

The Heart's Secret

Maturin Murray

Table of Contents

<u>The Heart's Secret</u>	1
<u>Maturin Murray</u>	2
<u>PREFACE</u>	3
<u>CHAPTER I. THE ACCIDENT</u>	4
<u>CHAPTER II. THE BELLE AND THE SOLDIER</u>	8
<u>CHAPTER III. A SUDDEN INTRODUCTION</u>	13
<u>CHAPTER IV. CUBAN BANDITTL</u>	18
<u>CHAPTER V. THE WOUNDED SOLDIER</u>	22
<u>CHAPTER VI. THE CHALLENGE</u>	27
<u>CHAPTER VII. THE PRISONER</u>	32
<u>CHAPTER VIII. THE FAREWELL</u>	37
<u>CHAPTER IX. THE EXECUTION SCENE</u>	42
<u>CHAPTER X. THE BANISHMENT</u>	47
<u>CHAPTER XI. THE PROMOTION</u>	50
<u>CHAPTER XII. THE QUEEN AND THE SOLDIER</u>	54
<u>CHAPTER XIII. UNREQUITED LOVE</u>	57
<u>CHAPTER XIV. THE SURPRISE</u>	61
<u>CHAPTER XV. THE SERENAPE</u>	64
<u>CHAPTER XVI. A DISCOVERY</u>	67
<u>CHAPTER XVII. THE ASSASSIN</u>	71
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. THE DISGUISE</u>	75
<u>CHAPTER XIX. THE AVOWAL</u>	79
<u>CHAPTER XX. HAPPY FINALE</u>	83

The Heart's Secret

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

- PREFACE.
- CHAPTER I. THE ACCIDENT.
- CHAPTER II. THE BELLE AND THE SOLDIER.
- CHAPTER III. A SUDDEN INTRODUCTION.
- CHAPTER IV. CUBAN BANDITTI.
- CHAPTER V. THE WOUNDED SOLDIER.
- CHAPTER VI. THE CHALLENGE.
- CHAPTER VII. THE PRISONER.
- CHAPTER VIII. THE FAREWELL.
- CHAPTER IX. THE EXECUTION SCENE.
- CHAPTER X. THE BANISHMENT.
- CHAPTER XI. THE PROMOTION.
- CHAPTER XII. THE QUEEN AND THE SOLDIER.
- CHAPTER XIII. UNREQUITED LOVE.
- CHAPTER XIV. THE SURPRISE.
- CHAPTER XV. THE SERENAPE.
- CHAPTER XVI. A DISCOVERY.
- CHAPTER XVII. THE ASSASSIN.
- CHAPTER XVIII. THE DISGUISE.
- CHAPTER XIX. THE AVOWAL.
- CHAPTER XX. HAPPY FINALE.

This eBook was edited by Charles Aldarondo (www.aldarondo.net).

THE HEART'S SECRET:
OR, THE FORTUNES OF A SOLDIER.
BY LIEUTENANT MURRAY.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.—The following Novellette was originally published in the PICTORIAL DRAWING–ROOM COMPANION, and is but a specimen of the many deeply entertaining Tales, and gems of literary merit, which grace the columns of that elegant and highly popular journal. The COMPANION embodies a corps of contributors of rare literary excellence, and is regarded as the ne plus ultra, by its scores of thousands of readers.

PREFACE.

THE locale of the following story is that gem of the American Archipelago; the Island of Cuba, whose lone star, now merged in the sea, is destined yet to sparkle in liberty's hemisphere, and radiate the light of republicanism. Poetry cannot outdo the fairy-like loveliness of this tropical clime, and only those who have partaken of the aromatic sweetness of its fields and shores can fully realize the delight that may be shared in these low latitudes. A brief residence upon the island afforded the author the subject-matter for the following pages, and he has been assiduous in his efforts to adhere strictly to geographical facts and the truthful belongings of the island. Trusting that this may prove equally popular with the author's other numerous tales and novelettes, he has the pleasure of signing himself, Very cordially,

THE PUBLIC'S HUMBLE SERVANT.

DEDICATED
TO THE READERS OF
GLEASON'S PICTORIAL DRAWING-ROOM COMPANION,
FOR WHICH JOURNAL THESE PAGES WERE ORIGINALLY WRITTEN,
BY THEIR VERY HUMBLE SERVANT,
LIEUTENANT MURRAY.

CHAPTER I. THE ACCIDENT.

THE soft twilight of the tropics, that loves to linger over the low latitudes, after the departure of the long summer's day, was breathing in zephyrs of aromatic sweetness over the shores and plains of the beautiful Queen of the Antilles. The noise and bustle of the day had given place to the quiet and gentle influences of the hour; the slave had laid by his implements of labor, and now stood at ease, while the sunburnt overseers had put off the air of vigilance that they had worn all day, and sat or lounged lazily with their cigars.

Here and there strolled a Montaro from the country, who, having disposed of his load of fruit, of produce and fowls, was now preparing to return once more inland, looking, with his long Toledo blade and heavy spurs, more like a bandit than an honest husbandman. The evening gun had long since boomed over the waters of the land-locked harbor from the grim, walls of Moro Castle, the guard had been relieved at the governor's palace and the city walls, and now the steady martial tread to the tap of the drum rang along the streets of Havana, as the guard once more sought their barracks in the Plaza des Armes.

The pretty señoritas sat at their grated windows, nearly on a level with the street, and chatted through the bars, not unlike prisoners, to those gallants who paused to address them. And now a steady line of pedestrians turned their way to the garden that fronts the governor's palace, where they might listen to the music of the band, nightly poured forth here to rich and poor.

At this peculiar hour there was a small party walking in the broad and very private walk that skirts the seaward side of the city, nearly opposite the Moro, and known as the Plato. It is the only hour in which a lady can appear outside the walls of her dwelling on foot in this queer and picturesque capital, and then only in the Plaza, opposite to the palace, or in some secluded and private walk like the Plato. Such is Creole and Spanish etiquette.

The party referred to consisted of a fine looking old Spanish don, a lady who seemed to be his daughter, a little boy of some twelve or thirteen years, who might perhaps be the lady's brother, and a couple of gentlemen in undress military attire, yet bearing sufficient tokens of rank to show them to be high in command. The party was a gay though small one, and the lady seemed to be as lively and talkative as the two gentlemen could desire, while they, on their part, appeared most devoted to every syllable and gesture.

There was a slight air of hauteur in the lady's bearing; she seemed to half disdain the homage that was so freely tendered to her, and though she laughed loud and clear, there was a careless, not to say heartless, accent in her tones, that betrayed her indifference to the devoted attentions of her companions. Apparently too much accustomed to this treatment to be disheartened by it, the two gentlemen bore themselves most courteously, and continued as devoted as ever to the fair creature by their side.

The boy of whom we have spoken was a noble child, frank and manly in his bearing, and evidently deeply interested in the maritime scene before him. Now he paused to watch the throng of craft of every nation that lay at anchor in the harbor, or which were moored; after the fashion here, with their stems to the quay, and now his fine blue eye wandered off over the swift running waters of the Gulf Stream, watching for a moment the long, heavy swoop of some distant seafowl, or the white sail of some clipper craft bound up the Gulf to New Orleans, or down the narrow channel through the Caribbean Sea to some South American port. The old don seemed in the meantime to regard the boy with an earnest pride, and scarcely heeded at all the bright sallies of wit that his daughter was so freely and merrily bestowing upon her two assiduous admirers.

"Yonder brigantine must be a slaver," said the boy, pointing to a rakish craft that seemed to be struggling against the current to the southward.

"Most like, most like; but what does she on this side? the southern shore is her ground, and the Isle of Pines is a hundred leagues from here," said the old don.

"She has lost her reckoning, probably," said the boy, "and made the first land to the north. Lucky she didn't fall in with those Florida wreckers, for though the Americans don't carry on the African trade nowadays, they know what to do with a cargo if it gets once hard and fast on the reefs."

"What know you of these matters?" asked the old don, turning a curious eye on the boy.

"O, I hear them talk of these things, and you know I saw a cargo 'run' on the south side only last month,"

The Heart's Secret

continued the boy. "There were three hundred or more filed off from that felucca, two by two, to the shore."

"It is a slaver," said one of the officers, "a little out of her latitude, that's all."

"A beautiful craft," said the lady, earnestly; "can it be a slaver, and so beautiful."

"They are clipper-built, all of them," said the old don. "Launched in Baltimore, United States."

Senorita Gonzales was the daughter of the proud old don of the same name, who was of the party on the Plato at the time we describe. The father was one of the richest as well as noblest in rank of all the residents of the island, being of the old Castilian stock, who had come from Spain many years before, and after holding high office, both civil and military, under the crown, had at last retired with a princely fortune, and devoted himself to the education of his daughter and son, both of whom we have already introduced to the reader.

The daughter, beautiful, intelligent, and witty to a most extraordinary degree, had absolutely broken the hearts of half the men of rank on the island; for though yet scarcely twenty years of age, Senorita Isabella was a confirmed coquette. It was her passion to command and enjoy a devotion, but as to ever having in the least degree cherished or known what it was to love, the lady was entirely void of the charge; she had never known the tenderness of reciprocal affection, nor did it seem to those who knew her best, that the man was born who could win her confidence.

Men's hearts had been Isabella Gonzales's toys and playthings ever since the hour that she first had realized her power over them. And yet she was far from being heartless in reality. She was most sensitive, and at times thoughtful and serious; but this was in her closet, and when alone. Those who thought that the sunshine of that face was never clouded, were mistaken. She hardly received the respect that was due to her better understanding and naturally strong points of character, because she hid them mainly behind an exterior of captivating mirthfulness and never ceasing smiles.

The cool refreshing sea breeze that swept in from the water was most delicious, after the scorching heat of a summer's day in the West Indies, and the party paused as they breathed in of its freshness, leaning upon the parapet of the walk, over which they looked down upon the glancing waves of the bay far beneath them. The moon was stealing slowly but steadily up from behind the lofty tower of Moro Castle, casting a dash of silvery light athwart its dark batteries and grim walls, and silvering a long wake across the now silent harbor, making its rippling waters of golden and silver hues, and casting, where the Moro tower was between it and the water, a long, deep shadow to seaward.

Even the gay and apparently thoughtless Senorita Isabella was struck with delight at the view now presented to her gaze, and for a moment she paused in silence to drink in of the spirit-stirring beauty of the scene.

"How beautiful it is," whispered the boy, who was close by her side.

"Beautiful, very beautiful," echoed Isabella, again becoming silent.

No one who has not breathed the soft air of the south at an hour such as we have described, can well realize the tender influence that it exercises upon a susceptible disposition. The whole party gazed for some minutes in silence, apparently charmed by the scene. There was a hallowing and chastening influence in the very air, and the gay coquette was softened into the tender woman. A tear even glistened in Ruez's, her brother's eyes; but he was a thoughtful and delicate-souled child, and would be affected thus much more quickly than his sister.

The eldest of the two gentlemen who were in attendance upon Don Gonzales and his family, was Count Anguera, lieutenant-governor of the island; and his companion, a fine military figure, apparently some years the count's junior, was General Harero of the royal infantry, quartered at the governor's palace. Such was the party that promenaded on the parapet of the Plato.

As we have intimated, the two gentlemen were evidently striving to please Isabella, and to win from her some encouraging smile or other token that might indicate a preference for their attentions. Admiration even from the high source that now tendered it was no new thing to her, and with just sufficient archness to puzzle them, she waived and replied to their conversation with most provoking indifference, lavishing a vast deal more kindness and attention upon a noble wolf-hound that crouched close to her feet, his big clear eye bent ever upon his mistress's face with a degree of intelligence that would have formed a theme for a painter. It was a noble creature, and no wonder the lady evinced so much regard for the hound, who ever and anon walked close to her.

"You love the hound?" suggested General Harero, stooping to smooth its glossy coat.

"Yes."

"He is to be envied, then, upon my soul, lady. How could he, with no powers of utterance, have done that for

The Heart's Secret

himself, which we poor gallants so fail in doing?"

"And what may that be?" asked Isabella, archly tossing her head.

"Win thy love," half whispered the officer, drawing closer to her side.

The answer was lost, if indeed Isabella intended one, by the father's calling the attention of the party to some object on the Regla shore, opposite the city, looming up in the dim light.

Ruez had mounted the parapet, and with his feet carelessly dangling on the other side, sat gazing off upon the sea, now straining his eye to make out the rig of some dark hull in the distance, and now following back the moon's glittering wake until it met the shore. At this moment the hound, leaving his mistress's side, put his fore paws upon the top of the parapet and his nose into one of the boy's hands, causing him to turn round suddenly to see what it was that touched him; in doing which he lost his balance, and with a faint cry fell from the parapet far down to the water below. Each of the gentlemen at once sprang upon the stone work and looked over where the boy had fallen, but it would have been madness for any one, however good a swimmer; and as they realized this and their helpless situation, they stood for a moment dumb with consternation.

At that moment a plunge was heard in the water from the edge of the quay far below the parapet, and a dark form was traced making its way through the water with that strong bold stroke that shows the effort of a confident and powerful swimmer.

"Thank God some one has seen his fall from below, and they will rescue him," said Don Gonzales, springing swiftly down the Plato steps, followed by Isabella and the officers, and seeking the street that led to the quay below.

"O hasten, father, hasten!" exclaimed Isabella, impatiently.

"Nay, Isabella, my old limbs totter with fear for dear Ruez," was the hasty reply of the old don, as he hurried forward with his daughter.

"Dear, dear Ruez," exclaimed Isabella, hysterically.

Dashing by the guard stationed on the quay, who presented arms as his superiors passed, they reached its end in time to see, through the now dim twilight, the efforts of some one in the water supporting the half insensible boy with one arm, while with the other he was struggling with almost superhuman effort against the steady set of the tide to seaward. Already were a couple of seamen lowering a quarter-boat from an American barque, near by, but the rope had fouled in the blocks, and they could not loose it. A couple of infantry soldiers had also come up to the spot, and having secured a rope were about to attempt some assistance to the swimmer.

"Heave the line," shouted one of the seamen. "Give me the bight of it, and I'll swim out to him."

"Stand by for it," said the soldier, coiling it in his hand and then throwing it towards the barque. But the coil fell short of the mark, and another minute's delay occurred.

In the meantime he who held the boy, though evidently a man of cool judgment, powerful frame, and steady purpose, yet now breathed so heavily in his earnest struggle with the swift tide, that his panting might be distinctly heard on the quay. He was evidently conscious of the efforts now making for his succor and that of the boy, but he uttered no words, still bending every nerve and faculty towards the stemming of the current tint sets into the harbor from the Gulf Stream.

The hound had been running back and forth on the top of the parapet, half preparing every moment for a spring, and then deterred by the immense distance which presented itself between the animal and the water, it would run back and forth again with a most piteous howling cry; but at this moment it came bounding down the street to the quay, as though it at last realized the proper spot from which to make the attempt, and with a leap that seemed to carry it nearly a rod into the waters, it swam easily to the boy's side.

An exclamation of joy escaped from both Don Gonzales and Isabella, for they knew the hound to have saved a life before, and now prized his sagacity highly.

As the hound swung round easily beside the struggling forms, the swimmer placed the boy's arm about the animal's neck, while the noble creature, with almost human reason, instead of struggling fiercely at being thus entirely buried in the water, save the mere point of his nose, worked as steadily and as calmly as though he was merely following his young master on shore. The momentary relief was of the utmost importance to the swimmer, who being thus partially relieved of Ruez's weight, once more struck out boldly for the quay. But the boy had now lost all consciousness, and his arm slipped away from the hound's neck, and he rolled heavily over, carrying down the swimmer and himself for a moment, below the surface of the water.

The Heart's Secret

"Holy mother! they are both drowned!" almost screamed Isabella.

"Lost! lost!" groaned Don Gonzales, with uplifted hands and tottering form.

"No! no!" exclaimed General Harero, "not yet, not yet." He had jumped on board the barque, and had cut the davit ropes with his sword, and thus succeeded in launching the boat with himself and the two seamen in it.

At this moment the swimmer rose once more slowly with his burthen to the surface; but his efforts were so faintly made now, that he barely floated, and yet with a nervous vigor he kept the boy still far above himself. And now it was that the noble instinct of the hound stood his young master in such importance, and led him to seize with his teeth the boy's clothes, while the swimmer once more fairly gained his self-possession, and the boat with General Harero and the seamen came alongside. In a moment more the boy with his preserver and the dog were safe in the boat, which was rowed at once to the quay.

A shout of satisfaction rang out from twenty voices that had witnessed the scene.

Isabella, the moment they were safely in the boat, fainted, while Count Anguera ran for a volante for conveyance home. The swimmer soon regained his strength, and when the boat reached the quay, he lifted the boy from it himself. It was a most striking picture that presented itself to the eye at that moment on the quay, in the dim twilight that was so struggling with the moon's brighter rays.

The father, embracing the reviving boy, looked the gratitude he could not find words to express, while a calm, satisfied smile ornamented the handsome features of the soldier who had saved Ruez's life at such imminent risk. The coat which he had hastily thrown upon the quay when he leaped into the water, showed him to bear the rank of lieutenant of infantry, and by the number, he belonged to General Harero's own division.

The child was placed with his sister and father in a volante, and borne away from the spot with all speed, that the necessary care and attention might be afforded to him which they could only expect in their own home.

In the meantime a peculiar satisfaction mantled the brow and features of the young officer who had thus signally served Don Gonzales and his child. His fine military figure stood erect and commanding in style while he gazed after the volante that contained the party named, nor did he move for some moments, seeming to be exercised by some peculiar spell; still gazing in the direction in which the volante had disappeared, until General Harero, his superior, having at length arranged his own attire, after the hasty efforts which he had made, came by, and touching him lightly on the arm, said:

"Lieutenant, you seem to be dreaming; has the bath affected your brain?"

"Not at all, general," replied the young officer, hastening to put on his coat once more; "I have indeed forgotten myself for a single moment."

"Know you the family whom you have thus served?" asked the general.

"I do; that is, I know their name, general, but nothing further."

"He's a clever man, and will remember your services," said the general, carelessly, as he walked up the quay and received the salute of the sentinel on duty.

Some strange feeling appeared to be working in the breast of the young officer who had just performed the gallant deed we have recorded, for he seemed even now to be quite lost to all outward realization, and was evidently engaged in most agreeable communion with himself mentally. He too now walked up the quay, also, receiving the salute of the sentinel, and not forgetting either, as did the superior officer, to touch his cap in acknowledgement, a sign that an observant man would have marked in the character of both; and one, too, which was not lost on the humble private, whose duty it was to stand at his post until the middle watch of the night. A long and weary duty is that of a sentinel on the quay at night.

CHAPTER II. THE BELLE AND THE SOLDIER.

WHOEVER has been in Havana, that strange and peculiar city, whose every association and belonging seem to bring to mind the period of centuries gone by, whose time-worn and moss-covered cathedrals appear to stand as grim records of the past, whose noble palaces and residences of the rich give token of the fact of its great wealth and extraordinary resources—whoever, we say, has been in this capital of Cuba, has of course visited its well-known and far-famed Tacon Paseo. It is here, just outside the city walls, in a beautiful tract of land, laid out in tempting walks, ornamented with the fragrant flowers of the tropics, and with statues and fountains innumerable, that the beauty and fashion of the town resort each afternoon to drive in their volantes, and to meet and greet each other.

It was on the afternoon subsequent to that of the accident recorded in the preceding chapter, that a young officer, off duty, might be seen partially reclining upon one of the broad seats that here and there line the foot-path of the circular drive in the Paseo. He possessed a fine manly figure, and was perhaps of twenty-four or five years of age, and clothed in the plain undress uniform of the Spanish army. His features were of that national and handsome cast that is peculiar to the full-blooded Castilian, and the pure olive of his complexion contrasted finely with a moustache and imperial as black as the dark flowing hair that fell from beneath his foraging cap. At the moment when we introduce him he was playing with a small, light walking-stick, with which he thrashed his boots most immoderately; but his thoughts were busy enough in another quarter, as any one might conjecture even at a single glance.

Suddenly his whole manner changed; he rose quickly to his feet, and lifting his cap gracefully, he saluted and acknowledged the particular notice of a lady who bent partially forward from a richly mounted volante drawn by as richly it caparisoned horse, and driven by as richly dressed a calesaro. The manner of the young officer from that moment was the very antipodes of what it had been a few moments before. A change seemed to have come over the spirit of his dream. His fine military figure became erect and dignified, and a slight indication of satisfied pride was just visible in the fine lines of his expressive lips. As he passed on his way, after a momentary pause, he met General Harero, who stiffly acknowledged his military salute, with anything but kindness expressed in the stern lines of his forbidding countenance. He even took some pains to scowl upon the young soldier as they passed each other.

But what cared Lieutenant Bezan for his frowns? Had not the belle of the city, the beautiful, the peerless, the famed Senorita Isabella Gonzales just publicly saluted him?—that glorious being whose transcendent beauty had been the theme of every tongue, and whose loveliness had enslaved him from the first moment he had looked upon her—just two years previous, when he first came from Spain. Had not this high-born and proud lady publicly saluted him? Him, a poor lieutenant of infantry, who had never dared to lift his eyes to meet her own before, however deep and ardently he might have worshipped her in secret. What cared the young officer that his commander had seen fit thus to frown upon him? True, he realized the power of military discipline, and particularly of the Spanish army; but he forgot all else now, in the fact that Isabella Gonzales had publicly saluted him in the paths of the Paseo.

Possessed of a highly chivalrous disposition, Lieutenant Bezan had few confidants among his regiment, who, notwithstanding this, loved him as well as brothers might love. He seemed decidedly to prefer solitude and his books to the social gatherings, or the clubs formed by his brother officers, or indeed to join them in any of their ordinary sports or pastimes.

Of a very good family at home, he had the misfortune to have been born a younger brother, and after being thoroughly educated at the best schools of Madrid, he was frankly told by his father that he must seek his fortune, and for the future rely solely upon himself. There was but one field open to him, at least so it seemed to him, and that was the army. Two years before the opening of our story he had enlisted as a third lieutenant of infantry, and had been at once ordered to the West Indies with his entire regiment. Here promotion for more than one gallant act closely followed him, until at the time we introduce him to the reader as first lieutenant. Being of a naturally

The Heart's Secret

cheerful and exceedingly happy disposition, he took life like a philosopher, and knew little of care or sorrow until the time when he first saw Senorita Isabella Gonzales—an occasion that planted a hopeless passion in his breast.

From the moment of their first meeting, though entirely unnoticed by her, he felt that he loved her, deeply, tenderly loved her; and yet at the same time he fully realized how immeasurably she was beyond his sphere, and consequently hopes. He saw the first officials of the island at her very feet, watching for one glance of encouragement or kindness from those dark and lustrous eyes of jet; in short, he saw her ever the centre of an admiring circle of the rich and proud. It is perhaps strange, but nevertheless true, that with all these discouraging and disheartening circumstances, Lieutenant Bezan did not lose all hope. He loved her, lowly and obscure though he was, with all his heart, and used to whisper to himself that love like his need not despair, for he felt how truly and honestly his heart warmed and his pulses beat for her.

Nearly two entire years had his devoted heart lived on thus, if not once gratified by a glance from her eye, still hoping that devotion like his would one day be rewarded. What prophets of the future are youth and love! Distant as the star of his destiny appeared from him, he yet still toiled on, hoped on, in his often weary round of duty, sustained by the one sentiment of tender love and devotedness to one who knew him not.

At the time of the fearful accident when Ruez Gonzales came so near losing his life from the fall he suffered off the parapet of the Plato, Lieutenant Bezan was officer of the night, his rounds having fortunately brought him to the quay at the most opportune moment. He knew not who it was that had fallen into the water, but guided by a native spirit of daring and humanity, he had thrown off his coat and cap and leaped in after him.

The feelings of pleasure and secret joy experienced by the young officer, when after landing from the boat he learned by a single glance who it was he had so fortunately saved, may be better imagined than described, when his love for the boy's sister is remembered. And when, as we have related, the proud Senorita Isabella publicly saluted him before a hundred eyes in the Paseo, he felt a joy of mind, a brightness of heart, that words could not express.

His figure and face were such that once seen their manly beauty and noble outline could not be easily forgotten; and there were few ladies in the city, whose station and rank would permit them to associate with one bearing only a lieutenant's commission, who would not have been proud of his notice and homage. He could not be ignorant of his personal recommendations, and yet the young officer sought no female society—his heart it knew but one idol, and he could bow to but one throne of love.

