skeins of threads, white and inextricable, those bones that were smiling at him hideously, finished by tiring him also. He looked toward the other side and there he came across great, narrow-mouthed bottles containing human viscera, blackish and seared, floating in an acid liquid. "These pieces of human anatomy," he thought, "at least take away my appetite."

At last, he was obliged to again enter the office of the eminent man. The latter handed him a paper and said to him disagreeably:

"Absolute rest. Water alone for twenty-four hours; water and milk for the next twenty-four; then you will have me call at your house. This medicine, take one spoonful every four hours."

Procopio took the prescription with ostensible coolness.

"Is it, then, something serious?"

"It will be if you don't take care of yourself."

At the doors of the offices, Procopio stopped
thoughtfully. In his right hand the prescription was being folded; it was twisted, the roll was converted into a small ball, it was pressed between his fingers until it almost disappeared. Suddenly he shrugged his shoulders and the smile appeared on his lips; he continued walking forward and the little ball of paper shot into the middle of the street, without haste, without nervousness, by the mere automatic contraction of his hands.

As if he had awakened from a dream, he quickly took out his watch and, when he realized how late it was, he went back and entered the first restaurant that he encountered. "Oyster soup is quite nutritious, the mutton stew is my favorite dish, a filet of red snapper and a measure of Chambertin," he thought, looking over the menu. "For a weak man and one who has been bled besides, surely this is preferable to taking water, bed, and the doctor."

And smiling with his best humor, he indicated to the waiter the items chosen on the menu.

From the restaurant, he was carried to a taxicab.

He arrived home, gray-faced and scarcely breathing.
CHAPTER XX.

Francisco José was a serious poet; consequently, the parasitic spirit had nestled in his brain. When Lulú pronounced the fatal words: "Papa and I are working," he was crushed. When he discovered that all the charm of his present well-being was enclosed in one word, "work," he was filled with anger and indignation, the same as Agustinita. A spiritual tempest that threw him from his ivory tower through the windows of life. A beneficial interior shock, because life, seen face to face, revealed to him what had never appeared before—their great practical talent.

"Mamma," he cried after long hours of concentration, "I have solved our problem. They have found their redeeming word, 'work'; I have now found ours, 'Pascual.' Let us go at once to look for Pascual."

"Swear to me that we shall never more set foot in your father's house," exclaimed Agustinita, solemn and hoarse. "Your complaints are just and your indignation sacred, Mother!"

"Who can now doubt that Procopio has proposed to be the dishonor of our ancestors? He is dragging the pure name of the family through the mud!"

"He has descended to the position of a common laborer!"

"And he obliges his family to follow him in such an ignominious descent. I cannot, I cannot; I'll die first!"
I hear the voices of the Prado generals, protesting from their cold tombs."

Sobs shook the robust breast of Agustinita and tears oozed forth like the oil on the skin of a bitter orange.

"Hurry, Francisco José, let us go. Your advice is wise and good. Let Pascual know who is the real and only guilty one and that we, martyrs, self-sacrificing from obligation, have only retreated before ignominy....before the impossible!"

"And although Pascual was born in humble circumstances, his heart is noble and he will know how to understand us."

"He will open his loving arms in filial affection, Mother."

"And he will listen to our requests."

"Not so much as requests. We shall ask only for an act of strict justice."

"Proper shelter in his house, that is all."

"The shelter that all decent families have a right to."

Francisco José went in to change his suit and was absorbed in deep thought. Without serious offense to the fine style or to the esthetic, he could very well ask himself, now that he had come out of his ivory tower: "Why, Our Father, You, Who never forsakes the lowest worm, Who
always has an abundant head of hair for the abject louse; long, plaited skirts for the uneasy flea; a warm mattress for the apoplectic bedbug; and even a plump ear apiece for each tick; would You not have a decent and decorous shelter for the Vázquez Prados of Zacatecas?"

Prey to the cruel remorse of not having before put his beautiful, practical talent in service to the family, he surrendered his arm to Mamma and, silent, they took the road to Chapultepec.

Two hours of anxious and tiring walking. Exhausted, they stopped to breathe the pure air at the foot of the statue of Cuauhtemoc. The afternoon was cloudy; rain threatened; the warm and balmy air of the groves of trees was passing in great puffs. With the circulation of gold and silver, Mexico City had been galvanized. No longer were the eternal fools with the frightful faces and corpulence of bandits on the crossroads the only ones that occupied the automobiles. Sirens sounded in all directions; the rapid and silent autos glittered with dark reflections. Sensuous and elegant women, lazily reclining, were exhibiting fabrics and patterns of the latest fashion (high American shoes and long silk stockings, more transparent than a spider web).