Whether by accident or purposely, the lady herself only knew, but when the volante, in the circular drive of the Paseo, again came opposite to the spot where Lieutenant Bezan was, the Senorita Isabella dropped her fan upon the carriage-road. As the young officer sprang to pick it up and return it, she bade the calesaro to halt. Her father, Don Gonzales, was by her side, and the lieutenant presented the fan in the most respectful manner, being rewarded by a glance from the lady that thrilled to his very soul. Don Gonzales exclaimed:

"By our lady, but this is the young officer, Isabella, who yesternight so promptly and gallantly saved the life of our dear Ruez."

"It is indeed he, father," said the beauty, with much interest.

"Lieutenant Bezan, the general told us, I believe," continued the father.

"That was the name, father."

"And is this Lieutenant Bezan?" asked Don Gonzales, addressing the officer.

"At your service," replied he, bowing respectfully.

"Senor," continued the father, most earnestly, and extending at the same time his hand to the blushing soldier, "permit me and my daughter to thank you sincerely for the extraordinary service you rendered to us and our dear Ruez last evening."

"Senor, the pleasure of having served you richly compensated for any personal inconvenience or risk I may have experienced," answered Lieutenant Bezan; saying which, he bowed low and looked once into the lovely eyes of the beautiful Senorita Isabella, when at a word to the calesaro, the volante again passed on in the circular drive.

But the young officer had not been unwatched during the brief moments of conversation that had passed between him and the occupants of the vehicle. Scarcely had he left the side of the volante, when he once more met General Harero, who seemed this time to take some pains to confront him, as he remarked:

"What business may Lieutenant Bezan have with Don Gonzales and his fair daughter, that he stops their volante in the public walks of the Paseo?"

The Heart's Secret

"The lady dropped her fan, general, and I picked it up and returned it to her," was the gentlemanly and submissive reply of the young officer.

"Dropped her fan," repeated the general, sneeringly, as he gazed at the lieutenant.

"Yes, general, and I returned it."

"Indeed," said the commanding officers, with a decided emphasis.

"Could I have done less, general?" asked Lieutenant Bezan.

"It matters not, though you seem to be ever on hand to do the lady and her father some service, sir. Perhaps you would relish another cold bath," he continued, with most cutting sarcasm. "Who introduced you, sir, to these people?"

"No one, sir. It was chance that brought us together. You will remember the scene on the quay."

"I do."

"Before that time I had never exchanged one word with them."

"And on this you presume to establish an acquaintance?"

"By no means, sir. The lady recognized me, and I was proud to return the polite salute with which she greeted me."

"Doubtless."

"Would you have me do otherwise, sir?"

"I would have you avoid this family of Gonzales altogether."

"I trust, general, that I have not exceeded my duty either to the father or daughter, though by the tone of your remarks I seem to have incurred your disapprobation," replied Lieutenant Bezan, firmly but respectfully.

"It would be more becoming in an officer of your rank," continued the superior, "to be nearer his quarters, than to spend his hours off duty in so conspicuous and public a place as the Tacon Paseo. I shall see that such orders are issued for the future as shall keep those attached to my division within the city walls."

"Whatever duty is prescribed by my superiors I shall most cheerfully and promptly respond to, General Harero," replied the young officer, as he respectfully saluted his general, and turning, he sought the city gates on the way to his barracks.

"Stay, Lieutenant Bezan," said the general, somewhat nervously.

"General," repeated the officer, with the prompt military salute, as he awaited orders.

"You may go, sir," continued the superior, biting his lips with vexation. "Another time will answer my purpose quite as well, perhaps better. You may retire, I say."

"Yes, general," answered the soldier, respectfully, and once more turned away.

Lieutenant Bezan was too well aware of General Harero's intimacy at the house of Don Gonzales, not to understand the meaning of the rebuke and exhibition of bitterness on the part of his superior towards him. The general, although he possessed a fine commanding figure, yet was endowed with no such personal advantages to recommend him to a lady's eye as did the young officer who had thus provoked him, and he could not relish the idea that one who had already rendered such signal services to the Senorita Isabella and her father, even though he was so very far below himself in rank, should become too intimate with the family. It would be unfair towards Lieutenant Bezan to suppose that he did not possess sufficient judgment of human nature and discernment to see all this.

He could not but regret that he had incurred the ill will of his general, though it was unjustly entertained, for he knew only too well how rigorous was the service in which he was engaged, and that a superior officer possessed almost absolute power over those placed in his command, in the Spanish army, even unto the sentence of death. He had too often been the unwilling spectator, and even at times the innocent agent of scenes that were revolting to his better feelings, which emanated solely from this arbitrary power vested in heartless and incompetent individuals by means of their military rank. Musing thus upon the singular state of his affairs, and the events of the last two days, so important to his feelings, now recalling the bewitching glances of the peerless Isabella Gonzales, and now ruminating upon the ill will of General Harero, he strolled into the city, and reaching La Dominica's, he threw himself upon a lounge near the marble fountain, and calling for a glass of agrass, he sipped the cool and grateful beverage, and wiled away the hour until the evening parade.

Though Don Gonzales duly appreciated the great service that Lieutenant Bezan had done him, at such imminent personal hazard, too, yet he would no more have introduced him into his family on terms of a visiting

The Heart's Secret

acquaintance in consequence thereof, than he would have boldly broken down any other strict rule and principle of his aristocratic nature; and yet he was not ungrateful; far from it, as Lieutenant Bezan had reason to know, for he applied his great influence at once to the governor-general in the young officer's behalf. The favor he demanded of Tacon, then governor and commander-in-chief, was the promotion to a captaincy of him who had so vitally served the interests of his house.

Tacon was one of the wisest and best governors that Cuba ever had, as ready to reward merit as he was to signally punish trickery or crime of any sort, and when the case was fairly laid before him, by reference to the rolls of his military secretary, he discovered that Lieutenant Bezan had already been promoted twice for distinguished merit, and replied to Don Gonzales that, as this was the case, and the young soldier was found to be so deserving, he should cheerfully comply with his request as it regarded his early promotion in his company. Thus it was, that scarcely ten days subsequent to the meeting in the Paseo, which we have described, Lieutenant Bezan was regularly gazetted as captain of infantry, by honorable promotion and approval of the governor-general.

The character of Tacon was one of a curious description. He was prompt, candid, and business-like in all things, and the manner of his promoting Lieutenant Bezan was a striking witness of these very qualities. The young officer being summoned by an orderly to his presence, was thus questioned:

"You are Lieutenant Lorenzo Bezan?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"Of the sixth infantry?"

"Excellency, yes."

"Of company eight?"

"Of company eight, excellency."

"Your commander is General Harero?"

"Excellency, yes."

"You were on the quay night before last, were you not?"

"Excellency, I was."

"And leaped into the water to save a boy's life who had fallen there?"

"I did, excellency."

"You were successful."

"Excellency, I was."

"You were promoted eleven months since in compliment for duty."

"Yes, excellency."

"Captain Bezan, here is a new commission for you."

"Excellency you are only too kind to an humble soldier."

A calm, proud inclination of the head on the part of the governor-general, indicated that the audience was over, and the young officer returned, knowing well the character of the commander-in-chief. Not a little elated, Lorenzo Bezan felt that he was richly repaid for the risk he had run by this promotion alone; but there was a source of gratification to him far beyond that of having changed his title to captain. He had served and been noticed by Isabella Gonzales, and it is doubtful if he could have met with any good fortune that would have equalled this, in his eye; it was the scheme of his life—the realization of his sleeping and waking dreams.

This good fortune, as pleasant to him as it was unexpected, was attributed by the young officer to the right source, and was in reality enhanced and valued from that very fact.

"A bumper," exclaimed his brother officers, that day at the mess-table, when all were met. "A bumper to Captain Lorenzo Bezan. May he never draw his sword without cause; never sheathe it without honor!"

"But what's the secret of Bezan's good fortune?" asked one.

"His luck, to be sure—born under a lucky star."

"Not exactly luck, alone, but his own intrepidity and manliness," replied a fellow-officer. "Haven't you heard of his saving the life of young Gonzales, who fell into the bay from the parapet of the Plato?"

"Not in detail. If you know about the affair, recite it," said another.

Leaving the mess, as did Captain Bezan at this juncture, we will follow the thread of our story in another chapter, and relating to other scenes.

CHAPTER III. A SUDDEN INTRODUCTION.

IT was again night in the capital; the narrow streets were brilliantly lighted from the store windows, but the crowd were no longer there. The heat of the long summer day had wearied the endurance of master and slave; and thousands had already sought that early repose which is so essential to the dwellers in the tropics. Stillness reigned over the drowsy city, save that the soft music which the governor-general's hand discourses nightly in the Plaza, stole sweetly over the scene, until every air seemed heavy with its tender influence and melody. Now it swelled forth in the martial tones of a military band, and now its cadence was low and gentle as a fairy whisper, reverberating to the ear from the opposite shore of Regla, and the frowning walls of the Cabanas behind the Moro, and now swelling away inland among the coffee fields and sugar plantations.

The long twilight was gone; but still the deep streak of golden skirting in the western horizon lent a softened hue to the scene, not so bright to the eye, and yet more golden far than moonlight: "Leaving on craggy hills and running streams A softness like the atmosphere of dreams."

At this favorite hour the Senorita Isabella Gonzales and her young brother, Ruez, attended only by the wolf hound, who seemed to be almost their inseparable companion, were once again strolling in the cool and retired walk of the Plato. The lady moved with all the peculiar grace so natural to the Spanish women, and yet through all, a keen observer might have seen the lurking effects of pride and power, a consciousness of her own extraordinary beauty, and the control it gave her over the hearts of those of the other sex with whom she associated. Alas! that such a trait should have become a second nature to one with so heavenly a form and face. Perhaps it was owing to the want of the judicious management of a mother, of timely and kindly advice, that Isabella had grown up thus; certainly it seemed hard, very hard, to attribute it to her heart, her natural promptings, for at times she evinced such traits of womanly delicacy and tenderness, that those who knew her best forgot her coquetry.

Her brother was a gentle and beautiful boy. A tender spirit of melancholy seemed ever uppermost in his heart and face, and it had been thus with him since he had known his first early grief—the loss of his mother—some four or five years before the present period of our story. Isabella, though she was not wanting in natural tenderness and affection, had yet outgrown the loss of her parent; but the more sensitive spirit of the boy had not yet recovered from the shock it had thus received. The father even feared that he never would regain his happy buoyancy, as he looked upon his pale and almost transparent features, while the boy mused thoughtfully to himself sometimes for the hour together, if left alone and undisturbed.

"Ruez, dear, we've not been on the Plato since that fearful night," said Senorita Isabella, as she rested her hand gently upon the boy's shoulder.

"It was a fearful night, sister," said the boy recalling the associations with a shudder.

"And yet how clear and beautiful it seemed just before that terrible accident."

"I remember," said the boy.

"And the slaver in the distance, with her soft white sails and treacherous business."

"And the sparkling moon upon the bay."

"It was very beautiful; and we have a night now almost its equal."

"Did you notice how stoutly that Lieutenant Bezan swam with me?"

"Yes, brother. You forget, though, that he is Captain Bezan now," she added.

"Father told me so," said the boy. "How fearfully the tide ran, and the current set against us! He held me way up above the water, while he was quite under it himself," continued Ruez. "I was sure he would drown; didn't it seem so to you, sister?"

"It did, it did; the deed was most gallantly done," said Isabella, as she stooped down and kissed her brother; "and you will never be so careless again, Ruez?"

"No, sister. I shall be more careful, but I should like to see that Captain Bezan again. I have never seen him since that night, and his barracks are within pistol shot from here."

The Heart's Secret

"Hark! what was that?" asked Isabella, starting at some unusual noise.

"I heard nothing," said the boy.

"There it is again," she continued, nervously, looking around.

"Down, Carlo, down," said the boy, sharply to the hound, as it sprang at the same time from a crouching posture, and uttered a deep, angry growl, peculiar to its species.

But the animal seemed too much aroused to be so easily pacified with words, and with heavy bounds sprang towards the seaward end of the Plato, over the parapet of which, where it joined a lofty stone wall that made a portion of the stone barracks of the army, a man leaped to the ground. The hound suddenly crouched, the moment it fairly reached the figure of the new comer, and instead of the hostile attitude, it had so lately he assumed, now placed its fore paws upon the breast of the person, and wagged its tail with evident tokens of pleasure at the meeting.

"That is a very strange way to enter the Plato," said Isabella, to her brother, drawing nearer to his side as she spoke. "I wonder who it can be?"

"Some friend of Carlo's, for he never behaves in that way to strangers," said the boy.

"So it would seem; but here he comes, be he whom he may."

"By our lady!" said the boy, earnestly, with a flash of spirit and color across his usually quiet and pale face. "Sister, it is Captain Bezan!"

"Captain Bezan, I believe," said Isabella, courtesying coolly to his respectful bow.

"The same, lady."

"You have chosen a singular mode of introduction, sir," said the Senorita Isabella Gonzales, somewhat severely, as she drew herself up with an air of cold reserve.

"It is true, lady, I have done a seemingly rash action; but if you will please to pause for one moment, you will at once realize that it was the only mode of introduction of which a poor soldier like myself could have availed himself."

"Our hall doors are always open," replied Isabella Gonzales.

"To the high born and proud, I grant you, lady, but not to such as I am."

"Then, sir," continued the lady, quickly, "if custom and propriety forbid you to meet me through the ordinary channels of society, do you not see the impropriety of such an attempt to see me as that which you have but just now made?"

"Lady, I can see nothing, hear nothing but my unconquerable love!"

"Love, sir!" repeated the lady, with a curl of her proud but beautiful lip.

"Ay, love, Isabella Gonzales. For years I have loved you in secret. Too humble to become known to you, or to attract your eye, even, I have yet nursed that love, like the better angel of my nature; have dreamed of it nightly; have prayed for the object of it nightly; have watched the starry heavens, and begged for some noble inspiration that would make me more worthy of thy affection; I have read nothing that I did not couple in some tender way with thee; have nursed no hope of ambition or fame that was not the nearer to raise me to thee, and over the midnight lamp have bent in earnestness year after year, that I might gain those jewels of the mind that in intelligence, at least, would place me by thy side. At last fortune befriended me, and I was able by a mischance to him, thy brother, to serve thee. Perhaps even then it might have ended, and my respect would still have curbed the promptings of my passion, had you not so kindly noticed me on the Paseo. O, how wildly did my heart beat at that gentle, kind and thoughtful recognition of the poor soldier, and no less quickly beats that heart, when you listen thus to me, and hear me tell how deeply I love."

"Audacity!" said Isabella Gonzales, really not a little aroused at the plainness of his speech. "How dare you, sir, to address such language to me?"

"Love dares do anything but dishonor the being that it loves. A year, lady, a month ago, how hopeless was my love—how far off in the blue ether was the star I worshipped. Little did I then think that I should now stand so near to you—should thus pour out of the fullness of my enslaved and devoted heart, ay, thus look into those glorious eyes."

"Sir, you are impertinent!" said Isabella, shrinking from the ardor of his expression.

"Nay, lady," said the young officer, profoundly humble, "it is impossible for such love as mine to lead to impertinence to one whom I little less than worship."

The Heart's Secret

"Leave me, sir!"

"Yes, Isabella Gonzales, if you will repeat those words calmly; if you will deliberately bid me, who have so often prayed for, so hoped for such a moment as this, to go, I will go."

"But, sir, you will compromise me by this protracted conversation."

"Heaven forbid. But for you I would risk all things—life, reputation, all that is valuable to me in life; yet perhaps I am forgetful, perhaps a thoughtless."

"What strange power and music there is in his voice," whispered Isabella, to herself.

Completely puzzled by his deep respect, his gallant and noble bearing, the memory of his late noble conduct in saving Ruez's life, Isabella hardly knew what to say, and she stood thus half confused, trotting her pretty foot upon the path of the Plato with a vexed air. At last, as if struggling to break the spell that seemed to be hanging over them, she said:

"How could one like you, sir, ever dare to entertain such feelings towards me? the audaciousness of your language almost strikes me dumb."

"Lady," said the young soldier, respectfully, "the sincerity of my passion has been its only self-sustaining power. I felt that love like mine could not be in vain. I was sure that such affection was never planted in my breast to bloom and blossom simply for disappointment. I could not think that this was so."

"I am out of all patience with his impertinence," said Isabella Gonzales, to herself, pettishly. "I don't know what to say to him."

"Sir, you must leave this place at once," she said, at last, after a brief pause.

"I shall do so, lady, at your bidding; but only to pray and hope for the next meeting between us, when you may perhaps better know the poor soldier's heart."

"Farewell, sir," said Isabella.

"Farewell, Isabella Gonzales."

"Are you going so soon?" asked Ruez, now approaching them from a short distance in the rear, where he had been playing with the hound.

"Yes, Ruez," said the soldier, kindly. "You are quite recovered, I trust, from the effects of that cold bath taken off the parapet yonder."

"O yes, I am quite recovered now."

"It was a high leap for one of your age."

"It was indeed," said the boy, with a shudder at the remembrance.

"And, O, sir, I have not thanked you for that gallant deed," said Isabella Gonzales, extending her hand incontinently to Captain Bezan, in the enthusiasm of the moment, influenced by the sincerity of her feelings, his noble and manly bearing, and the kind and touching words he had uttered to Ruez.

It would be difficult for us to describe her as she appeared at that moment in the soldier's eye. How lovely she seemed to him, when dropping all reserve for the moment, not only her tongue, but her eloquent eyes spoke from the tenderness of her woman's heart. A sacred vision would have impressed him no more than did the loveliness of her presence at that moment.

Bending instinctively at this demonstration of gentle courtesy on her part, he pressed her hand most respectfully to his lips, and, as if feeling that he had gone almost too far, with a gallant wave of the hand he suddenly disappeared from whence he had so lately come, over the seaward side of the parapet towards the army barracks.

Isabella gazed after him with a puzzled look for a while, then said half to herself and in a pettish and vexed tone of voice:

"I did not mean that he should kiss my hand. I'm sure I did not; and why did I give it to him? How thoughtless. I declare I have never met so monstrously impudent a person in the entire course of my life. Very strange. Here's General Harero, Don Romonez, and Felix Gavardo, have been paying me court this half year and more, and either of them would give half his fortune for a kiss of this hand, and yet neither has dared to even tell me that they love me, though I know it so well. But here is this young soldier, this new captain of infantry, why he sees me but half a minute before he declares himself, and so boldly, too! I protest it was a real insult. I'll tell Don Gonzales, and I'll have the fellow dishonored and his commission taken from him, I will. I'm half ready to cry with vexation. Yes, I'll have Captain Bezan cashiered, and that directly, I will."

The Heart's Secret

"No you wont, sister," said Ruez, looking up calmly into her face as he spoke.

"Yes I will, brother."

"Still I say no," continued the boy, gently, and caressing her hand the while.

"And why not, Ruez?" asked Isabella, stooping and kissing his handsome forehead, as the boy looked up so lovingly in her face.

"Because he saved my life, sister," replied Ruez, smiling.

"True, he did save your life, Ruez," murmured the beautiful girl, thoughtfully; an act that we can never repay; but it was most presuming for him to enter the Plato thus, and to—to—"

"Kiss your hand, sister," suggested the boy, smiling in a knowing way.

"Yes, it was quite shocking for him to be so familiar, Ruez."

"But, sister, I can hardly ever help kissing you when you look kind to me, and I am sure you looked very kind at Captain Bezan."

"Did I!" half mused Isabella, biting the handle of her Creole fan.

"Yes; and how handsome this Captain Bezan is, sister," continued the boy, pretending to be engaged with the hound, whom he patted while he looked sideways at Isabella.

"Do you think him so handsome?" still half mused Isabella, in reply to her brother's remarks, while her eye rested upon the ground.

"I know it," said the boy, with spirit. "Don Miguel, General Harero, or the lieutenant-general, are none of them half so good looking," he continued, referring to some of her suitors.

"Well, he is handsome, brother, that's true enough, and brave I know, or he would never have leaped into the water to save your life. But I'll never forgive him, I'm sure of that, Ruez," she said, in a most decided tone of voice.

"Yes you will, sister."

"No, I will not, and you will vex me if you say so again," she added, pettishly.

"Come, Carlo, come," said Ruez, calling to the hound, as he followed close upon his sister's footsteps towards the entrance of Don Gonzales's house on the Plato.

The truth was, Isabella Gonzales, the proud beauty, was pleased; perhaps her vanity was partly enlisted also, while she remembered the frankness of the humble soldier who had poured out his devotions at her feet in such simple yet earnest strains as to carry conviction with every word to the lady's heart. Image, even from the most lowly, is not without its charm to beauty, and the proud girl mused over the late scene thoughtfully, ay, far more thoughtfully than she had ever done before, on the offer of the richest and proudest cavalier.

She had never loved; she knew not what the passion meant, as applied to the opposite sex. Universal homage had been her share ever since she could remember; and if Isabella Gonzales was not a confirmed coquette, she was certainly very near being one. The light in which she regarded the advances of Captain Bezan, even puzzled herself; the phase of his case and the manner of his avowal were so far without precedent, that its novelty engaged her. She still felt vexed at the young soldier's assurance, but yet all unconsciously found herself endeavoring to invent any number of excuses for the conduct he had exhibited!

"It is true, as he said," she remarked, half aloud to herself, "that it was the only way in which he could meet me on terms of sufficient equality for conversation. Perhaps I should have done the same, if I were a high-spirited youth, and really loved!"

As for Lorenzo Bezan, he quietly sought his quarters, as happy as a king. Had he not been successful beyond any reasonable hope? Had he not told his love? ay, had he not kissed the hand of her he loved, at last, almost by her own consent? Had not the clouds in the horizon of his love greatly thinned in numbers? He was no moody lover. Not one to die for love, but to live for it rather, and to pursue the object of his affection and regard with such untiring and devoted service as to deserve, if not to win, success. At least this was his resolve. Now and then the great difference between their relative stations would lead him to pause and consider the subject; but then with some pleasant sally to himself he would walk on again, firmly resolved in his own mind to overcome all things for her whom he loved, or at least to strive to do so.

This was all very well in thought, but in practice the young soldier will not perhaps find this so easy a matter. Patience and perseverance are excellent qualities, but they are not certain criteria of success. Lorenzo Bezan had aimed his arrow high, but it was that little blind fellow, Cupid, that shot the bow. He was not to blame for it—of

The Heart's Secret

course not.

"Ha! Bezan, whence come you with so bright a face?" asked a brother officer, as he entered his quarters in the barracks of the Plaza des Armes.

"From wooing a fair and most beautiful maid," said the soldier, most honestly; though perhaps he told the truth as being the thing least likely to be believed by the other.

"Fie, fie, Bezan. You in love, man? A soldier to marry? By our lady, what folly! Don't you remember the proverb? 'Men dream in courtship, but in wedlock wake.'"

"May I wake in that state with her I love ere a twelvemonth," said Lorenzo Bezan, smiling at his comrade's sally and earnestness.

"Are you serious, captain?" asked the other, now trying to half believe him.

"Never more so in my life, I assure you," was the reply.

"And who is the lady, pray? Come, relieve your conscience, and confess."

"Ah, there I am silent; her name is not for vulgar ears," said the young soldier, smiling, and with really too much respect to refer lightly to Isabella Gonzales.

CHAPTER IV. CUBAN BANDITTI.

IT was one of those beautiful but almost oppressively hot afternoons that so ripen the fruits, and so try the patience of the inhabitants of the tropics, that we would have the patient reader follow us on the main road between Alquezar and Guinness. It is as level as a parlor floor, and the tall foliage, mostly composed of the lofty palm, renders the route shaded and agreeable. Every vegetable and plant are so peculiarly significant of the low latitudes, that we must pause for a moment to notice them.

The tall, stately palm, the king of the tropical forest, with its tufted head, like a bunch of ostrich feathers, bending its majestic form here and there over the verdant and luxuriant undergrowth, the mahogany tree, the stout *lignumvit*, the banana, the fragrant and beautiful orange and lemon, and the long, impregnable hedge of the dagger aloe, all go to show us that we are in the sunny clime of the tropics.

The fragrance, too, of the atmosphere! How soft to the senses! This gentle zephyr that only ruffles the white blossoms of the lime hedges, is off yonder coffee plantation that lies now like a field of clear snow, in its fragrant milk-white blossoms; and what a bewitching mingling of heliotrope and wild honeysuckle is combined in the air! how the gaudy plumed parrot pauses on his perch beneath the branches of the plantain tree, to inhale the sweets of the hour; while the chirps of the pedoreva and indigo birds are mingled in vocal praise that fortune has cast their lot in so lovely a clime. O, believe us, you should see and feel the belongings of this beautiful isle, to appreciate how nearly it approaches to your early ideas of fairy land.

But, alas! how often do man's coarser disposition and baser nature belie the soft and beautiful characteristics of nature about him; how often, how very often, is the still, heavenly influence that reigns in fragrant flowers and bubbling streams, marred and desecrated by the harshness and violence engendered by human passions!

In the midst of such a scene as we have described, at the moment to which we refer, there was a fearful struggle being enacted between a small party of Montaros, or inland robbers, and the occupants and outriders of a volante, which had just been attacked on the road. The traces that attached the horse to the vehicle had been cut, and the postilion lay senseless upon the ground from a sword wound in their head, while the four outriders were contending with thrice their number of robbers, who were armed with pistols and Toledo blades. It was a sharp hand to hand fight, and their steel rang to the quick strokes.

In the volante was the person of a lady, but so closely enshrouded by a voluminous rebosa, or Spanish shawl, as hardly to leave any of her figure exposed, her face being hid from fright at the scene being enacted about her. At her side stood the figure of a tall, stately man, whose hat had been knocked over his head in the struggle, and whose white hairs gave token of his age. Two of the robbers, who had received the contents of his two pistols, lay dead by the side of the volante, and having now only his sword left, he stood thus, as if determined to protect her by his side, even at the cost of his life.

The robbers had at last quite overmatched the four outriders, and having bound the only one of them that had sufficient life left to make him dangerous to them, they turned their steps once more towards the volante. There were in all some thirteen of them, but three already lay dead in the road, and the other ten, who had some sharp wounds distributed among them, now standing together, seemed to be querying whether they should not revenge the death of their comrades by killing both the occupants of the volante, or whether they should pursue their first purpose of only robbing them of what valuables they possessed.

Fierce oaths were reiterated, and angry words exchanged between one and another of the robbers, as to the matter they were hastily discussing, while the old gentleman remained firm, grasping the hilt of his well-tempered sword, and showing to his enemies, by the stern, deep resolve they read in his eye, that they had not yet conquered him. Fortunately their pistols had all been discharged, or they might have shot the brave old man without coming to closer quarters, but now they looked with some dread upon the glittering blade he held so firmly!

That which has required some time and space for us to describe, was, however, the work of but a very few moments of time, and the robbers, having evidently made up their minds to take the lives of the two persons now

The Heart's Secret

in the vehicle, divided themselves into two parties and approached the volante at the same moment on opposite sides.

"Come on, ye fiends in human shape," said the old man, flourishing his sword with a skill and strength that showed he was no stranger to its use, and that there was danger in him. "Come on, ye shall find that a good blade in an old man's hands is no plaything!"

They listened for a moment: yes, that half-score of villains held back in dismay at the noble appearance of the old man, and the flashing fire of his eye.

"Ha! do you falter, ye villains? do you fear a good sword with right to back it?"

But hark! what sound is that which startles the Montaros in the midst of their villainy, and makes them look into each other's faces with such consternation and fear? It is a very unfrequented spot—who can be near? Scarcely had the sound fallen on their ears, before three horsemen in the undress uniform of the Spanish infantry, dashed up to the spot at full speed, while one of them, who seemed to be the leader of the party, leaped from his horse, and before the others could follow his example, was engaged in a desperate hand to hand conflict with the robbers. Twice he discharged his pistols with fatal effect, and now he was fighting sword and sword with a stout, burly Montaro, who was approaching that side of the volante where the lady sat, still half concealed by the ample folds of her rebosa, though the approach of assistance had led her to venture so far as to partially uncover her face, and to observe the scene about her.

The headlong attack, so opportunely made by the fresh horsemen, was too much for treble their number to withstand, more especially as the leader of them had met with such signal success at the outset—having shot two, and mortally wounded a third. In this critical state of affairs, the remaining banditti concluded that discretion was the better part of valor, and made the best of their time and remaining strength to beat a hasty retreat, leaving the old gentleman and his companion with their three deliverers, quite safe in the middle of the road.

"By our lady, sir, 'twas a gallant act. There were ten of those rascals, and but three of you," said the old gentleman, stepping out of the volante and arranging his ruffled dress.

"Ten, senor? a soldier would make nothing of a score of such scapegraces as those," replied the officer (for such it was now apparent he was), as he wiped the gore from his reeking blade with a broad, green leaf from the roadside, and placed it in the scabbard.

One of the soldiers who had accompanied the officer had now cut the thongs that bound the surviving outrider, who was one of the family attaches of the old gentleman, and who now busied himself about the vehicle, at one moment attending to the lady's wants, and now to harnessing the horse once more.

Removing his cap, and wiping the reeking perspiration from his brow, the young officer now approached the volante and said to the lady:

"I trust, madame, that you have received no further injury by this unfortunate encounter than must needs occur to you from fright."

As he spoke thus, the lady turned quickly from looking towards the old gentleman, who was now on the other side of the vehicle, and after a moment exclaimed:

"Is it possible, Captain Bezan, that we are indebted to you for this most opportune deliverance from what seemed to be certain destruction?"

"Isabella Gonzales!" exclaimed the young officer, with unfeigned surprise.

"You did not know us, then?" she asked, quickly, in reply.

"Not I, indeed, or else I should sooner have spoken to you."

"You thus risked your life, then, for strangers?" she continued.

"You were the weakest party, were attacked by robbers; it only required a glance to realize that, and to attack them and release you was the next most natural thing in the world," replied the soldier, still wiping the perspiration from his forehead and temples.

"Father!" exclaimed Isabella, with undisguised pleasure, "this is Captain Bezan!"

"Captain Bezan?" repeated the old don, as surprised as his daughter had been.

"At your service," replied the soldier, bowing respectfully to Don Gonzales.

"Why, sir," said the old man, "what possible chance could have brought you so fortunately to our rescue here, a dozen leagues from the city?"

"I was returning with these two companions of my company from a business trip to the south side of the

The Heart's Secret

island, where we had been sent with despatches from Tacon to the governor of the department."

"No, matter, what chance has brought you here, at all events we owe our lives to you, sir," said Don Gonzales, extending his hand cordially to the young officer.

After some necessary delay, under the peculiar circumstances, the horses were finally arranged so as to permit of proceeding forward on the road. The bodies of the servants were disposed of, and all was ready for a start, when Isabella Gonzales turned to her father and pressing his arm said:

"Father, how pale he looks!"

"Who, my child!"

"There, see how very pale!" said Isabella, rising up from her seat.

"Who do you speak of, Isabella?"

"Captain Bezan, father; see, there he stands beside his horse."

"He does look fatigued; he has worked hard with those villains," said the old man.

"Why don't he mount? The rest have done so, and we are ready," continued the old man, anxiously.

At that moment one of the horsemen, better understanding the case than either Isabella Gonzales or her father, left his well-trained animal in the road, and hastened to his officer's side. It required but a glance for him to see that his captain was too weak to mount.

Directing the outrider, who had now mounted one of the horses attached to the volante, and acted as postilion, to drive towards him whom his companion was partially supporting, Don Gonzales asked most anxiously:

"Captain Bezan, you are ill, I fear; are you much hurt?"

"A mere trifle, Don Gonzales; drive on, sir, and I will follow you in a moment."

"He is bleeding from his left arm and side, father," said Isabella, anxiously.

"You are wounded—I fear severely, Captain Bezan," said the father.

"A mere scratch, sir, in the arm, from one of the unlucky thrusts of those Montaros," he replied, assuming an indifference that his pale face belied.

"Ah! father, what can be done for him?" said Isabella, quickly.

"I am unharmed," said the grateful old man, "and can sit a horse all day long, if need be. Here, captain, take my seat in the volante, and Isabella, whom you have served at such heavy cost to yourself, shall act the nurse for you until we get to town again."

Perhaps nothing, save such a proposition as this, could possibly have aroused and sustained the wounded officer; but after gently refusing for a while to rob Don Gonzales of his seat in the volante, he was forced to accept it even by the earnest request of Isabella herself, who seemed to tremble lest he was mortally wounded in their behalf.

Little did Don Gonzales know, at that time, what a flame he was feeding in the young officer's breast. He was too intently engaged in his own mind with the startling scenes through which he had just passed, and was exercised with too much gratitude towards Captain Bezan for his deliverance, to observe or realize any peculiarity of appearance in any other respect, or to question the propriety of placing him so intimately by the side of his lovely child. Isabella had never told her father, or indeed any one, of the circumstance of her having met Captain Bezan on the Plato. But the reader, who is aware of the scene referred to, can easily imagine with what feelings the soldier took his seat by her side, and secretly watched the anxious and assiduous glances that she gave his wounded arm and side, as well as the kind looks she bestowed upon his pallid face.

"I fear I annoy you," said the soldier, realizing his proximity to her on the seat.

"No, no, by no means. I pray you rest your arm here," said Isabella Gonzales, as she offered her rebosa supported in part by her own person!

"You are too kind—far too kind to me," said the wounded officer, faintly; for he was now really very weak from loss of blood and the pain of his wounds.

"Speak not, I beseech of you, but strive to keep your courage up till we can gain the aid of some experienced surgeon," she said, supporting him tenderly.

Thus the party drove on towards the city, by easy stages, where they arrived in safety, and left Captain Bezan to pursue his way to his barracks, which he did, not, however, until he had, like a faithful courier, reported to the governor—general the safe result of his mission to the south of the island.

The story of the gallant rescue was the theme of the hour for a period in Havana, but attacks from robbers on

The Heart's Secret

the road, under Tacon's governorship, were too common an occurrence to create any great wonder or curiosity among the inhabitants of the city. But Captain Bezan had got wounds that would make him remember the encounter for life, and now lay in a raging fever at his quarters in the infantry barracks of the Plaza des Armes.

CHAPTER V. THE WOUNDED SOLDIER.

THE fervor and heat of the mid-day atmosphere had been intense, but a most delightfully refreshing sea breeze had sprung up at last, and after fanning its way across the Gulf Stream, was dallying now with the palms and orange trees that so gracefully surrounded the marble statue of Ferdinand, in the midst of the Plaza, and ruffling the marble basin of water that bubbles forth from the graceful basin at its base. Light puffs of it, too, found their way into the invitingly open windows of the governor's palace, into an apartment which was improved by General Harero. Often pausing at the window to breathe in of the delightful atmosphere for a moment, he would again resume his irregular walk and seemingly absorbed in a dreamy frame of mind, quite unconscious of the outward world about him. At last he spoke, though only communing with himself, yet quite aloud:

"Strange, very strange, that this Captain Bezan should seem to stand so much in my way. Curse his luck, the old don and his daughter feel under infinite obligations to him already, and well they may, as to the matter of that. If it was not for the girl's extraordinary stock of pride, we should have her falling in love with this young gallant directly, and there would be an end to all my hopes and fancies. He's low enough, now, however, so my valet just told me, and ten to one, if his physician knows his case, as he pretends, he'll make a die of it. He is a gallant fellow, that's a fact, and brave as he is gallant. I may as well own the fact that's what makes me hate him so! But he should not have crossed my path, and served to blight my hopes, there's the rub. I like the man well enough as a soldier, hang it. I'd like half the army to be just like him—they'd be invincible; but he has crossed my interest, ay, my love; and if he does get up again and crosses me with Isabella Gonzales, why then—well, no matter, there are ways enough to remove the obstacle from my path.

"By the way," he continued, after crossing and re-crossing the room a few times, "what a riddle this Isabella Gonzales is; I wonder if she has got any heart at all. Here am I, who have gone scathless through the courts of beauty these many years, actually caught—surprised at last; for I do love the girl; and yet how archly she teases me! Sometimes I think within myself that I am about to win the goal, when drop goes the curtain, and she's as far away as ever. How queenly she looks, nevertheless. I had much rather be refused by such a woman, to my own mortification, than to succeed with almost any other, if only for the pleasure of looking into those eyes, and reading in silent language her poetical and ethereal beauty—I might be happy but for this fellow, this Captain Bezan; he troubles me. Though there's no danger of her loving him, yet he seems to stand in my way, and to divert her fancy. Thank Heaven, she's too proud to love one so humble."

Thus musing and talking aloud to himself, General Harero walked back and forth, and back and forth again in his apartment, until his orderly brought him the evening report of his division. A far different scene was presented on the other side of the great square, in the centre of which stands the shrubbery and fountain of the Plaza. Let the reader follow us now inside the massive stone walls of the Spanish barracks, to a dimly lighted room, where lay a wounded soldier upon his bed. The apartment gave token in its furniture of a very peculiar combination of literary and military taste. There were foils, long and short swords, pistols, hand pikes, flags, military boots and spurs; but there were also Shakspeare, Milton, the illustrated edition of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and a voluminous history of Spain, with various other prose and poetic volumes, in different languages. A guitar also lay carelessly in one corner, and a rich but faded bouquet of flowers filled a porcelain vase.

At the foot of the bed where the wounded soldier lay, stood a boy with a quivering lip and swimming eye, as he heard the sick man moan in his uneasy sleep. Close by the head of the bed sat an assistant—surgeon of the regiment, watching what evidently seemed to be the turning point as to the sufferer's chance for life or death. As the boy and the surgeon watched him thus, gradually the opiate just administered began to affect him, and he seemed at last to fall into the deep and quiet sleep that is generally indicated by a low, regular and uninterrupted respiration.

The boy had not only watched the wounded man, but had seemed also to half read the surgeon's thoughts, from time to time, and now marked the gleam of satisfaction upon his face as the medicine produced the desired effect upon the system of his patient.

The Heart's Secret

"How do you think Captain Bezan is, to-day?" whispered the boy, anxiously, as the surgeon's followed him noiselessly from the sick-room to the corridor without.

"Very low, master Ruez, very low indeed; it is the most critical period of his sickness; but he has gone finely into that last nap, thanks to the medicine, and if he will but continue under its influence thus for a few hours, we may look for an abatement of this burning thirst and fever, and then—"

"What, sir?" said the boy, eagerly, "what then?"

"Why, he may get over those wounds, but it's a severe case, and would be little less than a miracle. I've seen sicker men live, and I've seen those who seemed less sick die."

"Alas! then there is no way yet of deciding upon his case," said the boy.

"None, Master Ruez; but we'll hope for the best; that is all that can be done."

Ruez Gonzales walked out of the barracks and by the guard with a sad countenance, and whistling for Carlo, who had crouched by the parapet until his young master should come out, he turned his steps up the Calla de Mercaderes to his home. Ruez sought his sister's apartment, and throwing himself upon a lounge, seemed moody and unhappy. As he reclined thus, Isabella regarded him intently, as though she would read his thoughts without asking for them. There seemed to be some reason why she did not speak to him sooner, but at last she asked:

"Well, Ruez, how is Captain Bezan, to-day? have you been to the barracks to inquire?" She said this in an assumed tone of indifference, but it was only assumed.

"How is he?" repeated Ruez, after turning a quick glance of his soft blue eyes upon his sister's face, as though he would read her very soul. Isabella felt his keen glance, and almost blushed.

"Yes, brother, pray, how is Captain Bezan, to-day? do you not know?"

"His life hangs by a mere thread," continued the boy, sadly, resuming again his former position. "The surgeon told me that his recovery was very doubtful."

"Did he tell you that, Ruez?"

"Not those words, sister, but that which was equivalent to it, however."

"He is worse, then, much worse?" she continued, in a hasty tone of voice.

"Not worse, sister," replied Ruez. "I did not say that he was worse, but the fever rages still, and unless that abates within a few hours, death must follow."

Isabella Gonzales sat herself down at an open balcony and looked off on the distant country in silence, so long, that Ruez and the hound both fell asleep, and knew not that she at last left her seat. The warmth and enervating influence of the atmosphere almost requires one to indulge in a siesta daily, in these low latitudes and sunny regions of the earth.

"He is dying, then," said Isabella Gonzales, to herself, after having sought the silence and solitude of her own chamber, "dying and alone, far from any kindred voice or hand, or even friend, save those among his brothers in arms. And yet how much do we owe to him! He has saved all our lives—Ruez's first, and then both father's and mine; and in this last act of daring gallantry and bravery, he received his death wound. Alas! how fearful it seems to me, this strange picture. Would I could see and thank him once more—take from him any little commission that he might desire in his last moments to transmit to his distant home—for a sister, mother, or brother. Would that I could smooth his pillow and bathe his fevered brow; I know he loves me, and these attentions would be so grateful to him—so delightful to me. But alas! it would be considered a disgrace for me to visit him."

Let the reader distinctly understand the feelings that actuated the heart of the lovely girl. The idea of loving the wounded soldier had never entered the proud but now humbled Isabella's thoughts. Could such a thought have been by any means suggested to her, she would have spurned it at once; but it was the woman's sympathy that she felt for one who would have doubtless sacrificed his life for her and hers; it was a simple act of justice she would have performed; and the pearly tear that now wet her cheek, was that of sympathy, and of sympathy alone. Beautiful trait, how glorious thou art in all; but how doubly glorious in woman; because in her nature thou art most natural, and there thou findest the congenial associations necessary for thy full conception.

General Harero had judged Isabella Gonzales well when he said that there was no danger of her loving Lorenzo Bezan—she had too much pride!

But let us look once more into the sick room we so lately left, where the wounded soldier lies suffering from his wounds. A volante has just stopped at the barracks' doors, and a girl, whose dress betokens her to be a servant, steps out, and telling her errand to the corporal of the guard, is permitted to pass the sentinel, and is conducted to

The Heart's Secret

the sick man's room. She brings some cooling draughts for his parched lips, and fragrant waters with which to battle his fevered temples and burning forehead.

"Who sends these welcome gifts to Captain Bezan?" asked the assistant–surgeon.

"My lady, sir."

"And who is your lady, my good girl, if you please?" he asked.

"The Senorita Isabella Gonzales, sir," was the modest reply of the maid.

"Ah, yes; her brother has been here this afternoon, I remember," said the surgeon; "the sick man fell asleep then, and has not since awakened."

"Heaven grant the sleep may refresh him and restore his strength," said the girl.

"Amen, say I to that," continued the surgeon, "and amen says every man in the regiment."

"Is he so popular as that?" asked the girl, innocently.

"Popular, why he's the pet of the entire division. He's the best swordsman, best scholar, best—in short we could better lose half the other officers than Captain Bezan."

"Do you think him any better than he was this morning?"

"The sleep is favorable, highly favorable," replied the surgeon, approaching the bedside; "but in my judgment of the case, it must entirely depend upon the state in which he wakes."

"Is there fear of waking him, do you think?" asked the girl, in a whisper, as she drew nearer to the bed, and looked upon the high, pale forehead and remarkably handsome features of the young soldier. Though the few days of confinement which he had suffered, and the acute pain he had endured by them, had hollowed his checks, yet he was handsome still.

"No," replied the surgeon, to her question; "he will sleep quite long enough from the opiate, quite as long as I wish; and if he should wake even now, it would not be too soon."

"How very slightly he breathes," continued the girl, observantly.

"Very; but it is a relief to see him breathe in that way," replied the surgeon.

"Stay, did he not murmur something, then?" asked the maid.

"Possibly," replied the surgeon. "He has talked constantly during his delirium. Pray, my good girl, does he know your mistress very well?"

"I think not," was the reply. "But why do you ask that?"

"Because he seems constantly to dream and talk about her night and day. Indeed she is all he has spoken of since the height of his fever was upon him."

"Indeed!" said the girl, musing at the surgeon's words abstractedly.

"Have you not heard your mistress speak of him at all?"

"Yes, that is, he once did the family some important service. Do you say that he talked of Senorita Isabella in the hours of his delirium?"

"Yes, and in looking into his dressing–case, a few days since, to find some lint for his wounds, I discovered this," said the surgeon, showing the girl a miniature, painted on ivory with great skill and beauty. "I think it must be a likeness of the Senorita Isabella," continued the surgeon, "though I have never seen her to know her but once."

"It is indeed meant for her," said the girl, eagerly scanning the soft and delicate picture, which represented the Senorita Isabella Gonzales as sitting at an open window and gazing forth on the soft, dreamy atmosphere of a tropical sunset.

"You think it is like her?"

"O, very."

"Well, I was sure that it was meant for the lady when I first saw it."

"May I bathe his temples with this Florida water?" asked the girl, as she observed the sick man to move slightly and to moan.

"Yes, it will have a tendency to rouse him gently, and it is now time for him to wake."

The girl smoothed back the dark locks from the soldier's brow, and with her hands bathed his marble–like forehead and temples as gently as she might have done had he been an infant. The stimulating influence of the delicate spirits she was using was most delightful to the senses of the sick man, and a soft smile for a moment breathed his lips, as half awake and half dreaming, he returned thanks for the kindness, mingled with Isabella's

The Heart's Secret

name.

The girl bent over his couch to hear the words, and the surgeon saw a tear drop upon the sick man's hand from the girl's eyes as she stood there! In a moment more the soldier seemed to arouse, and uttered a long deep sigh, as though relieved from some heavy weight that had long been oppressing him, both mentally and physically. He soon opened his eyes, and looked languidly about him, as if striving to recall his situation, and what had prostrated him thus.

The girl stepped immediately back from the bedside, as she observed these tokens, and dropping the rebosa that had been heretofore confined, veil-like to the crown of her head, and partially screened her features, but she showed most unmistakable signs of delight, as she read in the soldier's eyes that reason had once more returned to her throne, and that Lorenzo Bezan was once more rational.

"How beautiful!" uttered the surgeon, half aloud, as he stood gazing at the girl. "If the mistress be as lovely as the maid, no wonder Captain Bezan has talked of her in his delirium!"

"Step hither, step hither, he is awake!" whispered the girl to the surgeon.

"And his reason too has returned," said the professional man, as soon as his eyes rested on the wounded soldier's face. "There is hope now!"

"Thank Heaven for its infinite mercy!" said the girl, with an earnest though tremulous voice, as she gathered her rebosa about her face and prepared to depart.

"He will recover now?" she asked, once more, as she turned towards the surgeon.

"With care and good nursing we may hope so," was the reply of the attendant, who still looked earnestly into the face of the inquirer as he spoke.

"My lady knew not the pecuniary condition of Captain Bezan at this time, and desired that this purse might be devoted to his convenience and comfort; but she also desires that this may not be known to him. May I trust to you, sir, in this little matter?"

"It will give me great pleasure to keep the secret, and to improve the purse solely for the sick man's individual benefit," was the reply.

"Thank you, sir; I see you are indeed his friend," she answered, as she bowed low and withdrew.

Scarcely had the door closed after the visitor, before the surgeon, turning hastily once more to the miniature he had shown, examined it in various lights, now carefully within a part shaded by the hand, and now as a whole, and now near to, and then at a distance.

"I more than suspected it," he exclaimed, with emphasis; "and now I know it; that lady was Senorita Isabella Gonzales, the belle of Havana!"

And so indeed it was. Unable longer to restrain her desire to see him who had so infinitely served the interests of herself and her father's house, the proud girl had smothered every adverse prompting in her bosom, and donning her dressing-maid's attire, had thus dressed in humble costume, stepped into a volante, and ordering the calesaro to drive to the infantry barracks, where she knew the sick man was, had entered as we have seen, under pretext of bringing necessities from her pretended mistress to the wounded soldier. Her scheme had succeeded infinitely well, nor would she have betrayed herself to even the surgeon's observant eye, had it not been for that single tear!

"What angel was that?" whispered the sick man, to his attendant, who now approached his bedside to administer some cooling draught to his parched lips.

"You have been dreaming, my dear fellow," said the discreet surgeon, cautiously, "and are already much better; keep as quiet as possible, and we will soon have you out again. Here, captain, drink of this fruit water, it will refresh you."

Too weak to argue or even to talk at all, the sick man drank as he was desired, and half closed his eyes again, as if he thought by thus doing he might once more bring back the sweet vision which had just gladdened his feeble senses.

Like a true-hearted fellow as he was, the surgeon resolved not to reveal the lady's secret to any one—not even to his patient; for he saw that this was her earnest desire, and she had confided in part to him her errand there. But those who saw the surgeon in the after part of that day, marked that he bore a depressed and thoughtful countenance.