"It is beginning to rain, Mother."

Francisco José pointed to a black thunder-cloud
arising like foam over the grove.

"Yes, let us go, I have rested enough now."

Step by step they continued their way along the Paseo de la Reforma. The cloud spent itself and the resplendent sun bathed the trees again and accented the outlines of the elegant residences. When, among the verdure of the clusters of trees and in the midst of the most elegant chalets, the roof of the haughty mansion of Pascual peeped out like the silvered and scaly belly of an enormous fish, Agustinita and Francisco José felt in their hearts, withered and embittered by so many days of frustrated illusions and disenchantments, the fluttering of a new hope. With profound rejoicing, they approached the white facade; their eyes delighted in the marble of the stairway, of the columns and balustrades, in the dull color of the soldered iron grating and in the bright flashes of the sun that ignited the lead roofs. Silent again, beside themselves, they advanced, almost without breathing. When Agustinita pressed the doorbell with her feverish hand, she felt her heart in her throat.

A servant, wearing a neat, black suit and a snowy, white shirt front, enquired with a supercilious gesture what they wanted.

"We are looking for the mistress," responded Agustinita with a trembling and hushed voice.

The lackey insolently examined them from head to foot
and asked whom he was to announce.

"Berta's mother and brother," answered the Olympic Francisco José.

The servant then bowed his head with humility and condescended to come down and draw the bolt. He bowed low and gave them entrance:

"Please wait here a moment. I go to advise the mistress."

Such a change of attitude caused Agustinita and Francisco José to endure formalities which should not have been used with them.

They were occupying a seat in the long, silent, and semi-dark corridor. Their glances roved over the molding and low reliefs, over the ornaments that decorated the walls and arches of the door frames. At the back, upon one side of the hall, were scattered some exotic plants, supported in urns of baked pottery, that brought with a sigh to the memory of Agustinita, her house in Zacatecas.

"By an act of fortune we are going to leave this horrid nightmare once and for all."

"From this nightmare that did not seem ever to end."

"Free at last."

Francisco José stood up and nervously looked around the living room.

"Berta has been careless, Mother; see how this
porcelain has pushed a magnificent Rembrandt from the side of the wall. It's hardly conceivable."

Agustinita got up, placed the piece in the correct position, and observed:

"It is never swept in here. Heavens! I find cobwebs everywhere."

"Berta's servants deceive her."

Then she made a minute examination:

"There is no room for doubt; here, the servants do as they please. But I will know how to put them in their places."

"May I permit myself to recommend to you a certain insolent young man who doesn't know how to show proper respect for people?"

"Don't worry: he will be the first to go to learn his trade in the street."

Agustinita returned to her chair. She was uneasy. She did not know what to think of Berta's conduct. It was a serious lack of education to make her own mother wait for her. For Agustinita was in her own house, since she was in her daughter's house.

But, as in spite of such sensible reflections Berta did not appear, to encourage the illusion that, in fact, she was in her house, she spoke aloud:

"My goodness, this beautiful palace sunk in so much
sollitude and silence! Even the noises of the street are
deadened here. This is very sad. Berta has no children,
who are the joy of a house, but she ought to have many birds.
I shall have them send us some mocking birds from Zacatecas,
that I know how to train very well. I shall fill this house
with canaries, thrushes, and larks....with noise and happi-
ness."

"I will advise Pascual to get an Angora cat and a fox-
terrier. That is very chic. It gives character."

Suddenly, in the glass partition in the back, across
the dull crystals in the fine arabesques and the capricious
etchings in dead white, a silhouette disappeared and a shad­
ow passed.

"Did I see or did I imagine? What has happened?
Francisco, cold air is blowing on my back. A chill has come
over me!"

The doors half opened and Berta appeared, pallid,
emaciated, and with an air of bewilderment.

"Berta!"

They rushed to each other's arms and embraced effusive-
ly.

"Good Heavens, you are only a shadow of what you were,
my darling daughter!"

The full, floating dressing gown of green silk with
golden flowers put funereal tints on the quince-like face of
Berta. Her lean flesh looked like the miserable body of a butterfly with splendid wings of iridescent gold. In her voice, half-smothered by weeping and moans, could scarcely be divined these words:

"I am very wretched!"