Isabella Gonzales had filled his vision, and very nearly his heart, also, by her exquisite loveliness and beauty!

CHAPTER VI. THE CHALLENGE.

THE Tacon Theatre is one of the largest in the world, and is situated in the Paseo, just outside the city walls. You enter the parquet and first row of boxes from the level of the street, and above this are four ranges of boxes, besides seats in the parquet for six hundred persons. The gildings are elaborate and beautiful, and the frescoes are done by the first Italian artists; the whole being brilliantly lighted by an immense chandelier in the centre, and lesser ones pendant from the half moon of boxes, and supplied with gas. It is a superb establishment, and when it is filled with the beauty and fashion of the city, it is a brilliant sight indeed.

It is nearly a month subsequent to the scene that closed the last chapter of our story, that we would carry the reader with us within the brilliantly lighted walls of the Tacon Theatre. How lively and gay is the prospect that presents itself to the eye—the glittering jewelry and diamonds of the fair senor's and senoritas, casting back the brilliant light, and rivalled in lustre by the sparkle of a thousand eyes of jet. The gilded and jewelled fans rustle audibly (what would a Spanish or Creole lady do without a fan?)—the orchestra dashes off in a gay and thrilling overture, intermingled by the voices, here and there, of merry groups of the audience, while the stately figures of the soldiers on duty are seen, with their many-colored dresses and caps, amid the throng and at the rear of the boxes.

In a centre box of the first tier sits Senorita Isabella Gonzales, with her father, brother, General Harero, and a party of friends. All eyes are turned towards the peerless beauty—those of the ladies with envy at her extraordinary charms of person, and those of the young cavaliers and gentlemen with undisguised admiration at the picture of loveliness which met their eyes. Isabella herself sat with an easy and graceful air of unconsciousness, bowing low to the meaningless compliments and remarks of General Harero, and now smiling at some pleasantry of Ruez who was close to her side, and now again regarding for a moment the tall, manly figure of an officer near the proscenium box, who was on duty there, and evidently the officer of the evening. This may sound odd to a republican, but no assembly, no matter how unimportant, is permitted, except under the immediate eye and supervision of the military.

"There is Captain Bezan," said Ruez, with undisguised pleasure, pointing towards the proscenium box where the young officer stood.

"Yes, I see him, Ruez," replied Isabella, "and it is the first time he has been out on duty, I think, since his dangerous and protracted illness."

"I know it is the first time," said the boy, "and I don't think he's hardly able to be out now. How very pale he is looking, Isabella."

"Do you think he's very pale, Ruez?" she asked, turning towards the soldier, whose arm and sword were now outstretched, indicating some movement to a file of soldiers on the other side.

"He's too ill, I should think, to be out in the night air."

"One would certainly think so," answered Isabella.

"His company was ordered out to-night," said Ruez, "and though the surgeon told him to remain in, he said he must be with his command."

"You seem to know his business almost as well as himself, Master Ruez," said General Harero, who had overheard the remarks relating to Captain Bezan.

"The captain and I are great friends, famous friends," replied Ruez, instantly. "He's a noble fellow, and just my idea of what a soldier should be. Don't you think him a fine soldier, General Harero?" asked the boy, most frankly.

"Humph!" ejaculated the general, "why, yes, he's good enough for aught I know, professionally. Not quite rough and tough enough for a thorough bred one, I think," was the reply of his superior, who was plainly watching Isabella Gonzales's eyes while he spoke to the boy, and who was anything but pleased to see how often she glanced at Captain Bezan.

"I don't know what you may mean by rough and tough, general," said Ruez, with evident feeling evinced in

The Heart's Secret

his voice; "but I know, very well, that Captain Bezan is as brave as a lion, and I don't believe there is a man in your service who can swim with such weight as he can do."

"May be not," replied the general, with assumed indifference.

"Then why say that he's not rough and tough? that means something," continued the boy, with not a little pertinacity in defence of his new friend.

"There's some difference, let me tell you, Master Ruez, between facing an enemy with blazing gunpowder before your eyes, and merely swimming a while in cold water."

"The very wounds that came so near proving fatal to Captain Bezan, prove that he can fight, general, as well as swim," said Ruez, rather smartly, in reply, while Isabella Gonzales glanced at her brother with evident tokens of satisfaction in her face.

"You are enthusiastic in your friend's behalf," said General Harero, coldly.

"And well I may be, since I not only owe him my own life, but that of my dear sister and father," continued Ruez, quite equal to the general's remark in any instance.

"Certainly, you are right, Master Ruez," said General Harero, biting his lips, as he saw that Isabella was regarding him with more than ordinary attention.

In the meantime Lorenzo Bezan remained, as in duty bound, at his post, while many an admiring eye was resting upon his fine figure and martial bearing. He was quite unconscious of being the subject of such particular remark and criticism within the bearing of her he so nearly worshipped—the beautiful Isabella Gonzales. Though his heart was with her every moment, and his thoughts were never off the box, even where she sat, yet it was only now and then that he permitted himself to turn his eyes, as though by accident, towards Don Gonzales and his daughter. He seemed to feel that General Harero was particularly regarding him, and he strove to be less thoughtful of Isabella, and if possible, more observant of his regular duty. It is the duty of the officer of the night for the occasion, to fill the post during the performance, where the young officer now stood, as it commanded a view of the entire house, and was the point, where, by an order from him, he could at once summon a much larger force under arms than that which under ordinary circumstances was required. Each division of the guard was set from this point, therefore Captain Bezan, as was his custom, remained here during the performance.

"It must be very tedious to stay thus standing just there," remarked Ruez, pointing to Captain Bezan, and speaking to Isabella.

"I should think so," was the reply of his sister, who had often turned that way, to the no small annoyance of the observant General Harero.

"A soldier's duty," replied the general, "should content him with his post."

It was nearly the middle of the evening's entertainment, when turning his eyes towards the box occupied by Don Gonzales and his party, Captain Bezan caught the eye of Isabella Gonzales, and at the same time observed distinctly the peculiar wave of the fan, with which a Spanish lady invites in a friendly manner the approach of a friend of the opposite sex. He could not be mistaken, and yet was it possible that the belle of all that proud assemblage deigned openly to notice and compliment him thus in public? Impelled by the ardor of his love, and the hope that he had rightly construed the signal, he approached the box from the rear, and stepping to its back, gave some indication to one of his orderlies sufficiently loud in tone to cause Isabella and her father to turn their heads, as they at once recognized the voice of the young officer.

"Ah! Captain Bezan," said Don Gonzales, heartily, as he caught the young officer's eye, "glad to see you once more with epaulets on—upon my soul I am."

"Thank you, sir," said the soldier, first saluting in due form his superior, and then bowing low and gracefully to Isabella Gonzales, who honored him with a gracious smile.

"You are looking comparatively well, captain," said Don Gonzales, kindly.

"O yes, sir, I am as well as ever, now," replied the officer, cheerfully.

Ruez Gonzales loved Lorenzo Bezan like a brother; first, because he had so materially served him at imminent peril of his own life, and secondly, because he saw in him just such traits of character as attracted his young heart, and aroused it to a spirit of emulation. With the privilege of boyhood, therefore, he sprang over the seats, half upsetting General Harero to get at the young officer's side, which, having accomplished, he seized his hand familiarly. General Harero frowned at this familiarity, and his face grew doubly dark and frowning, as he saw now how closely Isabella was observing the young officer all the while.

The Heart's Secret

"I trust you find yourself quite recovered, captain, from your severe illness," said Isabella, reaching by her father, as she addressed Lorenzo Bezan kindly.

"I am quite recovered, lady; better, if possible, than before," he replied, respectfully. "Master Ruez has been a constant nurse to me, thoughtful and kind," he continued, as he looked down upon the boy's handsome features with real affection lighting up his own pale face.

Ruez only drew the closer to his side at these words, while his father, Don Gonzales, watched both the soldier and his boy with much interest for a moment, then turning to General Harero, he made some earnest and complimentary remark, evidently referring to Captain Bezan, though uttered in a low tone of voice, which seemed to increase the cloud on the general's brow.

But the young soldier was too much interested in gazing upon the lovely features of Isabella, to notice this; he seemed almost entranced by the tender vision of beauty that was before him. At the same moment some slight disturbance occurred in a distant part of the extensive building, which afforded a chance for General Harero to turn quickly to the young soldier, and in a sharp tone say:

"Your duty calls you hence, sir!"

For it moment the blood mantled to the officer's face at the tone of this remark, but suppressing his feelings, whatever they might be, with a respectful acknowledgement of the order, Lorenzo Bezan hastened to the quarter from whence the noise had come, and by a simple direction obviated their trouble immediately. But he remembered the bitter and insulting air of his superior, and it cut him to the quick, the more keenly too as having been given in the presence of Isabella Gonzales.

As he returned from this trifling duty, he necessarily again passed the box where were Don Gonzales, amid his party, and seeing Ruez standing there awaiting his return, he again paused for a moment to exchange a word with the boy, and once more received a pleasant greeting from Isabella and her father. At this but reasonable conduct, General Harero seemed nettled and angry beyond all control, and turning once more towards Lorenzo Bezan, with a face black with suppressed rage, said:

"It strikes me, sir, that Captain Bezan would consult his own interest, and be best performing his ordinary duty by maintaining his post at the proscenium!"

"I proposed to return there immediately, General Harero, and stopped here but for one moment," said the young officer, with a burning cheek, at the intended insult.

"Shall I put my words in the form of an order?" continued General Harero, seeing that Bezan paused to assist Ruez once more over the seats to his position in the box.

"It is not necessary, general," replied the officer, biting his lips with vexation.

"I declare, general," said Isabella, unable longer to remain quiet at his repeated insults to the young officer, "you soldiers are so very peremptory, that you half disconcert me."

"It is sometimes necessary," was the quick and stern reply, "to be prompt with young and headstrong officers who do not well understand their duty, or rather, I may say, who knowing their duty, fail to perform it," emphasizing the last part of the sentence.

This was intended not only for the lady's ear, but also for that of Lorenzo Bezan, who barely succeeded in commanding his feelings for the moment, so far as to turn silently away to return to his post of observation. The effect of the scene was not lost upon the high-spirited beauty. Isabella had marked well the words and tone of voice with which General Harero spoke, and she saw, too, the effect of his words upon the free, manly spirit of the young soldier, and from that moment, either intentionally, or by accident, she paid no further attention during the whole evening to General Harero, neither turning towards him, nor even speaking to him at all.

The general, of course, observed this particularly, desiring as he did to stand in the best possible light as it regarded Isabella's favor, and imputing her conduct to the presence of Captain Bezan, and the conversation that had taken place relative to his duty between Captain Bezan and himself; he hated the young officer more than ever, as being in some degree the cause of preventing the consummation of his hopes as it regarded the favor of the lady. He had long cherished a regard for the beautiful daughter of Don Gonzales, for her personal charms, as well as the rich coffers which her father could boast. As the reader has already surmised, he had been a constant and ardent, though unsuccessful suitor, for no inconsiderable period. It will not, therefore, be wondered at, that he should have felt very sensitive upon this point. As he passed Lorenzo Bezan, therefore, at the close of the performance, in going out of the theatre that night, while still in the most immediate proximity to Isabella

The Heart's Secret

Gonzales, her father, and the party with them, he took occasion to speak very loud, and in the most peremptory manner to him, saying:

"I find you exceedingly lax, Captain Bezan, as it regards the exercise of your duty and command. You will report yourself to me, after morning parade, for such orders as shall be deemed proper for you under the circumstances, as a public reproof for dereliction from duty."

"Yes, general," replied the young officer, with the usual salute to his superior.

Still curbing his feelings, the young officer contented himself with a kind glance from Isabella Gonzales, who had overheard the last act of petty tyranny on the general's part, and for that very reason redoubled her passing notice and smiles upon Captain Bezan. The officer marched his company to their barracks, and then sought the silence and quiet of his own room, to think over the events of the past evening.

His temples burned still with the angry flush that the insult of his superior officer had produced there, and throwing himself into a chair, he recalled the whole scene at the theatre, from his answering Isabella's friendly signal, until the time when General Harero passed him at the entrance, and for the last time reproved him.

He weighed the cause of these repeated attacks upon him by his superior, and could at once divine the cause of them. That was obvious to his mind at the first glance. He could not but perceive the strong preference that General Harero evinced for Isabella Gonzales, nor could he disguise the fact to his own heart that she cared not a farthing for him. It required but a very simple capacity to understand this; any party, not interested in the general's favor, could easily discern it. But the general counted upon his high rank, and also upon the fact that his family was a good one, though his purse was not very long.

Lorenzo Bezan remembered not alone the annoyance of that evening. He had not yet forgotten the insult from the general in the Paseo, and coupling that with other events, he saw very well that his commanding officer was decidedly jealous of him. He saw, too, that there was not any chance of matters growing any better, but that on the contrary they must continue to grow worse and worse, since he had determined, come what might, he should pursue his love with the fair lady Isabella.

Could he bear to be insulted thus at every turn by such a man as General Harero? No! He felt himself, in courage, intellectual endowments, birth, ay, everything but the rank of a soldier, to be more than his equal. His heart beat quickly when he recollected that the latter taunt and threat had been given in the presence of Don Gonzales and his daughter. The malignity, the unfairness of this attack upon him at this time, was shameful, and deserved to be punished. Brooding upon these things alone and at a late hour of the night, he at last wrought himself up to such a point, perhaps in some degree aggravated by his late wounds, which were hardly yet healed, that he determined he would challenge General Harero to martial and mortal conflict.

True this was preposterous in one of his rank, as contending against another so vastly his superior in position and influence; but his feelings had begun to assume an uncontrollable character; he could not bear to think that he had been thus insulted before Isabella Gonzales. It seemed to him that she would think less of him if he did not resent and punish such an insult. In the heat of his resentment, therefore, he sat down and wrote to his superior as follows:

"GENERAL HARERO: Sir—Having received, at different periods and under peculiar circumstances, insults from you that neither become me as a gentleman tamely to submit to, nor you as a soldier to give, I do hereby demand satisfaction. It would be worse than folly in me to pretend that I do not understand the incentive that governs you—the actuating motive that has led to these attacks upon me. In my duty as an officer I have never failed in the least; this you know very well, and have even allowed before now, to my very face. Your attacks upon me are, therefore, plainly traceable to a spirit of jealousy as to my better success with the Senorita Gonzales than yourself. Unless I greatly mistake, the lady herself has discovered this spirit within your breast.

"Now, sir, the object of this note is to demand of you to lay aside the station you hold, and to forget our relative ranks as officers in the Spanish army, and to meet me on the platform of our individual characters as gentlemen, and render me that satisfaction for the insult which you have placed upon me, which I have a right to demand. A line from you and a friend can easily settle this business. LORENZO BEZAN."

This note was carefully sealed and addressed, and so despatched as to reach its destination early on the following morning. It was a most unfortunate epistle for Captain Bezan, and could the young officer have calmly considered the subject, he would never have been so imprudent as to send it to his superior. So long as he bore the petty annoyances of General Harero without murmuring he was strong, that the step he had now taken greatly

The Heart's Secret

weakened his cause and position. Perhaps he partly realized this as he sent the note away on the subsequent morning; but he felt too much pride to relent, and so only braced himself to meet the result.

The note gave General Harero what he wanted, and placed Captain Bezan completely at his mercy. It gave him the opportunity to do that which he most desired, viz., to arrest and imprison the young officer. Consulting with the governor general, merely by way of strengthening himself, he took his opinion upon the subject before he made any open movement in the premises. This was a wary step, and served in some degree to rob the case of any appearance of personality that it might otherwise have worn to Tacon's eye.

As it was, the wary old soldier felt some degree of suspicion in the matter, as was evident by his remarks to the general, who brought the charge. It did not seem very natural that one who had just experienced such favor and promotion should so early be guilty of a breach of discipline. He was accustomed to judge of men and matters with care, and judiciously, and for this reason he now rested his head upon his hand for a moment, upon the table by his side, and after a pause of some minutes thus passed in silence, during which he had considered the verbal charge brought against Lorenzo Bezan by his commanding officer, he once more cast a searching glance upon General Harero. He had never detected him in any small or unfair business, but he had suspected him of being capable of such things.

"Is this not the young man whom I have lately promoted for gallantry?" asked the governor-general.

"Excellency, yes."

"It is strange that he should be guilty of such insubordination."

"Very strange, excellency."

"You know not the reason that has induced this conduct?"

"No—that is—" continued General Harero, as he saw Tacon's piercing eye bent upon him, "I can easily presume."

"Have you the letter of challenge that Captain Bezan sent?"

"Excellency, yes."

"I will see it."

"Excellency, at your pleasure," said the general, hoping not to have been obliged to show this document.

"Now, if you please, general."

"At once, excellency."

General Harero produced the letter, and handed it with something very like a blush tinging his sunburnt cheek, to his commander-in-chief. Tacon read it slowly, pausing now and then to re-read a line, and then, remarked, as he slowly folded it up once more:

"A love affair."

"Why, your excellency will easily understand that the young officer has dared to lift his eyes to one above his rank, and she cares nothing for him. His causes for complaint are all imaginary."

"Well, be this as it may, in that I shall not interfere. He has been guilty of a serious breach of discipline and must suffer for it. You may take the necessary steps at once in the matter, general."

"Excellency, yes," said General Harero, hastening away with secret delight, and at once taking such measures as should carry out his own wishes and purposes.

The result of the matter was, that before ten o'clock that morning the note conveying the challenge was answered by an aid-de-camp and a file of soldiers, who arrested Captain Bezan for insubordination, and quietly conducted him to the damp underground cells of the military prison, where he was left to consider the new position in which he found himself, solitary and alone, with a straw bed, and no convenience or comfort about him. And it is not surprising that such a situation should have been particularly suggestive to a mind so active as that of Lorenzo Bezan.

CHAPTER VII. THE PRISONER.

TO know and fully realize the bitter severity exercised in the Spanish prisons, both at Madrid and in Havana, one must have witnessed it. Cold, dark and dreary cells, fit only to act as supports to the upper and better lighted portions of the dismal structure, are filled by those persons who have incurred in any way the displeasure of the military board of commission. Here, in one of the dampest and most dreary cells, immured with lizards, tarantulas, and other vile and unwholesome reptiles, Captain Bezan, but so very recently—risen from a sick bed, and yet smarting under his wounds, found himself. He could now easily see the great mistake he had made in thus addressing General Harero as he had done, and also, as he knew very well the rigor of the service to which he was attached when he considered for a moment, he had not the least possible doubt that his sentence would be death.

As a soldier he feared not death; his profession and experience, which had already made him familiar with the fell destroyer in every possible form and shape, had taught him a fearlessness in this matter; but to leave the air that Isabella Gonzales breathed, to be thus torn away from the bright hopes that she had given rise to in his breast, was indeed agony of soul to him now. In the horizon of his love, for the first time since his heart had known the passion, the sun had risen, and the genial rays of hope, like young spring, had commended to warm and vivify his soul.

Until within a very short time she whom he loved was to him as some distant star, that might be worshipped in silence, but not approached; but now, by a series of circumstances that looked like providential interference in his behalf, immense barriers had been removed. Thinking over these matters, he doubly realized the misstep he had taken, and the heart of the lone prisoner was sad in the depths of his dreary dungeon.

Many days passed on, and Lorenzo Bezan counted each hour as one less that he should have to live upon the earth. At first all intercourse was strictly denied him with any person outside the prison walls, but one afternoon he was delighted as the door of his cell was thrown open, and in the next moment Ruez sprang into his arms.

"My dear, dear friend!" said the boy, with big tears starting from his eyes, and his voice trembling with mingled emotions of pleasure and of grief.

"Why, Ruez," said the prisoner, no less delighted than was the boy, "how was it possible for you to gain admittance to me? You are the first person I have seen, except the turnkey, in my prison."

"Everybody refused me; General Harero refused father, who desired that I might come and see if he could not in some way serve you. At last I went to Tacon himself. O, I do love that man! Well, I told him General Harero would not admit me, and when I told him all—"

"All of what, Ruez?"

"Why, about you and me, and sister and father. He said, 'Boy, you are worthy of confidence and love; here, take this, it will pass you to the prison, and to Captain Bezan's cell;' and he wrote me this on a card, and said I could come and see you by presenting it to the guard, when I pleased."

"Tacon is just, always just," said Lorenzo Bezan, "and you, Ruez, are a dear and true friend." As the soldier said this, he turned to dash away a tear—confinement and late sickness had rendered him still weak.

"Captain?"

"Master Ruez."

"I hate General Harero."

"Why so?"

"Because sister says it is by his influence that you are here."

"Did Isabella say that?"

"Yes."

"Well, tell me of your father and sister, Ruez. You know I am a hermit here."

Lorenzo Bezan had already been in prison for more than ten days, when Ruez thus visited him, and the boy had much to tell him: how General Harero had called repeatedly at the house, and Isabella had totally refused to see him; and how his father had tried to reason with General Harero about Captain Bezan, and how the general

The Heart's Secret

had declared that nothing but blood could wash out the stain of insubordination.

With the pass that the governor-general had given him, Ruez Gonzales came often to visit the imprisoned soldier, but as the day appointed for the trial drew near, Ruez grew more and more sad and thoughtful at each visit, for, boy though he was, he felt certain of Lorenzo Bezan's fate. He was not himself unfamiliar with military examinations, for he was born and brought up within earshot of the spot where these scenes were so often enacted by order of the military commission, and he trembled for his dearly loved friend.

At length the trial came; trial! we might with more propriety call it a farce, such being the actual character of an examination before the military commission of Havana, where but one side is heard, and condemnation is sure to follow, as was the case so lately with one of our own countrymen (Mr. Thrasher), and before him the murder by this same tribunal of fifty Americans in cold blood! Trial, indeed! Spanish courts do not try people; they condemn them to suffer—that is their business.

But let us confine ourselves to our own case; and suffice it to say, that Captain Bezan was found guilty, and at once condemned to die. His offence was rank insubordination, or mutiny, as it was designated in the charge; but in consideration of former services, and his undoubted gallantry and bravery, the sentence read to the effect, as a matter of extraordinary leniency to him, that it should be permitted for him to choose the mode of his own death—that is, between the garote and being shot by his comrades.

"Let me die like a soldier," replied the young officer, as the question was thus put to him, before the open court, as to the mode of death which he chose.

"You are condemned, then, Lorenzo Bezan," said the advocate of the court, "to be shot by the first file of your own company, upon the execution field."

This sentence was received with a murmur of disapprobation from the few spectators in the court, for the condemned was one of the most beloved men in the service. But the young officer bowed his head calmly to the sentence, though at close observer might have seen a slight quiver of his handsome lips, as he struggled for an instant with a single inward thought. What that thought was, the reader can easily guess,—it was the last link that bound him to happiness.

Lorenzo Bezan had no fear of death, and perhaps estimated his life quite as lightly as any other person who made a soldier's calling his profession; but since his heart had known the tender promptings of love, life had discovered new charms for him; he lived and breathed in a new atmosphere. Before he had received the kind considerations of the peerless daughter of Don Gonzales, he could have parted the thread of his existence with little regret. But now, alas! it was very different; life was most sweet to him, because it was so fully imbued with love and hope in the future.

Wild as the idea might have seemed to any one else, the young officer had promised his own heart, that with ordinary success, and provided no extraordinary difficulty should present itself in his path, to win the heart and love of the proud and beautiful Isabella Gonzales. He had made her character and disposition his constant study, was more familiar, perhaps, with her strong and her weak points than was she herself, and believed that he knew how best to approach her before whom so many, vastly higher than himself, had knelt in vain, and truth to say, fortune seemed to have seconded his hopes.

It was the death of all these hopes, the dashing to earth of the fairy future he had dreamed of, that caused his proud lip to tremble for a moment. It was no fear of bodily ill.

General Harero had accomplished his object, and had triumphed over the young officer, whose impetuosity had placed him within his power. The sentence of death cancelled his animosity to Lorenzo Bezan, and he now thought that a prominent cause of disagreement and want of success between the Senorita Isabella Gonzales and himself was removed. Thus reasoning upon the subject, and thus influenced, he called at the house of Don Gonzales on the evening following that of Captain Bezan's sentence, expecting to be greeted with the usual courtesy that had been extended to him. Ruez was the first one whom he met of the household, on being ushered to the drawing-room by a slave.

"Ah! Master Ruez, how do you do?" said the general, pleasantly.

"Not well at all!" replied the boy, sharply, and with undisguised dislike.

"I'm sorry to learn that. I trust nothing serious has affected you."

"But there has, though," said the boy, with spirit; "it is the rascality of human nature;" at the same moment he turned his back coldly on the general and left the room.

The Heart's Secret

"Well, that's most extraordinary," mused the general, to himself; "the boy meant to hit me, beyond a doubt."

"Ah, Don Gonzales," he said to the father, who entered the room a moment after, "glad to see you; have had some unpleasant business on my hands that has kept me away, you see."

"Yes, very unpleasant," said the old gentleman, briefly and coldly.

"Well, it's all settled now, Don Gonzales, and I trust we shall be as good friends as ever."

Receiving no reply whatever to this remark, and being left to himself, General Harero looked after Don Gonzales, who had retired to a balcony in another part of the room, for a moment, and then summoning a slave, sent his card to Senorita Isabella, and received as an answer that she was engaged. Repulsed in every quarter, he found himself most awkwardly situated, and thought it about time to beat a retreat.

As General Harero rose and took his leave in the most formal manner, he saw that his pathway towards the Senorita Isabella's graces was by no means one of sunshine alone, but at that moment it presented to his view a most cloudy horizon. The unfortunate connection of himself with the sentence of Captain Bezan, now assumed its true bearing in his eye. Before, he had only thought of revenge, and the object also of getting rid of his rival. Now he fully realized that it had placed him in a most unpleasant situation, as it regarded the lady herself. Indeed he felt that had not the matter gone so far, he would gladly have compromised the affair by a public reprimand to the young officer, such as should sufficiently disgrace him publicly to satisfy the general's pride. But it was too late to regret now, too late for him to turn back—the young soldier must die!

In the meantime Lorenzo Bezan was remanded to his dismal prison and cell, and was told to prepare for the death that would soon await him. One week only was allowed him to arrange such matters as he desired, and then he was informed that he would be shot by his comrades in the execution field, at the rear of the city barracks. It was a sad and melancholy fate for so young and brave an officer; but the law was imperative, and there was no reprieve for him.

The cold and distant reception that General Harero had received at Don Gonzales's house since the sentence had been publicly pronounced against Captain Lorenzo Bezan, had afforded unmistakable evidence to him that if his victim perished on account of the charge he had brought against him, his welcome with Isabella and her father was at an end. But what was to be done? As we have said, he had gone too far to retrace his steps in the matter. Now if it were but possible to get out of the affair in some way, he said to himself, he would give half his fortune. Puzzling over this matter, the disappointed general paced back and forth in his room until past midnight, and at last having tired himself completely, both mentally and physically, he carelessly threw off his clothes, and summoning his orderly, gave some unimportant order, and prepared to retire for the night.

But scarcely had he locked his door and drawn the curtains of his windows, when a gentle knock at the door caused him once more to open it, when an orderly led in a person who was closely wrapped up in a cloak, and after saluting respectfully left the new comer alone with his superior.

"Well, sir, did you obtain me those keys?" asked General Harero.

"I did, and have them here, general," was the reply.

"You say there is no need of my entering at the main postern."

"None. This first key opens the concealed gate in the rear of the guard house, and this the door that leads to the under range of the prison. You will require no guide after what I have already shown you. But you have promised me the fifty ounces."

"I have."

"And will hold me harmless?"

"At all hazards."

"Then here are the keys."

"Stay; it would be as well for you to be about at the time specified, to avert any suspicions or immediate trouble."

"I will be on the alert, general. You may rely upon me in this business, since you pay for my services so liberally."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, general."

And gathering his cloak about him, the stranger vanished stealthily through the door, which General Harero closed and locked after him. Having consummated the preliminaries to some piece of rascality or secret business

that he did not care to make public.

More than half of the time allotted to the prisoner for preparation in closing up his connection with life, had already transpired since his sentence had been pronounced, and he had now but three days left him to live. Ruez Gonzales, improving the governor-general's pass, had visited the young officer daily, bringing with him such luxuries and necessities to the condemned as were not prohibited by the rules of the prison, and which were most grateful to him. More so, because, though this was never intimated to him, or, indeed, appeared absolutely obvious, he thought that oftentimes Isabella had selected these gifts, if indeed she had not prepared them with her own hands. A certain delicacy of feeling prevented him from saying as much to her brother, or of even questioning him upon any point, however trivial, as to any matter of a peculiar nature concerning Isabella. Sometimes he longed to ask the boy about the subject, but he could not bring himself to do so; he felt that it would be indelicate and unpleasant to Isabella, and therefore he limited himself to careful inquiries concerning her health and such simple matters as he might touch upon, without risk of her displeasure.

Lorenzo Bezan took the announcement of his fate calmly. He felt it his duty to pray for strength, and he did so, and sought in the holy silence and confidence of prayer for that abiding and inward assurance that may carry us through the darkness and the valley of death. Ruez, poor boy, was almost distracted at the realization of the young soldier's fate. Boy though he was, he had yet the feelings, in many respects, of manhood, and though before Lorenzo Bezan he said nothing of his coming fate, and indeed struggled to appear cheerful, and to impart a pleasant influence to the prisoner, yet when once out of his presence, he would cry for the hour together, and Isabella even feared for the child's reason, unless some change should take place ere long.

When his mother was taken from him, and their home made desolate by the hand of death, Ruez, in the gentleness and tenderness of his heart, had been brought so low by grief, that it was almost miraculous that he had survived. The influence of that sorrow, as we have before observed, had never left him. His father's assiduous care and kindness, and Isabella's gentle and sisterly love for him, had in part healed the wound, when now his young and susceptible heart was caused thus to bleed anew. He loved Lorenzo Bezan with a strange intensity of feeling. There was an affinity in their natures that seemed to draw them together, and it was strange that strength of consolation and happiness that weak and gentle boy imparted to the stern soldier!

In his association of late with Ruez, the condemned officer felt purified and carried back to childhood and his mother's knee; the long vista of eventful years was blotted out from his heart, the stern battles he had fought in, the blood he had seen flow like water, his own deep scars and many wounds, the pride and ambition of his military career, all were forgotten, and by Ruez's side he was perhaps more of a child at heart than the boy himself. How strange are our natures; how susceptible to outward influence; how attunable to harshness or to plaintive notes! We are but as the 'olian harp, and the winds of heaven play upon us what times they will!

It was midnight in the prison of Havana; nought could be heard by the listening ear save the steady pace of the sentinels stationed at the various angles of the walls and entrances of the courtyard that surrounded the gloomy structure. It was a calm, tropical light, and the moon shone so brightly as to light up the grim walls and heavy arches of the building, almost as bright as if it were day. Now and then a sentinel would pause, and resting upon his musket, look off upon the silvery sea, and perhaps dream of his distant Castilian home, then starting again, he would rouse himself, shoulder the weapon, and pace his round with measured stride. Lorenzo Bezan, the condemned, had knelt down and offered up a prayer, silent but sincere, for Heaven's protection in the fearful emergency that beset him; he prayed that he might die like a brave man, yet with a right feeling and reconciled conscience with all mankind. Then throwing himself upon his coarse straw bed, that barely served to separate him from the damp earthen floor, he had fallen asleep—a calm, deep, quiet sleep, so silent and childlike as almost to resemble death itself.

He had not slept there for many minutes, before there was heard a most curious noise under the floor of his prison. At first it did not awaken him, but partially doing so, caused him to move slightly, and in a half-conscious, half-dreamy state, to suggest some cause for the unusual phenomenon. It evidently worked upon his brain and nervous system, and he dreamed that the executioner had come for him, that his time for life had already expired, and the noise he heard was that of the officers and men, come to execute the sentence that had been pronounced upon him by the military commission.

By degrees the noise gradually increased, and heavy bolts and bars seemed to be removed, and a gleam of light to stream across the cell, while the tall form of a man, wrapped in a military cloak, came up through the floor

The Heart's Secret

where a stone slab gave way to the pressure applied to it from below.

Having gained a footing, the new comer now turned the light of a dark lantern in the direction of the corner where the prisoner was sleeping. The figure approached the sleeping soldier, and bending over him, muttered to himself, half aloud:

"Sleeping, by Heaven! he sleeps as quietly as though he was in his camp—bedstead, and not even under arrest."

As the officer thus spoke—for his cloak now falling from one shoulder, partially exposed his person and discovered his rank—the strong light of the lantern fell full upon the sleeper's face, and caused him suddenly to awake, and partially rising from the floor, he said:

"So soon! has my time already come? I thought that it was not yet. Well, I am ready, and trust to die like a soldier!"

"Awake, Captain Bezan, awake!" said the new comer. "I have news for you!"

"News!"

"Yes."

"What possible news can there be that I can feel interested in?"

"Rise, and I will tell you," replied the other, while he shaded the lantern with his hand.

"Speak on, I am listening," replied Lorenzo Bezan, rising to his feet.

"I would speak of your liberty."

"My liberty? I am condemned to die, and do you come to mock me?"

"Be patient; the way is open, and you may yet escape from death."

"And what should interest you, General Harero, in my fate? Your purpose is gained; I am removed from your path; why do you visit me thus at this still hour of the night, and in so extraordinary a manner by a secret entrance to my cell?"

"All this matters nothing. I came not here to answer questions. On one condition you are free. I have the means of your escape at hand."

"Name the condition," said the prisoner, though without exhibiting the least interest.

"There is a vessel which will sail for America with the morning tide; swear if I liberate you that you will take passage in her, and never return to this island."

"Never!" said the soldier, firmly. "I will never leave those I love so dearly."

"You refuse these terms?" continued the general, in a hoarse tone of voice.

"I do, most unhesitatingly. Life would be nothing to me if robbed of its brightest hope."

"You will not consider this for a moment? it is your only chance."

"I am resolved," said Lorenzo Bezan; "for more than one reason I am determined."

"Then die for your obstinacy," said General Harero, hoarse with rage and disappointment.

Thus saying, General Harero descended into the secret passage from whence he had just emerged, and replacing the stone above his head, the prisoner heard the grating of the rusty bolts and bars as they were closed after him. They grated, too, most harshly upon his heart, as well as upon their own hinges, for they seemed to say, "thus perishes your last hope of reprieve—your last possibility of escape from the fate that awaits you."

"No matter," said he, to himself, at last, "life would be of little value to me now if deprived of the presence of Isabella, and that dear boy, Ruez, and therefore I decided none too quickly as I did. Besides, in honor, I could hardly accept my life at his hands on any terms—he whom I have to thank for all my misfortunes. No, no; let them do their worst, I know my fate is sealed; but I fear it not. I will show them that I can die as I have lived, like a soldier; they shall not triumph in my weakness so long as the blood flows through my veins."

With this reflection and similar thoughts upon his mind, he once more threw himself upon the hard damp floor, and after thinking long and tenderly of Isabella Gonzales and her brother, he once more dropped to sleep, but not until the morning gun had relieved the sentinels, and the drum had beat the reveille.

CHAPTER VIII. THE FAREWELL.

THE apartment in Don Gonzales's house appropriated as Ruez's sleeping room, led out of the main reception hall, and adjoined that of his sister Isabella. Both rooms looked out upon the Plato, and over the Gulf Stream and outer portions of the harbor, where the grim Moro tower and its cannon frowned over the narrow entrance of the inner bay. One vessel could hardly work its way in ship shape through the channel, but a thousand might lay safely at anchor inside this remarkably land-locked harbor. At the moment when we would introduce the reader to the house of the rich old Don Gonzales, Isabella had thrown herself carelessly upon a couch in her room, and half sighing, half dreaming while awake, was gazing out upon the waters that make up from the Caribbean Sea, at the southward, and now and then following with her eyes the trading crafts that skimmed the sparkling waters to the north.

As she gazed thus, she suddenly raised herself to a sitting position, as she heard the suppressed and most grievous sobs of some one near the room where she was, and rising, she approached the window to discover the cause of this singular sound. The noise that had excited her curiosity came from the next chamber, evidently, and that was her brother's. Stealing softly round to the entrance of his chamber, she went quietly in and surprised Ruez as lay grieving upon a couch with eyes filled with tears.

"Why, Ruez, what does this mean? Art sick, brother, that you are so depressed?" asked the beautiful girl, seating herself down by his side.

"Ay, sister, sick at heart," said the boy, with a deep drawn sigh.

"And why, Ruez?" she continued, gently parting the hair from his forehead.

"How can you ask such a question, sister? do you not know already?" he asked, turning his deep blue eyes full upon her.

"Perhaps not, brother," replied Isabella, struggling to suppress a sigh, while she turned her face away from her brother's searching glance.

"Do you not know, sister, that to-morrow Captain Bezan is sentenced to die?"

"True," said Isabella Gonzales, with an involuntary shudder, "I do know it, Ruez."

"And further, sister," continued the boy, sagely, "do you not know that we have been the indirect cause of this fearful sacrifice?"

"I do not see that, brother," said Isabella, quickly, as she turned her beautiful face fully upon her brother, inquiringly.

Ruez Gonzales looked like one actuated by some extraordinary inspiration; his eyes were wonderfully bright, his expression that of years beyond his actual age, and his beautiful sister, while she gazed thus upon him at that moment, felt the keen and searching glance that he bestowed upon her. She felt like one in the presence of a superior mind; she could not realize her own sensations. The boy seemed to read her very soul, as she stood thus before him. It was more than a minute before he spoke, and seemed to break the spell; but at last—and it seemed an age to Isabella Gonzales—he did so, and said:

"Sister?"

"Well, Ruez?"

"Captain Bezan loves you."

"Perhaps so."

"I say he does love you."

"It is possible."

"I say he loves you," continued the boy, almost sternly.

"Well, brother, what of that?" she asked, with assumed indifference.

"It is that, sister, which has led General Harero to persecute him as he has done, and it is that which has led him like a noble spirit to turn to bay."

A moment's pause ensued.

The Heart's Secret

"Is it not so, sister?" he asked, still looking keenly at her. "Have you not yourself intimated that Captain Bezan was to suffer owing to his interest and services for us?"

"You do indeed speak truly, brother," said the lovely girl, breathing more quickly, and half amazed at Ruez's penetration and prophetic manner of speech.

"Alas!" said the boy, once more relapsing into his former mood, "that he might be saved!"

"Has our father seen the governor-general, Ruez?" asked his sister, earnestly.

"Yes."

"And to no effect?"

"None. Tacon, you know, is most strict in his administration of justice, and he says that if he were to pardon one such breach of military discipline as Captain Bezan has been guilty of, the whole army would at once be impregnated with insubordination."

"Would that I could see Captain Bezan, if only for one single moment," murmured Isabella Gonzales, half aloud, yet only to herself.

"Do you mean so, sister?" asked Ruez, catching quickly at his sister's words, and with an undisguised expression of delight written upon his handsome countenance.

"Yes, no, brother, that is to say, if I could see him with propriety, you know, Ruez; that is what I meant to say."

"Nothing easier, than for you to do so, if you desire it," said the boy.

"Do you think so, Ruez?" said his sister, somewhat eagerly.

"Certainly, Isabella, my pass will serve for you with a trifling disguise."

"But our difference in size; besides, you know that my voice—"

"Will not be noticed by those stiff sentries, or the turnkey," interrupted the boy. "They do not know me at all, and would not suspect you."

"Ah! but I can see many impediments in the way of one of my sex," added Isabella Gonzales, with a deep sigh.

Captain Lorenzo Bezan awoke on the day previous to that appointed for his execution, with cheerful spirit. He found no guilt in his heart, he felt that he had committed no crime, that his soul was free and untrammelled. His coarse breakfast of rude cassava root and water was brought to him at a late hour, and having partaken of sufficient of this miserable food to prevent the gnawings of hunger, he now sat musing over his past life, and thinking seriously of that morrow which was to end his career upon earth forever. A strange reverie for a man to be engaged in a most critical period—the winding up of his earthly career.

"I wonder," said he to himself, somewhat curiously, "why Ruez does not come to-day? it is his hour—ay, must be even past the time, and the boy loves me too well to neglect me now, when I am so near my end. Hark! is that his step? No; and yet it must be; it is too light for the guard or turnkey. O yes, that is my door, certainly, and here he is, sure enough. I knew he would come."

As the prisoner said this, the door slowly opened on its rusty and creaking hinges, and the turnkey immediately closed it after the new comer, who was somewhat closely wrapped in the profuse folds of a long Spanish cloak.

"Well, Ruez," said Captain Bezan, quite leisurely, and without turning his head towards the door, "I had begun to fear that you would not come to-day. You know you are the only being I see, except the turnkey, and I'm quite sensitive about your visits, my dear boy. However, you are here, at last; sit down."

"Captain Bezan, it appears to me that you do not welcome me very cordially," said Isabella Gonzales, in reply, and a little archly.

"Lady!" said the prisoner, springing to his feet as though he had been struck by an electric shock, "Senorita Isabella Gonzales, is it possible that you have remembered me at such a time—me, who am so soon to die?"

Isabella Gonzales had now thrown back the ample folds of the cloak she wore, and lifting her brother's cap from her head, her beautiful hair fell into its accustomed place, and with a slight blush tinging either cheek, she stood before the young soldier in his cell, an object of ineffable interest and beauty.

"Heaven bless you, lady," said the prisoner, kneeling at her feet.

"Nay. I pray you, sir, Captain Bezan, do not kneel at such a time."

"Ah! lady, how can I thank you in feeble words for this sweet ray of sunshine that you have cast athwart my

The Heart's Secret

dark and dreary path? I no longer remember that I am to die—that my former comrades are to pierce my heart with bullets. I cannot remember my fate, lady, since you have rendered me so happy. You have shown me that I did not mistake the throne at which I have secretly worshipped—that, all good and pure as you are, you would not forget Lorenzo Bezan, the poor, the lonely soldier who had dared to tell you how dearly he loved you."

As he spoke, Isabella Gonzales seemed for one moment to forget herself in the realizations of the scene. She listened to his thrice eloquent words with eyes bent upon the ground at first, and then gazing tenderly upon him, and now that he had ceased to speak, they sought once more the floor of the room in silence. He could not but construe these delicate demonstrations in his favor, and drawing close to her side, he pressed her hand tenderly to his lips. The touch seemed to act like magic, and aroused her to present consciousness, while she started as if in amazement. All the pride of her disposition was instantly aroused; she felt that for a single moment she had forgotten herself, and to retrieve the apparent acquiescence that she had seemed to show to the condemned soldier's words and tale of love, she now appeared to think that she must assume all the hauteur of character that usually governed her in her intercourse with his sex and the world generally. It was but a simple struggle, and all her self-possession was rallied again to her service and absolute control.

"Captain Bezan," she said, with assumed dignity, and drawing herself up in all her beauty of person to its full height, "I came not hither to hear such talk as this from you, nor to submit to such familiarity, and I trust, sir, that you will henceforth remember your station, and respect mine."

The breast of the prisoner heaved with inward emotion, in the struggle to suppress its outward show, and he bit his lips until the blood nearly flowed. His face instantly became the picture of despair; for her words had planted that grief and sorrow in his heart which the fear of death could not arouse there. Even Isabella Gonzales seemed for a moment struck with the effect of her repulse; but her own proud heart would not permit her to recall one word she had uttered.

"I would not leave you, Captain Bezan," said she, at length, as she gathered the ample folds of the cloak about her, "without once more tendering to you my most earnest thanks for your great services to our family. You know to what I refer. I need not tell you," she continued, with a quivering lip, "that my father has done all in his power to have your sentence remitted, but, alas! to no effect. Tacon seems to be resolved, and unchangeable."

As she spoke thus, spite of all her assumed pride and self-control, a tear trembled in her eye, and her respiration came quickly—almost in sobs!

The young soldier looked at her silently for a moment; at first he seemed puzzled; he was weighing in his own mind the meaning of all this as contrasted with the repulse he had just received, and with the estimate he had before formed of her; at last, seeming to read the spirit that had possessed her, he said:

"Ah, lady, I bless you a thousand times for that tear!"

"Nay, sir, I do not understand you," she said, quickly.

"Not your own heart either, lady, else you disguise its truth. Ah! why should all this be so? why should hearts be thus masked?"

"Sir, this is positive impertinence," said Isabella Gonzales, struggling once more to summon her pride to sustain her.

"Impertinence, lady?" repeated the prisoner, sadly.

"That was my word, sir," answered the proud girl, with assumed harshness.

"No, it would be impossible for me, on the very brink of the grave, to say aught but the truth; and I love you too deeply, too fervently, to be impertinent. You do not know me, lady. In my heart I have reared an altar to worship at, and that shrine for three years has been thy dearly loved form. How dearly and passionately I have loved—what a chastening influence it has produced upon my life, my comrades, who know not yet the cause, could tell you. To-morrow I must die. While I hoped one day to win your love, life was most dear to me, and I was happy. I could then have clung to life with as much tenacity as any one. But, lady, I find that I have been mistaken; my whole dream of fancy, of love, is gone, and life is no better to me than a burden. I speak not in haste, nor in passion. You must bear me witness that I am calm and collected; and I assure you that the bullets which end my existence will be but swift-winged messengers of peace to my already broken heart!"

"Captain Bezan," said Isabella, hesitating, and hardly speaking distinctly.

"Well, lady?"

"How could you have so deceived yourself? How could you possibly suppose that one in your sphere of life

The Heart's Secret

could hope to be united to one in mine?" asked Isabella Gonzales, with a half averted face and a trembling voice, as she spoke. "It was foolhardy, sir; it was more than that; it was preposterous!"

"Lady, you are severe."

"I speak but truth, Captain Bezan, and your own good sense will sustain it."

"I forgot your birth and rank, your wealth—everything. I acknowledge this, in the love I bore you; and, lady, I still feel, that had not my career been thus summarily checked, I might yet have won your love. Nay, lady, do not frown; true love never despairs—never is disheartened—never relinquishes the object that it loves, while there is one ray of light yet left to guide it on. It did seem to me now, when we are parting so surely forever, that it might have been, on your part, more kindly, and that you would, by a smile, or even a tear—drop, for my sake, have thus blessed me, and lightened my heavy steps to the field of execution and of trial."

Isabella Gonzales, as she listened to his words, could no longer suppress her feelings, but covering her face with her hands, she wept for a moment like a child. Pride was of no avail; the heart had asserted its supremacy, and would not be controlled.

"You take advantage of my woman's heart, sir," she said, at last. "I cannot bear the idea that any one should suffer, and more particularly one who has endeared himself to me and mine by such important service as you have done. Do not think that tears argue aught for the wild tale you have uttered, sir. I would not have you deceive yourself so much; but I am a woman, and cannot view violence or grief unmoved!"

"Say, rather, lady," added the soldier, most earnestly, "that you are pure, beautiful, and good at heart, but that pride, that only alloy of thy most lovely character, chokes its growth in your bosom."

"Sir!"

"Well, Senorita Isabella."

"Enough of this," she said, hastily and much excited. "I must leave you now, captain. It is neither fitting that I should hear, nor that you should utter such words as these to Isabella Gonzales. Farewell!"

"Lady, farewell," replied the prisoner, more by instinct than by any comprehension that she was actually about to leave him.

"I pray you, Captain Bezan, do not think that I cherish any unkind thoughts towards you," she said, turning when at the door; "on the contrary, I am by no means unmindful of my indebtedness to you; but far be it from me to sanction a construction of my feelings or actions which my heart will not second."

"Lady, your word is law to me," replied the submissive prisoner.

When she had gone, and the rough grating of the turnkey's instruments had done sounding in his ear, Captain Bezan remained a moment looking upon the slot where she had stood, with apparent amazement. He could not realize that she had been there at all; and hardest of all, that she had left him so abruptly. But her "farewell" still rang in his ears, and throwing himself upon his rude seat, with his face buried in his hands, he exclaimed:

"Welcome, welcome death! I would that thou wert here already!"

After a few moments thus passed, as it were, in the very depths of despair, he rose and walked his dreary cell in a sad and silent reverie, a reviewal of all these matters.

"How I have mistaken that beautiful creature, how idolized, how loved her! I knew that there was much, ay, very much, of pride in her heart. I knew the barriers that rose between her and me; but, alas, I thought them not so very at high, so very impregnable. I would not, could not, have believed that she would have left me thus. It was our last farewell. She might have been more kind; might, without much risk of loss of pride have permitted me such a parting as should have rendered my last hours happy! Alas! alas! what toys of fortune we are; what straws for every breeze to shake—for every wind to shatter!