Francisco José contracted his brow. Could Berta have lost her mind? How could she call herself wretched, the young wife that trod thick carpets, felt the sacred breath of masters of ancient and modern art, breathed exquisite perfumes, and was illuminated by luminous clusters of light?

"My daughter, tell me all; here I am to defend you from anyone who tries to harm you! Who has done this to you?"

Berta checked her sorrow to say:

"When we lived in Zacatecas modestly, with only the monthly allowance from Papa, I was happy, immensely happy. I had everything....I had him. Today we are millionaires and today I am nothing, I am nobody. He doesn't belong to me."

She continued speaking and, however much her words repeated themselves or changed, they were the same ballad, the same rhythm, the same elegy. An elegy that charmed, seduced, disturbed, and snatched away.

Francisco José, moved to tears, asked:

"Isn't it enough, sister of mine, that he has surrounded you with so many comforts and so many luxuries?"
"What a mistake! Comforts! Luxury! If I were even poor. Work would be my consolation, in work I would find relief from my pain, work would exhaust my poor strength and, weary, I would be able to sleep long hours, interminable hours. What happiness! In work I would surely find the resignation that today nobody, nobody can give me."
CHAPTER XXI.

Work! Work! Work!

The word sounded like the strokes of a hammer. It was the lash of a whip striking across the face.

Some deep thinking was being initiated in Agustinita's mind. Berta did not know how to speak of more than her inconsolable sorrow. And as if she had made a great discovery, how she wished to delude herself with the idea of work. Because in work she saw something that could fill, in part at least, the emptiness of her life. Work would be her faithful companion, capable, perhaps of making her forget for moments, at least, the uselessness and absurdity of her life. If in her hellish idleness, the hours passed like centuries, working would make them seem like seconds. And what happiness to see time rushing by at a dizzy speed for one who had no other destiny in life than to take her own corpse for a walk within the cold walls of a premature tomb!

"If I didn't believe in God, I would leave Pascual, and in work I would surely find my salvation. Happy are those who have work to make them forget the pain of living!"

And hearing that sustained and interminable lament, Agustinita saw clearly that she, who came in pursuit of consolation and peace, was now the one who had to administer them.

Berta did not cease speaking until her false strength
exhausted the remains of her energy, as occurs with slightly feverish persons when the fever stops providing warmth and stimulation to the nerves. Her face took the color of a wax candle, her legs became weak and, splendidly enveloped in her rich dressing gown of green and gold silk, she fell senseless to the carpet, convulsed as a little bird, mortally wounded.

Agustina went to her assistance; she fell on her knees on the rug, raised the head that rolled inertly upon one of her smooth, muscular arms.

"Berta!"

A torrent of kisses and tears overflowed upon the thin, translucent face.

Francisco José shrieked, imploring help.

Great agitation. Bells rang, hinges creaked, doors were opened with a crashing noise, and the servants came in. Even the cook's knife was flashing, polishing its two faces on the white apron.

"Cologne water for my daughter!"

Then they understood. Berta's personal maid came at once with a vial. Their glances softened and the servants approached silently and formed a circle.

Agustinita was rubbing the limp limbs and, in a voice that was a lament, exclaimed:

"Why, she is a skeleton!"
Suddenly, as if a hidden spring had moved all the mannequins, the servants placed themselves in a rigorous line and maintained respectful composure. Through a small, half-closed door, Pascual appeared, wrapped in a thick bathrobe, his head bare and still dripping water. His fat hands were swinging the cords from which hung two tassels like balls of gold.

Forgetful of his mother and sister, Francisco José leaped over them and ran towards Pascual with his arms open: "Brother!"

But Pascual, fastening his hawk-like eyes on the group that was struggling on the rug, pronounced with clear and serene intonation:

"She is a neurasthenic. The doctor wants these scenes to be avoided. It would be preferable, then for us to continue as before....consequently, no visits....."

Agustinita raised her narrow face, her eyes dilated, the veins on her temples throbbed, and her gray hair bristled. "Brother!" implored Francisco José, innocently, and advanced to embrace him.

But Pascual turned on his heel and at his back the small door slammed.

Francisco José lowered his head, knit his brows, and concentrated. Soon his forehead raised, high and smooth, and he pronounced gravely and in a low voice:
"It's all right, because I have been hurried and incorrect."

Overwhelmed by the cataclysm, Agustinita, in whose mind a sudden change had taken place, seemed turned to an idiot and remained with Berta in her arms and her eyes staring into space.

Berta mumbled unintelligible sounds, inarticulate words, let a sigh escape, and half opened her eyes.