"We set our hearts upon an object, and blinded by our warm desires, believe, like children, that which we hope for. I have never paused to think in this matter of my love, I have been led on too precipitately by the brilliancy of the star that I followed; its light blinded me to all other influences; and, too truly, I feel it, blinded me to reason also. Isabella Gonzales, the belle of this brilliant city, the courted, beloved, rich, proud Isabella Gonzales; what else might I have expected, had one moment been permitted to me for reason, for cool reflection. I was mad in my fond and passionate love; I was blind in my folly, to ever dream of success. But the end will soon be here, and I shall be relieved from this agonizing fever at my heart, this woeful pain of disappointed love, of broken-heartedness."

He folded his arms, and permitting his head to sink upon his breast, sat down, the very picture of despair.

CHAPTER IX. THE EXECUTION SCENE.

THE morning was bright and beautiful that ushered in the day which was appointed for the execution of Captain Lorenzo Bezan, in accordance with the sentence passed upon him. The birds carolled gaily in the little grove that is formed about the fountain which fronts the governor-general's palace and the main barracks of the army, while the fresh, soft air from inland came loaded with delicious flavors and sweet aroma. Nature could hardly have assumed a more captivating mood than she wore at that time.

The soldiers, who sauntered about the Plaza, and hung around the doors of the guard house, wore an air quite different from that which the bright and beautiful tropical morning might be supposed to induce. They knew only too well of the tragedy that was that day to enacted; such occasions—the spilling of the tide of life, in cold blood—suited not their chivalrous notions at any time, much less so now, for they loved the officer who was to lose his life—a victim to Harero—whom, again, few men respected, either as a soldier or a man—his character was repulsive to nearly all.

"So the captain is to be shot to-day," remarked one of Captain Bezan's own company, to a comrade whom he had just met in the Plaza.

"Yes, I had rather it had been—"

"Hush, Alonzo," said his companion, observing General Harero walking across the street.

"That is he, and he is the only man I ever saw," continued the officer, "that I would like to see shot in cold blood. Poor Bezan, he's sacrificed to the general!"

"I wonder what gave the trouble between them."

"Don't know; some say there's a lady in the case."

"I hadn't heard of that."

"Yes, you know he challenged the general?"

"Yes,"

"Well, that was about a lady, in some way; I heard one of the officers say so."

"The first file do the business."

"Yes, and thankful am I, Alonzo, that you and I are in the fourth section."

The hour appointed for the execution of the sentence had nearly arrived, and the steady roll of the drum beat the regiment to which Captain Bezan's company belonged, to the line. His own immediate company was formed on the side of the Plaza at right angles with the rest of the line, in all some thousand rank and file. This company "stood at ease," and the men hung their heads, as if ashamed of the business they were about to perform. In the rest of the line the men exchanged a few words with each other, now and then, quietly, but the company referred to, spoke not a word. Their officers stood in a little knot by themselves, and evidently felt sad at heart when they remembered the business before them, for their comrade condemned to die had been a universal favorite with them.

But a few moments transpired, after the forming of the line, before an aid-de-camp approached and transmitted an order to the first-lieutenant, now commanding the company, and the first file of twelve men were marched away to the rear of the barracks, while the rest of the company were sent to the prison to do guard duty in escorting the prisoner to the ground. It seemed to them as though this additional insult might have been spared to the prisoner—that of being guarded by his late command, in place of any other portion of the regiment being detailed for this service. But this was General Harero's management, who seemed to gloat in his own diabolical purposes.

In the meantime the prisoner had risen that morning from his damp, rude couch, and had completed his simple toilet with more than usual neatness. After offering up a sincere prayer, and listening to the words of the priest who had been sent to prepare him for the last hour, he declared calmly that he was ready to die. He had looked for Ruez Gonzales, and wondered not a little that the boy had not come to bid him farewell that morning—a last, long farewell.

The Heart's Secret

"Perhaps his young heart was too full for him to do so," said the doomed soldier; "and yet I should have felt happier to see him again. It is strange how much his purity and gentleness of character have caused me to love him. Next to Isabella Gonzales, surely that boy is nearest to my heart. Poor Ruez will miss me, for the boy loves me much."

As he mused thus to himself, the steady and regular tread of armed men was heard approaching his prison door, and the young soldier knew full well for what purpose they came. In a few moments after, he who had formerly been his second in command entered the cell and saluted the prisoner respectfully.

"Captain Bezan," said the lieutenant, "I need not explain in detail to you the very unpleasant business upon which I have been at this time sent, nor add," continued the officer, in a lower tone of voice, "how much I regret the fate that awaits you."

"Nay, Ferdinand," answered Captain Bezan, calmly, "say nothing of the matter, but give me your hand, my friend, and do your duty."

"Would to God I could in any way avoid it, Lorenzo," said his brother officer, who had long been associated with him, and who had loved him well.

"Regrets are useless, Ferdinand. You know we all have our allotted time, and mine has come. You shall see that I will die like a soldier."

"Ay, Lorenzo; but in such a way; so heartlessly, so needlessly, so in cold blood; alas! why were you so imprudent? I am no woman, comrade. You have fought in the same field, and slept in the same tent with me oftentimes, and you know that I have laid the sod upon my companion's breast without a murmur, without a complaint; but this business is too much for me!"

"Fie, fie, man," said the prisoner, with assumed indifference; "look upon it as a simple duty; you but fulfil an order, and there's the end of it."

"I can't, for the life of me, I can't!"

"Why, my good fellow, come to think of it, you should not complain, of all others, since it gives you promotion and the command of our brave boys."

A look of deep reproach was the only answer he received to this remark.

"Forgive me, Ferdinand, forgive me, I did but jest," he continued, quickly, as he again grasped the hand of his comrade between his own.

"Say no more, Lorenzo. Is there aught I can do for you before we march?"

"Nothing."

"No little boon—no service you would like to trust to a friend and comrade?"

"My papers are all arranged and addressed to you, with directions how I should like to have them disposed of. There is nothing else, Ferdinand."

"It will be my melancholy pleasure to follow your wishes implicitly," was the reply.

"Thank you, Ferdinand."

"Is that all?"

"All."

"Then we must at once away."

"One moment—stay, Ferdinand; tell my poor boys who act the executioners, those of the first file, to fire low—at my heart, Ferdinand! You will remember?"

"Alas! yes," said his comrade, turning suddenly away from the prisoner.

"And tell them, Ferdinand, that I most heartily and sincerely forgive them for the part they are called upon to play in this day's drama."

"I will—I will."

"That is all. I have no other request, and am prepared now to follow you," he added, with a calm and resigned expression of countenance.

The drum beat—the file opened—the prisoner took his position, and the detachment of men whom he had so often commanded amid the carnage of battle and the roar of cannon, now guarded him towards the place of his execution.

Lorenzo Bezan had but a little way to march; but still a blush suffused his face as he passed, thus humiliated, through the public Plaza, where he had so often paraded his company before. All eyes were low bent upon him,

The Heart's Secret

from the humblest to the highest, for he was well known, and his fate had created much remark among all. He was marched quietly to the rear of the barracks, and as the company filed by the guard house, to the long open space on the city side, just opposite Moro Castle, he distinctly heard a voice from one of the windows say:

"God bless and help you, Captain Bezan!"

He turned partially round to see the speaker, but no one was visible. He was sure it was Ruez's voice, and wondering why he did not come forward to meet his eye, he marched on to the plain where the entire division of General Harero's command was drawn up to witness the scene. It is difficult to conceive, and much more so to describe, such an impressive sight as presented itself at this moment to the spectator. There was so much mockery in the brilliant uniforms, flaunting plumes and gilded accoutrements of the soldiery, when contrasted with the purpose of the scene, that one could hardly contemplate the sight even for a moment with ordinary composure.

The prisoner, attended by a private and two officers, was led to his position, where, divested of his coat, he stood simply in his linen and nether garments, and quietly submitted to have his hands bound behind him, while he exchanged a few pleasant words with those who were about him. At a signal from the provost marshal, one of the officers essayed to bind a handkerchief before his eyes, but at an earnest request to the contrary by the prisoner, he desisted, and in a moment after he stood alone beside the open grave that had been dug to receive his remains!

Behind him rolled the ocean, mingling with the waters of the Gulf Stream; on either side were ranged the long line of infantry that formed his division, while in front was ranged his own company, and some ten yards in front of them stood the file of thirteen men who were to be his executioners. They had just been supplied with their muskets by an officer, and were told that one was without ball, that each one might hope his was not the hand to slay his former comrade in arms. Another signal from the provost, and the lieutenant commanding Captain Bezan's company advanced from the rear to the side of the first file to his regular position, at the same time saying in a low voice:

"Fire low, my men, as you love our former comrade—aim at his heart!"

A glance, and a sad one of intelligence, was all he could receive from the men. Two or three successive orders brought the file to the proper position for firing.

At that moment Lorenzo Bezan, with a slight exertion of the great physical strength which he possessed, easily broke the cords asunder that bound his wrists behind him, and dashing the dark hair from his high and manly forehead, he calmly folded his arms upon his breast, and awaited the fire that was to end his existence. The fearful word was given by the officer, and so still was every one, so breathless the whole scene, that the order was distinctly heard through the entire length of the lines.

The morning sun shone like living fire along the polished barrels of the guns, as the muzzles all ranged in point towards the heart of the condemned. In spite of the effort not to do so, the officer paused between the order to aim, and that to fire. The word appeared to stick in his throat, and he opened his mouth twice before he could utter the order; but at last he did so, distinctly, though with a powerful effort.

The, sharp, quick report of the muskets that followed this order, seemed to jar upon every heart among that military throng, except, indeed, of him who sat upon a large dapple gray horse, at the right of the line, and whose insignia bespoke him to be the commanding officer, General Harero. He sat upon his horse like a statue, with a calm but determined expression upon his features, while a stern smile might be observed to wreath his lips for an instant at the report of the guns fired by the executing file.

But see, as the smoke steadily sweeps to seaward, for a moment it completely covers the spot where the victim stood, and now it sweeps swiftly off over the water. But what means that singular murmur so audible along the line—that movement of surprise and astonishment observed in all directions?

Behold, there stood erect the unharmed form of Lorenzo Bezan! Not a hair of his head was injured; not a line of his noble countenance was in the least distorted. As calm as though nought had happened, he stood there unmoved. He had so braced himself to the effort, that nothing human could have unnerved him. Hastily directing an aid-de-camp to the spot with some new order, General Harero issued another to his officers for the lines to be kept firm, and preparations were instantly set about for another and more certain attempt upon the life of the condemned, who seemed to the spectators to have escaped by some divine interposition, little less than a miracle.

At that instant there dashed into the area a mounted aid-de-camp, bearing the uniform of the governor-general's suite, and riding directly up to General Harero, he handed him a paper. It was done before the

The Heart's Secret

whole line of military and the spectators, all of whom seemed to know as well its purport, as did the general after reading it.

"A reprieve! A reprieve!" ran from mouth to mouth along the whole length of the line, until at last it broke out in one wild huzza, defying all discipline.

Those nearest to General Harero heard him utter a curse, deep but suppressed, for the surmise of the multitude was correct. Captain Bezan had been reprieved; and, probably, in fear of this very thing, the general of the division had taken upon himself to set the time of execution one hour earlier than had been announced to Tacon—a piece of villany that had nearly cut off the young soldier from the clemency that the governor had resolved to extend to him at the very last moment, when the impressiveness of the scene should have had its effect.

Issuing one or two hasty orders, General Harero put spurs to his horse and dashed off the grounds with chagrin but too plainly written in his face not to betray itself. He could even detect a hiss now and then from the crowd, as he passed; and one or two, bolder than the rest, cast epithets at him in vile language, but he paused not to listen. He was no favorite with citizens or soldiers, and hastily dismounting at the door of the palace, he sought his own room with deep feelings of suppressed rage and bitterness.

But what was the meaning of those twelve musketeers all missing their aim? So vexed was General Harero at this, that his first order was for their united arrest; but that had been countermanded now, since the governor had reprieved the prisoner; for the general saw that he stood in a false position, in having changed the hour for execution, and did not care to provoke a controversy that might lead to his exposure before the stern justice of Tacon, and he did well to avoid it.

It was very plain to officers and men that there had been foul play somewhere, and so excited had the division become by this time, that the officers began to look seriously at each other, fearing an immediate outbreak and disregard of discipline. It was a time to try the troops, if one had ever occurred. They would have stood firm and have received an enemy's fire without wavering; but there seemed some cold-blooded rascality here, in the arriving of the reprieve after the twelve men had fired, even though they did so ineffectually.

Quick, stern orders were quickly passed from line to line, the division was wheeled into column, the drums beat a quick march, and the whole column passed up the Calle del Iganasio towards the front of the main barracks, where, lest the symptoms, already referred to, should ripen into something more serious still, orders were issued to keep the division still under arms. In the meantime, Captain Lorenzo Bezan, still as calm as though nought had occurred, was marched back to his cell in the prison, to hear the conditions upon which the reprieve, as dictated by Tacon, was granted. As he passed the guard house again, on his return, he heard his name called as he had heard it when he marched with the guard:

"God bless you, Captain Bezan!"

"Strange," thought the prisoner—he knew it for Ruez Gonzales's voice at once; "where can that boy be secreted?" He mused for a second of time. This was the portion of the guard room where the officer on duty had loaded the guns for his execution, and from here they had been taken and passed into the hands of the men. It did not require much penetration on the part of the reprieved soldier to understand now the reason why these twelve men had missed their aim!

Had they exercised the skill of Kentucky sharpshooters they could have done no harm; blank cartridges don't kill. But how unexpected, how miraculous it appeared, how strange the sensations of the young officer, after that loud sounding discharge, to find himself standing thus unharmed,—no wound, no bullet whistling by his ears, the dead, sluggish smoke alone enveloping his person for a moment, and then, as it swept away seaward, the shout of the astonished division rang upon his senses. He felt that all eyes were upon him, and adamant itself could not have remained firmer than did he. Few men would have possessed sufficient self-control to bear themselves thus; but he was a soldier, and had often dared the bullet of the enemy. He was familiar with the whistling of bullets, and other sounds that carry on their wings the swift-borne messengers of death. Besides this, there was an indifference as to life, existing in his bosom at that moment, that led him to experience a degree of apathy that it would be difficult for us to describe, or for the reader to realize. He felt as he did when he exclaimed, in his lonely cell in prison, as he was left for the last time by her he so loved—"Welcome, welcome, death! I would that thou wert here already!"

How it was accomplished, of course he knew not; nor could he hardly surmise in his own mind, so very strictly is the care of such matters attended to under all like circumstances; but one thing he felt perfectly sure of,

The Heart's Secret

and indeed he was right in his conjecture—Ruez had drawn the bullets from the guns!

CHAPTER X. THE BANISHMENT.

LORENZO BEZAN had hardly reached his place of confinement, once more, before he was waited upon by the secretary of the governor-general, who explained to him the terms on which his reprieve was granted, viz., that he should leave the territory and soil of Cuba by the next homeward bound packet to Spain, to remain there, unless otherwise ordered by special direction of the government. His rank as captain of infantry was secured to him, and the usual exhortation in such cases was detailed, as to the hope that the present example might not be lost upon him, as to the matter of a more strict adherence to the subject of military discipline.

Repugnant as was the proposition to leave the island while life was his, Lorenzo Bezan had no alternative but to do so; and, moreover, when he considered the attraction that held him on the spot, how the Senorita Isabella Gonzales had treated him, when she had every reason to believe that it was his last meeting with her, and nearly the last hour of his life, he saw that if she would treat him thus at such a moment, then, when he had not the excuse of remarkable exigency and the prospect of certain death before him, she would be no kinder. It was while exercised by such thoughts as these that he answered the secretary:

"Bear my thanks, with much respect, to the governor-general, and tell him that I accept from him his noble clemency and justice, the boon of my life, on his own terms."

The secretary bowed low and departed.

We might tell the reader how Lorenzo Bezan threw himself upon his bed of straw, and wept like a child—how he shed there the first tears he had shed since his arrest, freely and without a check. His heart seemed to bleed more at the idea of leaving the spot where Isabella lived, and yet to live on himself, elsewhere, than his spirit had faltered at the idea of certain death. Her last cruel words, and the proud spirit she exhibited towards him, were constantly before his eyes.

"O," said he, half aloud, "how I have worshipped, how adored that fairest of God's creatures!"

At moments he had thought that he saw through Isabella's character—at moments had truly believed that he might by assiduity, perhaps, if favored by fortune, win her love, and, may be, her hand in marriage. At any rate, with his light and buoyant heart, there was sunshine and hope enough in the future to irradiate his soul with joy, until the last scene in his drama of life, added to that of her last cold farewell!

He was soon informed that the vessel which was to take him to Spain would sail on the following morning, and that no further time would be permitted to him on the island. He resolved to write one last letter of farewell to Isabella Gonzales, and then to depart; and calling upon the turnkey for writing materials, which were now supplied to him, he wrote as follows"

"DEAR LADY: Strange circumstances, with which you are doubtless well acquainted by this time, have changed my punishment from death to banishment. Under ordinary circumstances it would hardly be called banishment for any person to be sent from a foreign clime to the place of his nativity; nor would it appear to be such to me, were it not that I leave behind me the only being I have ever really loved—the idol angel of my heart—she who has been to me life, soul, everything, until now, when I am wretched beyond description; because without hope, all things would be as darkness to the human heart.

"I need not review our brief acquaintanceship, or reiterate to you the feelings I have already expressed. If you can judge between true love and gallantry, you know whether I am sincere or otherwise. I could not offer you wealth, Isabella Gonzales. I could not offer you rank. I have no fame to share with you; but O, if it be the will of Heaven that another should call you wife, I pray that he may love you as I have done. I am not so selfish but that I can utter this prayer with all my heart, and in the utmost sincerity.

"The object of this hasty scrawl is once more to say to you farewell; for it is sweet to me even to address you. May God bless your dear brother, who has done much to sustain me, bowed down as I have been with misfortune, and broken in spirit; and may the especial blessing of Heaven rest ever on and around you.

"This will ever be the nightly prayer of LORENZO BEZAN."

When Isabella Gonzales received this note on the following day, its author was nearly a dozen leagues at sea,

The Heart's Secret

bound for the port of Cadiz, Spain! She hastily perused its contents again and again. looked off upon the open sea, as though she might be able to recall him, threw herself upon her couch, and wept bitter, scalding tears, until weary nature caused her to sleep.

At last Ruez stole into her room quietly, and finding her asleep, and a tear-drop glistening still upon her cheek, he kissed away the pearly dew and awoke her once more to consciousness. He, too, had learned of Captain Bezan's sudden departure; and by the open letter in his sister's hand, to which he saw appended his dearly loved friend's name, he judged that her weeping had been caused by the knowledge that he had left them—probably forever.

Lorenzo Bezan should have seen her then, in her almost transcendent beauty, too proud, far too proud, to own even to herself that she loved the poor soldier; yet her heart would thus unbidden and spontaneously betray itself, in spite of all her proud calmness, and strong efforts at self-control. The boy looked at her earnestly; twice he essayed to speak, and then, as if some after thought had changed his purpose, he kissed her again, and was silent.

"Well, brother, it seems that Captain Bezan has been liberated and pardoned, after all," said Isabella, with a voice of assumed indifference.

"Yes, sister, but at a sad cost; for he has been banished to Spain."

"How strange he was not shot, when so many fired at him."

"Sister?"

"Well."

"Can you keep a secret?"

"I think so, Ruez," said Isabella, half smiling at the question of her brother.

"Well, it's not so very wonderful, since I drew the bullets from the guns!"

And Ruez explained to her that he had secreted himself in the house, with the hope that something might turn up to save his friend even yet, and there he had found a chance to draw the bullets from the twelve muskets. After he had told her, she threw her arms about his neck, and said:

"You are a dear, good brother."

"And for what, sister?"

"For saving Captain Bezan's life; for otherwise he had been shot."

"But why do you care so much about it, sister?" asked the boy, seriously.

"O, nothing, only—that is, you know, Ruez, we owe Captain Bezan so much ourselves for having hazarded his life for us all."

Ruez turned away from his sister with an expression in his face that made her start; for he began to read his sister's heart, young as he was, better than she knew it herself. He loved Lorenzo Bezan so dearly himself—had learned to think so constantly of him, and to regard him with such friendly consideration, that no influence of pride could in the least affect him; and though he had sufficient penetration to pierce through the subject so far as to realize that his dearly loved friend regarded his sister with a most ardent and absorbing love, he could not exactly understand the proud heart of Isabella, which, save for its pride, would so freely return the condemned soldier's affection.

Well, time passed on in its ever-varying round. Lorenzo Bezan was on his way to Spain, and Isabella and her brother filling nearly the same round of occupation, either of amusement or self-imposed duty. Occasionally General Harero called; but this was put a stop to, at last, by Ruez's pertinently asking him one evening how he came to order the execution of Lorenzo Bezan to take place a full hour before the period announced in the regular sentence signed by the governor-general!

Ruez was not the first person who had put this question to him, and he felt sore about it, for even Tacon himself had reprimanded him for the deed. Thus realizing that his true character was known to Don Gonzales and his family, he gave up the hope of winning Isabella Gonzales, or rather the hope of sharing her father's rich coffers, and quietly withdrew himself from a field of action where he had gained nothing, but had lost much, both as it regarded this family, and, owing to his persecution of Captain Bezan, that of the army.

Isabella Gonzales became thoughtful and melancholy without exactly knowing why. She avoided company, and often incurred her father's decided displeasure by absenting herself from the drawing-room when there were visitors of importance. She seemed to be constantly in a dreamy and moody state, and avoided all her former haunts and companions. A skilful observer might have told her the cause of all this, and yet, strange to say, so

blind did her pride render her, that she could not see, or at least never acknowledged even to herself, that the absent soldier had aught to do with it.

Had not Isabella Gonzales treated Lorenzo Bezan as she did at their last meeting, he would never have accepted the governor-general's pardon on the terms offered, nor life itself, if it separated him from her he loved. But as it was, he seemed to feel that life had lost its charm, ambition its incentive for him, and he cast himself forth upon the troubled waters without compass or rudder. And it was precisely in this spirit that he found himself upon the deck of the vessel, whose white wings were wafting him now across the ocean.

He, too, was misanthropic and unhappy; he tried to reason with himself that Isabella Gonzales was not worthy to render him thus miserable; that she was a coquette—an unfeeling, though beautiful girl; that even had he succeeded, and fortune favored him in his love, she would not have loved him its his heart craved to be loved. But all this sophistry was overthrown in a moment by the memory of one dear glance, when Isabella, off her guard, and her usual hauteur of manner for the instant, had looked through her eyes the whole truthfulness of her soul; in short, when her heart, not her head, had spoken!

Alas! how few of us feel as we do; how few do as we feel!

Perhaps there is no better spot than on shipboard for a dreamer to be; he has then plenty of time, plenty of space, plenty of theme, and every surrounding, to turn his thoughts inward upon himself. Lorenzo Bezan found this so. At times he looked down into the still depths of the blue water, and longed for the repose that seemed to look up to him from below the waves. He had thought, perhaps, too long upon this subject one soft, calm evening, and had indeed forgotten himself, as it were, and another moment would have seen the working of what seemed a sort of irresistible charm to him, and he would have cast himself into that deep, inviting oblivion!

Then a voice seemed to whisper Isabella's name in his ear! He started, looked about him, and awoke from the fearful charm that held him. It was his good angel that breathed that name to him then, and saved him from the curse of the suicide!

From that hour a strange feeling seemed to possess the young soldier. Like him in Shakspeare's "Seven Ages," he passed from love to ambition. A new charm seemed to awake to him in the future, not to the desertion of his love, nor yet exactly to its promotion. An indefinite idea seemed to move him that he must win fame, glory and renown; and yet he hardly paused to think what the end of these would be; whether they would ultimately bring him nearer to the proud girl of his hopes and his love. Fame rang in his ears; the word seemed to fire his veins; he was humble—he must be honored; he was poor—he must be rich; he was unknown—he must be renowned! With such thoughts as these, his pulses beat quicker, his eye flashed, and his cheek became flushed, and then one tender thought of Isabella would change every current, and almost moisten those bloodshot eyes with tears. Would to God that Lorenzo Bezan could now but shed a tear—what gentle yet substantial relief it would have afforded him.

Thus was the exiled soldier influenced; while Isabella Gonzales was, as we have seen, still living on under the veil of her pride; unable, apparently, for one single moment to draw the curtain, and look with naked eye upon the real picture of her feelings, actions, and honest affections. She felt, plain enough, that she was miserable; indeed the flood of tears she daily shed betrayed this to her. But her proud Castilian blood was the phase through which alone she saw, or could see. It was impossible for her to banish Lorenzo Bezan from her mind; but yet she stoutly refused to admit, even to herself, that she regarded him with affection—he, a lowly soldier, a child of the camp, a myrmidon of fortune—he a fit object for the love of Isabella Gonzales, the belle of Havana, to whom princes had bowed? Preposterous!

Her brother, whose society she seemed to crave more than ever, said nothing; he did not even mention the name of the absent one, but he secretly moaned for him, until the pale color that had slightly tinged his cheek began to fade, and Don Gonzales trembled for the boy's life. It was his second bereavement. His mother's loss, scarcely yet outgrown, had tried his gentle heart to its utmost tension; this new bereavement to his sensitive mind, seemed really too much for him. A strange sympathy existed between Isabella and the boy, who, though Lorenzo Bezan's name was never mentioned, yet seemed to know what each other was thinking of.

But in the meantime, while these feelings were actuating Isabella and her brother at Havana, Lorenzo Bezan had reached Cadiz, and was on his way to the capital of Spain, Madrid.

CHAPTER XI. THE PROMOTION.

WE have already given the reader a sufficient idea of Lorenzo Bezan, for him to understand that he was a person possessed of more than ordinary manliness and personal beauty. A distinguished and chivalric bearing was one of his main characteristics, and you could hardly have passed him in a crowd, without noting his fine manly physical appearance, and strikingly intelligent features. Fired with the new ambition which we have referred to in the closing of the last chapter, Lorenzo Bezan arrived in the capital of his native land, ready and eager to engage in any enterprise that called for bravery and daring, and which in return promised honor and preferment.

Tacon, governor-general of Cuba, had marked his qualities well, and therefore wrote by the same conveyance that took the young soldier to Spain, to the head of the war department, and told them of what stuff he was composed, and hinted at the possibility of at once placing him in the line of his rank, and of giving him, if possible, active service to perform. Tacon's opinion and wishes were highly respected at Madrid, and Lorenzo Bezan found himself at once placed in the very position he would have desired—the command of as fine a company, of the regular service as the army could boast, and his rank and position thoroughly restored.

There was just at that period a revolt of the southern and western provinces of Spain, which, owing to inactivity on the part of government, had actually ripened into a regularly organized rebellion against the throne. News at last reached the queen that regular bodies of troops had been raised and enlisted, under well known leaders, and that unless instant efforts were made to suppress the rising, the whole country would be shortly involved in civil war. In this emergency the troops, such as could be spared, were at once detached from the capital and sent to various points in the disaffected region to quell the outbreak. Among the rest was the company of Lorenzo Bezan and two others of the same regiment, and being the senior officer, young as he was, he was placed in command of the battalion, and the post to which he was to march at once, into the very heart of the disaffected district.

Having arrived in the neighborhood of the spot to which his orders had directed him, he threw his whole force, some less than three hundred men, into one of the old Moorish fortifications, still extant, and with the provisions and ammunition he had brought with him, entrenched himself, and prepared to scour and examine the surrounding country. His spies soon brought him intelligence of the defeat of two similar commands to his own, sent out at the same time to meet the insurgents; and, also, that their partial success had very naturally elated them in the highest degree. That they were regularly organized into regiments, with their stands of colors, and proper officers, and that one regiment had been sent to take the fort where he was, and would shortly be in the neighborhood.

Lorenzo Bezan was a thorough soldier; he looked to the details of all the plans and orders he issued, so that when the enemy appeared in sight, they found him ready to receive them. They were fully thrice his number, but they had a bad cause and poor leaders, and he feared not for the result. On they came, in the fullness of confidence, after having already participated in two victories over the regular troops; but they had, though a younger, yet a far better and more courageous officer to deal with in Captain Bezan. The fight was long and bloody, but ere night came on the insurgents were compelled to retire, after having lost nearly one third of their number in the contest.

The camp of the insurgents was pitched some half mile from the old fort occupied by Captain Bezan and his followers, just beneath the brow of a sheltering undulation of ground. Night overshadowed the field, and it was still as death over the battle field, when Captain Bezan, summoning his followers, told them that the enemy lay yonder in sleep; they could not anticipate a sally, and from a confidential spy he had ascertained that they had not even set a sentinel.

"I shall lead you out this night to attack them; take only your weapons. If we are defeated, we shall want nothing more; if victorious, we shall return to our post and our munitions."

He had lost scarcely two score of his men in the fight, protected as they were by the walls of the fortress, while the besiegers were entirely exposed to the fire of musketry, and the two small cannon they had brought with them, and so they entered into the daring plan of their commander with the utmost zeal. They were instructed as

The Heart's Secret

to the plan more fully, and at midnight, as the last rays of the moon sank below the horizon, they quietly filed forth from the fortress and turned towards the insurgents' camp. Slowly and silently they stole across the plain, without note of drum or fife, and headed by their young commander, until they reached the brow of the little elevation, beyond which the enemy lay sleeping, some in tents, some on the open field, and all unguarded.

The signal was given, and the small band of disciplined men fell upon the camp. Lorenzo Bezan with some fifty picked followers sought the head quarters of the camp, and having fought their way thither, possessed themselves of the standards, and made prisoner of the leader of the body of insurgents, and ere the morning sun had risen, the camp was deserted, the enemy, totally defeated, had fled, or been taken prisoners and bound, and the victorious little band of the queen's troops were again housed within the walls of the fortress.

But their fighting was not to end here; a second body of the enemy, incensed as much by the loss of their comrades as elated by various victories over other detachments of the army, fell upon them; but they were met with such determined spirit and bravery, and so completely did Lorenzo Bezan infuse his own manly and resolved spirit into the hearts of his followers, that the second comers were routed, their banners taken, and themselves dispersed. These two victories, however, had cost him dear; half his little gallant band had lost their lives, and there were treble their number of prisoners securely confined within the fortress.

Fresh troops were despatched, in reply to his courier, to escort these to the capital, and an order for himself and the rest of his command to return to Madrid, forthwith. This summons was of course complied with, and marching the remnant of his command to the capital, Captain Bezan reported himself again at head quarters. Here he found his services had been, if possible, overrated, and himself quite lionized. A major's commission awaited him, and the thanks of the queen were expressed to him by the head of the department.

"A major,—one step is gained," said the young soldier, to himself; "one round in the ladder of fame has been surmounted; my eyes are now bent upward!"

And how he dreamed that night of Cuba, of rank and wealth, and the power and position they conferred—and still his eyes were bent upward!

With a brief period permitted for him to rest and recover from slight wounds received in his late battles, Lorenzo, now Major Bezan, was again ordered to the scene of trouble in the southern district, where the insurgents, more successful with older officers sent against them, had been again victorious, and were evidently gaining ground, both in strength of purpose and numbers. This time he took with him a full command of four companies, little less than four hundred men, and departed under far better auspices than he had done before, resolved, as at the outset, to lead his men where work was to be done, and to lead them, too, on to victory or utter destruction! It was a fearful resolve; but in his present state of feelings it accorded with the spirit that seemed to actuate his soul.

But success does not always crown the most daring bravery, and twice were Lorenzo Bezan and his followers worsted, though in no way discouraged. But at last, after many weeks of toil and hardship, he was again victorious, again routed twice his own number, again captured a stand of colors, and again despatched his trophies to the feet of his queen. The civil war then became general, and for nearly a year Lorenzo Bezan and his followers were in the battle field. Victory seemed to have marked him for a favorite, and his sword seemed invincible; wherever he led, he infused his own daring and impetuous spirit into the hearts of his followers, and where his plume waved in the fight, there the enemy faltered.

A second and third victory crowned him within another promotion, and a colonel's commission was sent to the adventurous soldier after the hard fought battles he had won for the queen. Once more he paused, and whispered to himself:

"Another round in the ladder is gained! have patience, Lorenzo Bezan; fame may yet be thine; she is thy only bride now; alas, alas, that it should be so! that there cannot be one—one dearer than all the world beside—to share with thee this renown and honor, this fame won by the sword on the field of battle; one whose gentleness and love should be the pillow on which to rest thy head and heart after the turmoil and whirlwind of war has subsided!"

Scarcely a year had transpired since the condemned soldier had been banished from Cuba, and now from a captaincy he had risen to wear the star of a colonel. No wonder, then, that he thus soliloquized to himself upon the theme of which he dreamed.

The life he led, the fierce contests he engaged in, had no effect in hardening the heart of the young soldier: one thought, one single word, when he permitted himself to pause and look back upon the past, would change his

The Heart's Secret

whole spirit, and almost render him effeminate. At times his thoughts, spite of himself, wandered far away over the blue waters to that sunny isle of the tropics, where Isabella Gonzales dwelt, and then his manly heart would heave more quickly, and his pulses beat swifter; and sometimes a tear had wet his cheek as he recalled the memory of Ruez, whom he had really loved nearly as well as he had done his proud and beautiful sister. The boy's nature, so gentle, affectionate and truthful, and yet in emergency so manly and venturesome, as evinced in his drawing the bullets from the guns that would else have taken the life of Lorenzo Bezan, was a theme of oft recalled admiration and regard to the young soldier.

Though he felt in his heart that Isabella Gonzales could never love him, judging from the cold farewell that had at last separated them, still fame seemed dear to him on her account, because it seemed to bring him nearer to her, if not to raise a hope in his heart that she might one day be his. At times, in the lonely hours of the night, alone in his tent, he would apostrophize her angelic features, and sigh that Heaven, which had sent so sweet a mould in human form, should have imbued it with a spirit so haughty, a soul so proud as to mar the exquisite creation.

"I have thought," he amused to himself, "I that I knew her—that the bright loveliness of her soul would dazzle and outshine the pride that chance had sown there—that if boldly and truly wooed, she would in turn boldly and truly love. It seemed to me, that it was the first barrier only that must be carried by assault, and after that I felt sure that love like mine would soon possess the citadel of her heart. But I was foolish, self-confident, and perhaps have deserved defeat. It may be so, but Isabella Gonzales shall see that the humble captain of infantry, who would hardly be tolerated, so lowly and humble was he, will command, ere long, at least, some degree of respect by the position that his sword shall win for him. Ay, and General Harero, too, may find me composed of better metal than he supposed. There is one truthful, gentle and loving spirit that will sympathize with me. I know and feel that; Ruez, my boy, may Heaven bless thee!"

"Count Basterio, what sort of a person is this Colonel Bezan, whose sword has been invincible among the rebels, and who has sent us two stand of colors, taken by himself?" asked the queen, of one of her principal courtiers, one day.

"Your majesty, I have, never seen him," answered the count, "but I'm told he's a grim old war-horse, covered with scars gained in your majesty's service."

"Just as I had thought he must be," continued the queen, "but some one intimated to us yesterday that he was young, quite young, and of noble family, Count Basterio."

"He has displayed too much knowledge of warfare to be very young, your majesty," said the count, "and has performed prodigies during this revolt, with only a handful of men."

"That is partly what has so much interested me. I sent to the war office yesterday to know about him, and it was only recorded that he had been sent from Cuba. None of the heads of the department remembered to have seen him at all."

"I saw by the Gazette that he would return to Madrid with his regiment to-day," said the count, "when, if your majesty desires it, I will seek out this Colonel Bezan, and bring him to you."

"Do so; for we would know all our subjects who are gallant and deserving, and I am sure this officer must be both, from what I have already been able to learn."

"Your wish shall be obeyed, your majesty," said the obsequious courtier, bowing low, and turning to a lady of the court, hard by, began to chat about how this old "son of a gun," this specimen of the battle-field would be astonished at the presence of his queen.

"He's all covered with scars, you say?" asked one of the ladies.

"Ay, senorita, from his forehead to his very feet," was the reply.

"It will be immensely curious to see him; but he must look terrifically."

"That's true," added the count; "he's grizzly and rough, but very honest."

"Can't you have him muzzled," suggested a gay little senorita, smiling.

"Never fear for his teeth, I wear a rapier," added the count, pompously.

"But seriously, where's he from?"

"Of some good family in the middle province, I understand."

"O, he's a gentleman, then, and not a professional cut-throat?" asked another.

"I believe so," said the courtier.

The Heart's Secret

"That's some consolation," was the rejoinder to the count's reply.

While the merits of Lorenzo Bezan were thus being discussed, he was marching his regiment towards the capital, after a year's campaign of hard fighting; and the Gazette was right in its announcement, for he entered the capital on the evening designated, and occupied the regularly assigned barracks for his men.

CHAPTER XII. THE QUEEN AND THE SOLDIER.

IT was a noble and brilliant presence into which Lorenzo Bezan was summoned on the day following his arrival from the seat of war. Dons and senoras of proud titles and rich estates, the high officials of the court, the prime ministers the maids of honor, the gayly dressed pages and men-at-arms, all combined to render the scene one of most striking effect.

The young soldier was fresh from the field; hard service and exposure had deepened the olive tint of his clear complexion to a deep nut brown, and his beard was unshaven, and gave a fine classical effect to his handsome but melancholy features. The bright clearness of his intelligent eye seemed to those who looked upon him there, to reflect the battles, sieges and victories that the gallant soldier had so lately participated in. Though neat and clean in appearance, the somewhat sudden summons he had received, led him to appear before the court in his battle dress, and the same sword hung by his side that had so often reeked with the enemy's blood, and flashed in the van of battle.

There was no hauteur in his bearing; his form was erect and military; there was no self-sufficiency or pride in his expression; but a calm, steady purpose of soul alone was revealed by the countenance that a hundred curious eyes now gazed upon. More than one heart beat quicker among the lovely throng of ladies, as they gazed upon the young hero. More than one kindly glance was bestowed upon him; but he was impervious to the shafts of Cupid; he could never suffer again; he could love but one, and she was far away from here.

Lorenzo Bezan had never been at court. True that his father, and indeed his elder brother, and other branches of the house had the entree at court; but his early connection with the army, and a naturally retiring disposition, had prevented his ever having been presented, and he now stood there for the first time. The queen was not present when he first entered, but she now appeared and took her seat of state. Untaught in court etiquette, yet it came perfectly natural for Lorenzo Bezan to kneel before her majesty, which he did immediately, and was graciously bidden to rise.

"Count Basterio," said the queen, "where is this Colonel Bezan, whom you were to bring to us to-day? have you forgotten your commission, sir?"

"Your majesty, he stands before you," replied the complaisant courtier.

"Where, count?"

"Your majesty, here," said the courtier, pointing more directly to our hero.

"This youth, this Colonel Bezan! I had thought to see an older person," said the queen, gazing curiously upon the fine and noble features of the young soldier.

"I trust that my age may be of no detriment to me as it regards your majesty's good feelings towards me," said Lorenzo Bezan, respectfully.

"By no means, sir; you have served us gallantly in the field, and your bravery and good judgment in battle have highly commended themselves to our notice."

"I am little used, your majesty, to courtly presence, and find that even now I have come hither accoutred as I would have ridden on to the field of battle; but if a heart devoted to the service of your majesty, and a willing hand to wield this trusty weapon, are any excuses in your sight, I trust for lenient judgment at your royal hands."

"A brave soldier needs no excuse in our presence, Colonel Bezan," replied the queen, warmly. "When we have heard of your prowess in the field, and have seen the stands of colors you have taken from the enemy, far outnumbering your own force, we have thought you were some older follower of the bugle and the drum—some hardy and gray old soldier, whose life had been spent in his country's service, and therefore when we find an soldier like yourself, so young, and yet so wise, we were surprised."

"Your majesty has made too much of my poor deserts. Already have I been twice noticed by honorable and high promotion in rank, and wear this emblem to-day by your majesty's gracious favor." As he spoke, he touched his colonel's star.

"For your bravery and important services, Captain Bezan, wear this next that star for the present," said the

The Heart's Secret

queen, presenting the young soldier with the medal and order of St. Sebastian, a dignity that few attained to of less distinction than her privy councillors and the immediate officers of the government.

Surprised by this unexpected and marked honor, the young soldier could only kneel and thank her majesty in feeble words, which he did, and pressing the token to his lips, he placed it about his neck by the golden chain that had supported it but a moment before upon the lovely person of his queen. The presence was broken up, and Lorenzo Bezan returned to his barracks, reflecting upon his singular good fortune.

His modest demeanor, his brilliant military services, his handsome face and figure, and in short his many noble points of manliness; and perhaps even the slight tinge of melancholy that seemed ever struggling with all the emotions that shone forth from his expressive face, had more deeply interested the young queen in his behalf than the soldier himself knew of. He knew nothing of the envy realized by many of the courtiers when they saw the queen present him with the medal taken from her own neck, and that, too, of an order so distinguished as St. Sebastian.

"What sort of spirit has befriended you, Colonel Bezan?" said one of his early friends; "luck seems to lavish her efforts upon you."

"I have been lucky," replied the soldier.

"Lucky! the whole court rings with your praise, and the queen delights to honor you."

"The queen has doubly repaid my poor services," continued the young officer.

"Where will you stop, colonel?"

"Stop?"

"Yes; when will you have done with promotion?—at a general's commission?"

"No fear of that honor being very quickly tendered to me," was the reply; while at the same moment he secretly felt how much he should delight in every step that raised him in rank, and thus entitled him to positions and honor.

Such conversations were not unfrequent; for those who did not particularly envy him, were still much surprised at his rapid growth in favor with the throne, his almost magic success in battle, and delighted at the prompt reward which he met in payment for the exercise of those qualities which they could not themselves but honor.

Scarcely had he got off his fighting harness, so to speak, before he found himself the object of marked attention by the nobility and members of the court. Invitations from all sources were showered upon him, and proud and influential houses, with rich heiresses to represent them, were among those who sought to interest the attention if not the heart of the young but rising soldier—he whom the queen had so markedly befriended. Her majesty, too, seemed never tired of interesting herself in his behalf, and already had several delicate commissions been entrusted to his charge, and performed with the success that seemed sure to crown his simplest efforts.

So far as courtesy required, Colonel Bezan responded to every invitations and every extension of hospitality; but though beset by such beauty as the veiled prophet of Khorassan tempted young Azim with, still he passed unscathed through the trial of star-lit eyes and female loveliness, always bending, but never breaking; for his heart would still wander over the sea to the vision of her, who, to him, was far more beautiful than aught his fancy had pictured, or his eyes had seen. All seemed to feel that some tender secret possessed him, and all were most anxious as to what it was. Even the queen, herself, had observed it; but it was a delicate subject, and not to be spoken of lightly to him.

Lorenzo Bezan had most mysteriously found the passage to the queen's good graces, and she delighted to honor him by important commissions; so two years had not yet passed away, when the epaulets of a general were presented to the young and ambitious soldier! Simply outranked now by General Harero, who had so persecuted him, in point of the date of his commission, he far outstretched that selfish officer in point of the honors that had been conferred upon him by the throne; and being now economical with the handsome professional income he enjoyed, he was fast amassing a pecuniary fortune that of itself was a matter of no small importance, not only to himself, but also in the eyes of the world.

Among the courtiers he had already many enemies, simply because of his rise and preferment, and he was known as the favorite of the queen. Some even hinted darkly that she entertained for him feelings of a more tender nature than the court knew of, and that his promotion would not stop at a general's commission, and perhaps not short of commander-in-chief of the armies of Spain. But such persons knew nothing to warrant these surmises;

The Heart's Secret

they arose from the court gossip, day by day, and only gained importance from being often repeated.

"She delights to honor him," said one lady to another, in the queen's ante-chamber.

"Count Basterio says that he will be made prime minister within a twelvemonth."

"The count is always extravagant," replied the other, "and I think that General Bezan richly merits the honors he receives. He is so modest, yet brave and unassuming.

"That is true, and I'm sure I don't blame the queen for repaying his important services. But he doesn't seem to have any heart himself."

"Why not? He treats all with more than ordinary courtesy, and has a voice and manner to win almost any heart he wills. But some dark hints are thrown out about him."

"In what respect, as having already been in love?" asked the other lady.

"Yes, and the tender melancholy that every one notices, is owing to disappointed affection."

"It is strange that he should meet with disappointment, for General Bezan could marry the proudest lady of the court of Madrid."

"O, you forget when he came home to Spain he was only an humble captain of infantry, who had seen little service. Now he is a general, and already distinguished."

They were nearer right in their surmises than even themselves were aware of. It was very true that Captain Bezan, the unknown soldier, and General Bezan, the queen's favorite, honored by orders, and entrusted with important commissions, successful in desperate battles, and the hero of the civil war, were two very different individuals. No one realized this more acutely than did Lorenzo Bezan himself. No step towards preferment and honor did he make without comparing his situation with the humble lieutenant's birth that he filled when he first knew Isabella Gonzales, and when his hopes had run so high, as it regarded winning her love.

Of all the beauty and rank of the Castilian court, at the period of which we write, the Countess Moranza was universality pronounced the queen of beauty. A lineal descendant of the throne, her position near the queen was of such a nature as to give her great influence, and to cause her favor to be sought with an earnestness only second to the service rendered to the queen herself. Her sway over the hearts of men had been unlimited; courted and sought after by the nobles of the land, her heart had never yet been touched, or her favors granted beyond the proud civility that her birth, rank and position at court entitled her to dispense.

She differed from Isabella Gonzales but little in character, save in the tenderness and womanliness, so to speak, of her heart—that she could not control; otherwise she possessed all the pride and self-conceit that her parentage and present position were calculated to engender and foster. On Lorenzo's Bezan's first appearance at court she had been attracted by his youth, his fame, the absence of pride in his bearing, and the very subdued and tender, if not melancholy, cast of his countenance. She was formally introduced to him by the queen, and was as much delighted by the simple sincerity of his conversation as she had been by his bearing and the fame that preceded his arrival at the court. She had long been accustomed to the flirting and attention of the court gallants, and had regarded them with little feeling; but there was one who spoke from the heart, and she found that he spoke to the heart, also, for she was warmly interested in him at once.

On his part, naturally polite and gallant, he was assiduous in every little attention, more so from the feeling of gratitude for the friendship she showed to him who was so broken-hearted. Intercourse of days and hours grew into the intimacy of weeks and months, and they became friends, warm friends, who seemed to love to confide in each other the whole wealth of the soul. Unaccustomed to female society, and with only one model ever before his eyes, Lorenzo Bezan afforded, in his truthfulness, a refreshing picture to the court-wooed and fashionable belle of the capital, who had so long lived in the artificial atmosphere of the queen's palace, and the surroundings of the Spanish capital.

The absence of all intrigue, management and deceit, the frank, open-hearted manliness of his conversation, the delicacy of his feelings, and the constant consideration for her own ease and pleasure, could not but challenge the admiration of the beautiful Countess Moranza, and on her own part she spared no means to return his politeness.

CHAPTER XIII. UNREQUITED LOVE.

PLEASED, and perhaps flattered, by the constant and unvarying kindness and friendliness evinced towards him by the Countess Moranza, the young general seemed to be very happy in her company, and to pass a large portion of his leisure hours by her side. The court gossips, ever ready to improve any opportunity that may offer, invented all manner of scandal and prejudicial stories concerning the peerless and chaste Countess Moranza; but she was above the power of their shafts, and entertained Lorenzo Bezan with prodigal hospitality.

To the young soldier this was of immense advantage, as she who was thus a firm friend to him, was a woman of brilliant mind and cultivation, and Lorenzo Bezan improved vastly by the intellectual peers of the countess. The idea of loving her beyond the feelings a warm friendship might induce, had never crossed his mind, and had it done so, would not have been entertained even for one moment. Of loving he had but one idea, one thought, one standard, and that heart embodiment, that queen of his affections, was Isabella Gonzales.

They rode together, read to each other, and, in short, were quite inseparable, save when the queen, by some invitation, which was law of course to the young general, solicited his attendance upon herself. Her friendship, too, was in want, and her interest great for Lorenzo Bezan, and he delighted to shower upon him every honor, and publicly to acknowledge his service in to the throne.

"The queen seems very kind to you, general," said the countess, to him.