"Ah, my mother! My brother also! Where am I?"

"Do you feel better, my child?"

When Berta had recovered her senses, Agustinita said to her:

"When you want to see us, you know where your house is. A modest house, a house of poor people, a house of people who earn their living with their own hands; but the house of your father, your mother, your brother and sister... your true home! There you will find the warmth of the home."

"The warmth of the home!" answered Berta like a faraway echo, choked again by her weeping.

"Francisco José, let us go."

"Go? Why, we are still lacking the principal thing, mother. Don't be upset."

"Here is your hat."

"But, Mother!"
"Yes, Francisco José, it is better for us to go. Pascual might come and... it is better for him not to find us here. Our Lord gave me this cross, but it is my cross alone! I must fulfill my duty..."

The wind was blowing, the sky was bellowing.

"I don't understand you, Mamma dear. This is absurd!"

"Isn't it true that you haven't understood anything, Francisco José?"

"Unquestionably, I have been incorrect. It was not the opportune moment to embrace him. He has made use of a legitimate right. An explanation of mine might have arranged it all. There is still time, Mother. I tell you that we must return. Besides, look how it is beginning to rain now."

For the first time, Agustinita had her doubts about the high intellectual and moral gifts of the poet of the family.

"For goodness sake, Mamma, this rain is torrential! See how dark it is getting, you can't see anything now at a distance. Besides, my legs feel like they were broken."

"My heart feels broken forever... What an injustice!"

"You are talking nonsense, Mamma dear. What is the matter? Tell me, does your head ache? Come, follow me, let us take refuge near the walls of that house. The water is leaking through my hat, now."
"Is it possible, Francisco José, that you can't see anything of this horrible truth?"

"The only thing that I know, now, is that I am sopping wet."

"What horrible injustice! Punished by God for our sins!"

Struggling with her inner storm, Agustinita scarcely realized the other. Francisco José pulled her along and, panting, they stood against the walls of a luxurious residence.

The diffused masses of the trees had melted into only one and the great sheet of the straight avenue stretched out like a silver snake. In the distance the column of Peace raised up, massive and heavy; the golden Lucifer seemed to leap into the abyss of shifting clouds that descended to the treetops.

A half-hour passed and the rain began to stop. In anguished silence, huddled together, protected by a honeysuckle that now was raining mud, dry leaves, and small blossoms, rigid with the cold, they saw that night was falling. Vehicles were roaming around like will-o'-the-wisps; the electric trains were making an intermittent thread of red light.

"Let us go," pronounced Agustinita, suddenly, as if she were emerging from a dream.
Francisco José, stupefied was looking at a house with silvered eaves that was emitting cascades of light through its narrow gothic windows and its great central door with glass panes, colored like a bouquet of flowers; the polished staircase of jade, the silvered grillwork, and the flowering garden with honeysuckles that climbed to the bay window, silent and peaceful.

"Let us go now," repeated Agustinita, and shook him by the shoulders.

When they arrived at the garden of Los Angeles, the bugles from the barracks close to Santiago Tlaltelolco were sounding. Grooves of light that were sliding at intervals over the bituminous stone pavement, guided them in the sullen darkness.

A sigh as infinite as the night.

Before passing through the small door of the house, Agustinita took her son's arm and stopped him:

"We must throw ourselves at his feet and ask him for forgiveness."

"Who, Mother? You are still delirious!"

"Lulú is the only one that has known how to understand him."

"I don't understand anyone... and now, not even you..."

Transformed, Agustinita straightened up, caught him by the wrist and her clenched hand dug her nails into his
flesh until he cried out in pain. Then, in a voice as sharp and penetrating as a fine steel blade, she stunned him by saying in his ear:

"Imbecile! Pascual has robbed us!"
CHAPTER XXII.

They had hardly entered Procopio's room, when, terrified, they cried out.

"Frightful!" explained Lulú, coming out to meet them. "An attack; he arrived in a taxi, almost not breathing; I ran for a doctor......" 

"And?"

"I don't know. His heart....his kidneys...."

The voices were hushed. Procopio did not awaken. His face was lost in the whiteness of the pillows and the sheets.

Two days of mortal anguish elapsed; on the third began improvement. But the doctor cast a shadow of sadness on the general rejoicing: "It is not necessary for the attack to be repeated to have a regrettable conclusion."

When Agustinita came with the first food of the morning, Procopio smiled like a small boy anxious for some delicacy, caught the cup of milk between his hands and could not restrain a smile of satisfaction. He felt the gaiety of a convalescent, the napkin spread out on his knees, the fringe of the sunlight that entered through the door, the fragment of sky that peeped in his window, the warbling of the birds in the garden; all that in daily life pass unnoticed because of being trivial, was for him the object of lively joy.

As soon as he had finished breakfast, he took one of Agustinita's hands:
"I am glad that at last you have opened your eyes. Look, true happiness is this, that of the small daily joys, because the other, the Happiness that is written with a capital letter, does not exist. It is a mirage, a dismal falsehood. The elements of happiness we carry within, with absolute equity. All depends upon putting our inner world in harmony with the one outside."

He became eloquent, his eyes were shining, his cheeks were becoming flushed.

"Don't talk, you are tiring yourself," observed Agustinita.

A cold sweat dampened Procopio’s forehead.

Surprised, himself, at the limpid clearness with which he now perceived ideas that formerly were confused or subconscious, prey to a strange fire, he continued:

"He who has caught the meaning of life can understand me. You, Luli, you can. I know it, too. Those who look for happiness outside of themselves are going to an indestructible defeat. But, in order to achieve the meaning of life, there is only one road, that of sorrow. Through sorrow is revealed to us in all its truth our intimate personality, and with that revelation comes the supreme revelation: the meaning of life. The higher we have ascended on the ladder of sorrow, the more vast will be the field of our small joys."
"You are tiring yourself, Procopio," insisted Agustinita, almost imploring.

All saw something strange in him and were listening to him, deeply concerned. His voice was vehement and his cheeks were luminous like the brilliancy of dawn.

But something also very solemn must have been passing through his spirit so that he did not realize his physical state.

Francisco José entered to say that Archibaldo wished to greet him.

"Yes, let him enter; I wish to see all of my favorite people now."

A handclasp and a cordial smile. The same as always.

"To the periodical remittances that Archibaldo made to us during the time that he was with the zapatistas, we owe the fact that we did not lack money for more than a year."

Admiring eyes fastened on Archibaldo who, ordinarily such a chatterer, now stood there without opening his lips and looking disturbed. Who knows what he had on his mind or what he had seen that made him restrain himself?

"Lulú, Archibaldo says that you and I are as alike as two drops of water. And it is true, because you have always understood me. But only you...."

A gentle smile curved his lips, although his words
implied a reproach.

"I, senile, helpless, overwhelmed by this sudden illness that is wearing me, I am, with everything, happier than you. I feel joy even for the whiteness of my sheets, for the smoothness of my bed, the softness of the pillows that support me, and even for these unglazed windows that soften the light of the sun."

He made a brief pause to repress a gesture of pain; then, he said:

"I can scarcely believe that this illness has made me this way. It seems as though I have run many leagues without taking food. Lulú, I should like to go to sleep. Throw something over my feet. I almost can't feel them. Now, go out and let me rest awhile."

They all obeyed.

"Shouldn't we call a priest?" asked Agustinita, frightened.

No one dared to answer her.

Lulú, who couldn't be quiet an instant, returned to the bedroom.

"Do you know what happened last night in the Chapultepec restaurant?" pronounced Archibaldo, with manifest embarrassment.

"Who is going to bother himself about those things now, for Heaven's sake?" protested Agustinita.
"The fact is, it is something very serious and directly concerns the family."

"Us?"

"In a quarrel of drunken carrancistas, Pascual was gravely wounded."

"Pascual?"

"Mortally wounded! Mamma!"

"Archibaldo, tell us all the truth. Pascual is dead?"

"Yes," responded Archibaldo abruptly to the contradictory exclamations of Agustinita and Francisco José.

"He is dead, Mother!"

"He is dead, Francisco José!"

They exchanged a burning glance.

"Let us go at once, Mother."

A rending cry made them rush to the alcove.

That face of an ascetic, thin and yellow, those dark eyes where an intense spiritual flame had just burned, that head with its halo of white hair, was resting gently on the soft, white pillows.

Archibaldo approached, piously kissed him on the forehead, then raised the fallen jaw and fixed it in place by means of a handkerchief.

Then, there was traced on the lips of the deceased that curved line that was habitual and there shone for one more instant his smile of kindness and gentle irony.
When Archibaldo looked around, only Lulú was with him. Kneeling at the foot of the bed, she was raising her head, her eyes looking towards the sky: large eyes, infinite, like the universe.
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DICTIONARIES


**MANUSCRIPTS**