"She is more than kind—she lavish rewards upon me."

"She loves bravery."

"She repays good fortune in round sums," replied the officer.

"But why do you ever wear that sober, sombre, and sad look upon that manly and intellectual face?"

"Do I look thus?" asked the soldier, with a voice of surprise.

"Often."

"I knew it not," replied Lorenzo Bezan, somewhat earnestly.

"It seems a mystery to me that General Bezan, honored by the queen, with a purse well filled with gold, and promoted beyond all precedent in his profession, should not rather smile than frown; but perhaps there is some reason for grief in your heart, and possibly I am careless, and probing to the quick a wound that may yet be fresh."

The soldier breathed an involuntary sigh, but said nothing.

"Yes. I see now that I have annoyed you, and should apologize," she said.

"Nay, not so; you have been more than a friend to me; you have been an instructress in gentle refinement and all that is lovely in your sex, and I should but poorly repay such consideration and kindness, were I not to confide in you all my thoughts."

The countess could not imagine what was coming. She turned pale, and then a blush stole over her beautiful features, betraying how deeply interested she was.

"I hope, general," she said, "that if there is aught in which a person like myself might offer consolation or advice to you, it may be spoken without reserve."

"Ah, countess, how can I ever repay such a debt as you put me under by this very touching kindness, this most sisterly consideration towards me?"

There was a moment's pause in which the eyes of both rested upon the floor.

"You say that I am sad at times. I had thought your brilliant conversation and gentleness of character had so far made me forget that I no longer looked sad. But it is not so. You, so rich in wealth and position, have never known a want, have never received a slight, have never been insulted at heart for pride's sake. Lady, I have loved a being, so much like yourself, that I have often dreamed of you together. A being all pure and beautiful, with but one sad alley in her sweet character—pride. I saw her while yet most humble in rank. I served herself and father and brother, even to saving their lives; I was promoted, and held high honor with my command; but she was rich, and her father high in lordly honors and associations. I was but a poor soldier; what else might I expect but scorn if I dared to love her? But, countess, you are ill," said the soldier, observing her pallid features and quick coming

The Heart's Secret

and going breath.

"Only a temporary illness; it is already gone," she said. "Pray go on."

"And yet I believe she loved me also though the pride of her heart choked the growth of the tendrils of affection. Maddened by the insults of a rival, who was far above me in rank, I challenged him, and for this was banished from the island where she lives. Do you wonder that I am sometimes sad at these recollections? that my full heart will sometimes speak in my face?"

"Nay, it is but natural," answered the countess, with a deep sigh.

General Bezan was thinking of his own anguish of heart, of the peculiarities of his own situation, of her who was far away, yet now present in his heart, else he would have noticed more particularly the appearance of her whom he addressed. The reader would have seen at once that she received his declaration of love for another like a death blow, that she sat there and heard him go on as one would sit under torture; yet by the strong force of her character subduing almost entirely all outward emotions. There was no disguising it to a careful observer, she, the Countess Moranza, loved him!

From the first meeting she had been struck by his noble figure, his melancholy yet handsome and intellectual face, and knowing the gallantry of his services to the queen, was struck by the modest bearing of a soldier so renowned in battle. After refusing half of the gallants of the court, and deeming herself impregnable to the shafts of Cupid, she had at last lost her heart to this man. But that was not the point that made her suffer so now, it was that he loved another; that he could never sustain the tender relation to her which her heart suggested. All these thoughts now passed through her mind.

We say had General Bezan not been so intent in his thoughts far away, he might have discovered this secret, at least to some extent.

He knew not the favor of woman's love; he knew only of his too unhappy disappointment, and, on this his mind was sadly and earnestly engaged.

Days passed on, and the young general saw little of the countess, for her unhappy condition of mind caused her to seclude herself almost entirely from society, even denying herself to him whom she loved so well. She struggled to forget her love, or rather to bring philosophy to her aid in conquering it. She succeeded in a large degree; but at the same time resolved to make it her business to reconcile Lorenzo Bezan to her he loved, if such a thing were possible; and thus to enjoy the consciousness of having performed at least one disinterested act for him whom she too had loved, as we have seen, most sincerely and most tenderly.

Thus actuated, the countess resolved to make a confidant, or, at least, partially to do so, of the queen, and to interest her to return Lorenzo Bezan once more to the West Indian station, with honor and all the due credit. It scarcely needed her eloquence in pleading to consummate this object, for the queen already prepossessed in the young soldier's favor, only desired to know how she might serve him best, in order to do so at once. In her shrewdness she could not but discover the state of the countess's heart; but too delicate to allude to this matter, she made up her mind at once as to what should be done.

She wondered not at the countess's love for Lorenzo Bezan; she could sympathize with her; for had he been born in the station to have shared the throne with her, she would have looked herself upon him with a different eye; as it was, she had delighted to honor him from the first moment they had met.

"Your wish shall be granted, countess," said the queen; "he shall return to Cuba, and with honor and distinction."

"Thanks, a thousand thanks," was the reply of the fair friend.

"You have never told me before the particulars of his returning home."

"It was but lately that I learned them, by his own lips," she answered.

"His life is full of romance," mused the queen, thoughtfully.

"True, and his bravery, has he opportunity, will make him a hero."

"The lady's name—did he tell you that?" asked the queen.

"He did."

"And whom was it?"

"Isabella Gonzales."

"Isabella Gonzales?"

"Yes, my liege lady."

The Heart's Secret

"A noble house; we remember the name."

"He said they were noble," sighed the countess, thoughtfully.

"Well, well," continued the queen, "go you and recruit your spirits once more; as to Lorenzo Bezan, he is my protege, and I will at once attend to his interests."

Scarcely had the Countess Moranza left her presence, before the queen, summoning an attendant, despatched a message to General Bezan to come at once to the palace. The queen was a noble and beautiful woman, who had studied human nature in all its phases; she understood at once the situation of her young favorite's heart, and by degrees she drew him out, as far as delicacy would permit, and then asked him if he still loved Isabella Gonzales as he had done when he was a poor lieutenant of infantry, in the tropical service.

"Love her, my liege?" said the young general, in tones almost reproachful, to think any one could doubt it, "I have never for one moment, even amid the roar of battle and the groans of dying men, forgotten Isabella Gonzales!"

"Love like thine should be its own reward; she was proud, too proud to return thy love; was it not so, general?"

"My liege, you have spoken for me."

"But you were a poor lieutenant of infantry then."

"True."

"And that had its influence."

"I cannot but suppose so."

"Well," said the queen, "we have a purpose for you."

"I am entirely at your majesty's disposal," replied the young soldier.

"We will see what commission it best fits so faithful a servant of our crown to bear, and an appointment may be found that will carry thee back to this distant isle of the tropics, where you have left your heart."

"To Cuba, my liege?"

"Ay."

"But my banishment from the island reads forever," said the soldier.

"We have power to make it read as best suits us," was the reply.

"You are really too good to me," replied the soldier.

"Now to your duty, general, and to-morrow we shall have further business with you."

Lorenzo Bezan bowed low, and turned his steps from the palace towards his own lodgings, near the barracks. It was exceedingly puzzling to him, first, that he could not understand what had led the queen to this subject; second, how she could so well discern the truth; and lastly, that such consideration was shown for him. He could not mistake the import of the queen's words; it was perfectly plain to him what she had said, and what she had meant; and in a strange state of mind, bordering upon extreme of suspicion and strong hope, and yet almost as powerful fears, he mused over the singular condition in which he found himself and his affairs.

It seemed to him that fortune was playing at shuttlecock with him, and that just for the present, at any rate, his star was in the ascendant. "How long shall I go on in my good fortune?" he asked himself; "how long will it be before I shall again meet with a fierce rebuff in some quarter? Had I planned my own future for the period of time since I landed at Cadiz, I could not have bettered it—indeed I could not have dared to be as extravagant as I find the reality. No wonder that I meet those envious glances at court. Who ever shared a larger portion of the honorable favor of the queen than I do? It is strange, all very strange. And this beautiful Countess Moranza—what a good angel she has been to me; indeed, what have I not enjoyed that I could wish, since I arrived in Spain? Yet how void of happiness and of peace of heart am I! Alas, as the humble lieutenant in the Plaza des Armes in Havana, as the lowly soldier whom Isabella Gonzales publicly noticed in the Paseo, as the fortunate deliverer of herself and father, and as resting my wounded body upon her own support, how infinitely happier was I. How bright was hope then in my breast, and brilliant the charms of the fairy future! Could I but recall those happy moments at a cost of all the renown my sword may have won me, how gladly would I do so this moment. This constant suspense is worse than downright defeat or certain misfortune. Is there no power can give us an insight into the hidden destiny of ourselves? is there no means by which we can see the future? Not long could I sustain this ordeal of suspense. Ah, Isabella, what have I not suffered for thy love? what is there I would not endure!"

CHAPTER XIV. THE SURPRISE.

IT had already been announced among the knowing ones at Havana that there was to be a new lieutenant governor general arrive ere long for the island, and those interested in these matters feel of course such an interest as an event of this character would naturally inspire. Those in authority surmised as to what sort of a person they were to be associated with, and the better classes of society in the island wished to know what degree of addition to their society the new comer would be—whether he was married or single, etc.

Isabella Gonzales realized no such interest in the matter; the announcement that there was to be a new lieutenant-governor created no interest in her breast; she remained as she had done these nearly four years, secluded, with only Ruez as her companion, and only the Plato as the spot for promenade. She had not faded during the interim of time since the reader left her with Lorenzo Bezan's letter in her hand; but a soft, tender, yet settled melancholy had possessed the beautiful lineaments and expressive lines of her features. She was not happy. She had no confidant, and no one knew her secret save herself; but an observant person would easily have detected the deep shadow that lay upon her soul.

We say she had not faded—nor had she; there was the same soft and beautiful expression in her face, even more tender than before; for it had lost the tinge of alloy that pride was wont to impart to it; where pride had existed before, there now dwelt tender melancholy, speaking from the heart, and rendering the lovely girl far, far more interesting and beautiful. She had wept bitter, scalding tears over that last farewell between herself and Lorenzo Bezan in the prison; she blamed herself bitterly now that she had let him depart thus; but there was no reprieve, no recalling the consequences; he was gone, and forever!

Communication with the home government was seldom and slowly consummated, and an arrival at that period from Old Spain was an event. Partly for this reason, and partly because there was no one to write to her, Isabella, nor indeed her father, had heard anything of Lorenzo Bezan since his departure. General Harero had learned of his promotion for gallant service; but having no object in communicating such intelligence, it had remained wholly undivulged, either to the Gonzales family or the city generally.

It was twilight, and the soft light that tints the tropics in such a delicate hue at this hour was playing with the beauty of Isabella Gonzales's face, now in profile, now in front, as she lounged on a couch near the window, which overlooked the sea and harbor. She held in her hand an open letter; she had been shedding tears; those, however, were now dried up, and a puzzled and astonished feeling seemed to be expressed in her beautiful countenance, as she gazed now and then at the letter, and then once more off upon the sparkling waters of the Gulf Stream.

"Strange," she murmured to herself, and again hastily read over the letter, and examined the seal which had enclosed it in a ribbon envelope and parchment. "How is it possible for the queen to know my secret? and yet here she reveals all; it is her own seal, and I think even her own hand, that has penned these lines. Let me read again:

"SEÑORITA ISABELLA GONZALES: Deeply interested as we are for the welfare of all our loyal subjects, we have taken occasion to send you some words of information relative to yourself. Beyond a doubt you have loved and been beloved devotedly; but pride, ill asserted arrogance of soul, has rendered you miserable. We speak not knowingly, but from supposition grounded upon what we do know. He who loved you was humble—humble in station, but noble in personal qualities, such as a woman may well worship in man, bravery, manliness and stern and noble beauty of person. We say he loved you, and we doubt not you must have loved him; for how could it be otherwise? Pride caused you to repulse him. Now, señorita, know that he whom you thus repulsed was more than worthy of you; that, although he might have espoused one infinitely your superior in rank and wealth in Madrid, since his arrival here, he had no heart to give, and still remained true to you! Know that by his daring bravery, his manliness, his modest bearing, and above all, his clear-sighted and brilliant mental capacity he has challenged our own high admiration; but you, alas! must turn in scorn your proud lip upon him! Think not we have these facts from him, or that he has reflected in the least upon you; he is far too delicate for such conduct. No, it is an instinctive sense of the position of circumstances that has led to this letter and this plain language. (Signed)

The Heart's Secret

YOUR QUEEN.

"The Senorita Isabella Gonzales."

One might have thought that this would have aroused the pride and anger of Isabella Gonzales, but it did not; it surprised her; and after the first sensation of this feeling was over, it struck her as so truthful, what the queen had said, that she wept bitterly.

"Alas! she has most justly censured me, but points out no way for me to retrieve the bitter steps I have taken," sobbed the unhappy girl, aloud. "Might have espoused one my superior in rank and fortune, at Madrid, but he had no heart to give! Fool that I am, I see it all; and the queen is indeed but too correct. But what use is all this information to me, save to render me the more miserable? Show a wretch the life he might have lived, and then condemn him to death; that is my position—that my hard, unhappy fate!

"Alas! does he love me still? he whom I have so heartlessly treated—ay, whom I have crushed, as it were, for well knew how dearly he loved me! He has challenged even the admiration of the queen, and has been, perhaps, promoted; but still has been true to me, who in soul have been as true to him."

Thus murmured the proud girl to herself—thus frankly realized the truth.

"Ah, my child," said Don Gonzales, meeting his daughter, "put on thy best looks, for we are to have the new lieutenant—governor installed to—morrow, and all of us must be present. He's a soldier of much renown, so report says."

"Doubtless, father; but I'm not very well to—day, and shall be hardly able to go to—morrow—at least I fear I shall not."

"Fie, fie, my daughter; thou, the prettiest bird in all the island, to absent thyself from the presence on such an occasion? It will never do."

"Here, Ruez, leave that hound alone, and come hither," he continued, to the boy. "You, too, must be ready at an early hour to—morrow to go with Isabella and myself to the palace, where we shall be introduced to the new lieutenant—governor, just arrived from Madrid."

"I don't want to go, father," said the boy, still fondling the dog.

"Why not, Ruez?"

"Because Isabella does not," was the childish reply.

"Now if this be not rank mutiny, and I shall have to call in a corporal's guard to arrest the belligerents," said Don Gonzales, half playfully. "But go you must; and I have a secret, but I shall not tell it to you—no, not for the world—a surprise for you both; but that's no matter now. Go you must, and go you will; so prepare you in good season to—morrow to attend me."

Both sister and brother saw that he was in earnest, and made arrangements accordingly.

The occasion of instating the lieutenant—governor in his high and responsible station, was one of no little note in Havana, and was celebrated by all the pomp and military display that could possibly add importance to the event, and impress the citizens with the sacred character of the office. The day was therefore ushered in by the booming of cannon and the music of military bands, and the universal stir at the barracks told the observer that all grades were to be on duty that day, and in full numbers. The palace of the governor—general was decorated with flags and streamers, and even the fountain in the Plaza des Armes seemed to bubble forth with additional life and spirit on the occasion.

It was an event in Havana; it was something to vary the monotony of this beautiful island—city, and the inhabitants seized upon it as a gala day. Business was suspended; the throng put on their holiday suit, the various regiments appeared in full regalia and uniform, for the new lieutenant—commander—in—chief was to review them in the after part of the day.

The ceremony of installation was performed in the state hall of the palace, where all the military, wealth, beauty and fashion of the island assembled, and among these the venerable and much respected Don Gonzales, and his peerless daughter, Isabella, and his noble boy, Ruez. The reception hall was in a blaze of beauty and fashion, till patiently awaiting the introduction of the new and high official the queen had sent from Spain to sit as second to the brave Tacon.

An hour of silence had passed, when at a signal the band struck up a national march, and then advanced into the reception room Tacon, and by his side a young soldier, on whose noble brow sat dignity and youth, interwoven in near embrace. His eyes rested on the floor, and he drew near to the seat of honor with modest mien,

The Heart's Secret

his spurred heel and martial bearing alone betokening that in time of need his sword was ready, and his time and life at the call of duty.

Few, if any, had seen him before, and now among the ladies there ran a low murmur of admiration at the noble and manly beauty of the young soldier. The priest read the usual services, the customary hymn and chant were listened to, when the priest, delegated for this purpose, advanced and said:

"We, by the holy power vested in us, do anoint thee, Lorenzo Bezan—"

At these words, Isabella Gonzales, who had, during all the while, been an absent spectator, never once really turning her eyes toward the spot where the new officer stood, dropped her fan, and sprang to her feet. She gazed for one single moment, and then uttering one long and piteous scream, fell lifeless into her father's arms. This cry startled every one, but perhaps less the cause of it than any one else. He had schooled so critical a moment ceremony went on quietly and was duly installed.

"Alas, alas, for me, what made thee ill?" said she, as he bent over her couch, after.

But Isabella answered him not; she was in a half-dreamy, half-conscious state, and knew not what was said to her.

Ruez stood on the other side of her couch, and kissed her white forehead, but said nothing. Yet he seemed to know more than his father as to what had made Isabella sick, and at last he proved this.

"Why could you not tell Isabella and me, father, that our old friend Captain Bezan was to be there, and that it was he who was to be lieutenant-governor? Then sister would not have been so startled."

"Startled at what, Ruez?"

"Why, at unexpectedly seeing Captain Bezan," said the boy, honestly.

"General Bezan, he is now. But why should she be startled so?"

"O, she is not very well, you know, father," said the boy, evasively.

"True, she is not well, and I managed it as a surprise, and it was too much of one, I see."

And father and brother tended by the sick girl's bedside as they would have done that of an infant. Poor Isabella, what a medley of contradictions is thy heart!

The ceremonies of the day passed off as usual; the review took place in the after part of the day, and as General Bezan, now outranking General Harero, rode by his division, he raised his hat to his old comrades in arms, and bowed coldly to their commander. His rise and new position filled the army with wonder; but none envied him; they loved their old favorite too well to envy his good fortune to him; even his brother officers echoed the cheers for the new lieutenant-general.

But when the noise, the pomp, and bustle of the day was over, and when alone in his apartment by himself, it was then that Lorenzo Bezan's heart and feelings found sway. He knew full well who it was that uttered that scream, and better, too, the cause of it; he feared that he could neither sleep nor eat until he should see her and speak to her once more; but then again he feared to attempt this. True, his position gave him the entree to all classes now, and her father's house would have been welcome to him; but he would far rather have seen her as the humble Captain Bezan, of yore, than with a host of stars upon his breast.

Isabella revived at last, but she scarcely escaped a fever from the shock her system, mental and physical, had received. And how busy, too, wore her thoughts, how never tiring in picturing him with his new honors, and in surprise how he could have won such distinction and honor at the queen's hands, She read again and again the queen's letter. He had no heart to give. That she looked upon—those few words—until her eyes became blind at the effort. And still she read on, and thought of him whom she knew had loved her so dearly, so tenderly, and yet without hope.

Isabella Gonzales's pride had received a severe shock. Will she still bow low to the impulsive and arbitrary promptings of her proud spirit, or will she rise above them, and conquer and win a harvest of peace and happiness?

The story must disclose the answer; it is not for us to say here.

CHAPTER XV. THE SERENAPE.

GENERAL HARERO, as we have already intimated, had not, for a considerable period, enjoyed any degree of intimacy with Isabella Gonzales or her father, but actuated by a singular pertinacity of character, he seemed not yet to have entirely given up his hopes in relation to an alliance with her. The arrival of Lorenzo Bezan again upon the island, he felt, would, in any instance, endanger, if not totally defeat any lingering plans he might still conceive in his mind to bring into operation for the furtherance of his hopes; but when his arrival had actually occurred, and under such brilliant auspices for the young soldier, General Harero was enraged beyond control. He sought his quarters, after the review, in a desperate mood, and walked the narrow precincts of his room with bitter thoughts rankling in his bosom, and a burning desire for revenge goading him to action.

A thousand ways, all of which were more or less mingled with violence, suggested themselves to his mind as proper to adopt. Now he would gladly have fought his rival, have gone into the field and risked his own life for the sake of taking his; but this must be done too publicly, and he felt that the public feeling was with the new official; besides that, General Bezan could now arrest him, as he had done the young officer when he challenged his superior, as the reader will remember. Dark thoughts ran through his brain—some bearing directly upon Isabella Gonzales, some upon Lorenzo Bezan; even assassination suggested itself; and his hands clenched, and his cheeks burned, as the revengeful spirit possessed him and worked in his veins. While Lorenzo Bezan was absent he was content to bide his time, reasoning that eventually Isabella Gonzales would marry him, after a few more years of youthful pride and vanity had passed; but now he was spurred on to fresh efforts by the new phase that matters had taken, and but one course he felt was left for him to pursue, which one word might express, and that was action!

Having no definite idea as to what Lorenzo Bezan would do, under the new aspect of affairs, General Harero could not devise in what way to meet him. That Isabella had been prevented from absolutely loving him only by her pride, when he was before upon the island, he knew full well, and he realized as fully that all those obstacles that pride had engendered were now removed by the rank and position of his rival. He wondered in his own mind whether it was possible that Lorenzo Bezan might not have forgotten her, or found some more attractive shrine whereat to worship. As he realized Isabella's unmatched loveliness, he felt that, however, could hardly be; and thus unsettled as to the state of affairs between the two, he was puzzled as to what course to pursue.

In the meantime, while General Harero was thus engaged with himself, Lorenzo Bezan was thinking upon the same subject. It was nearly midnight; but still he walked back and forth in his room with thoughtful brow. There was none of the nervous irritation in his manner that was evinced by his rival; but there was deep and anxious solicitude written in every line of his handsome features. He was thinking of Isabella. Was thinking of her, did we say? He had never forgotten her for one hour since the last farewell meeting in the prison walls. He knew not how she felt towards him now—whether a new pride might not take the place of that which had before actuated her, and a fear lest she should, by acknowledging, as it were, the former error, be led still to observe towards him the same austere manner and distance.

"Have I won renown, promotion, and extended fame to no purpose, at last?" he asked himself; "what care I for these unless shared in by her; unless her beautiful eyes approve, and her sweet lips acknowledge? Alas, how poor a thing am I, whom my fellow—mortals count so fortunate and happy!"

Thus he mused to himself, until at last stepping to the open balcony window, he looked out upon the soft and delicious light of its tropical moon. All was still—all was beautiful; the steady pace of the sentinel on duty at the entrance of the palace, alone, sounding upon the ear. Suddenly a thought seemed to suggest itself to his mind. Seizing his guitar, from a corner of his room, he threw a thin military cloak about his form, and putting on a foraging cap, passed the sentinel, and strolled towards the Plato! How well he remembered the associations of the place, as he paused now for a moment in the shadow of the broad walls of the barracks. He stood there but for a moment, then drawing nearer to the house of Don Gonzales, he touched the strings of his guitar with a master hand, and sung with a clear, musical voice one of those exquisite little serenades with which the Spanish language

The Heart's Secret

abounds.

The song did not awake Isabella, though just beneath her window. She heard it, nevertheless, and in the half-waking, half-dreaming state in which she was, perhaps enjoyed it even with keener sense than she would have done if quite aroused. She dreamed of love, and of Lorenzo Bezan; she thought all was forgotten—all forgiven, and that he was her accepted lover. But this was in her sleep-awake, she would not have felt prepared to say yet, even to herself, whether she really loved him, or would listen to his address; awake, there was still a lingering pride in her bosom, too strong for easy removal. But sweet was the pure and beautiful girl's sleep-sweet was the smile that played about her delicate mouth—and lovely beyond the painter's power, the whole expression of soft delight that dwelt in her incomparably handsome features.

The song ceased, but the sleeper dreamed on in delightful quietude.

Not so without; there was a scene enacting there that would chill the heart of woman, and call into action all the sterner powers of the other sex.

Some strange chance had drawn General Harero from his quarters, also, at this hour, and the sound of the guitar had attracted him to the Plato just as Lorenzo Bezan had completed his song. Hearing approaching footsteps, and not caring to be discovered, the serenader slung his guitar by its silken cord behind his back, and wrapping his cloak about him, prepared to leave the spot; but hardly had he reached the top of the broad stairs that lead towards the Calle de Mercaderes (street of the merchants), when he stood face to face with his bitter enemy, General Harero!

"General Harero!"

"Lorenzo Bezan!"

Said each, calling the other's name, in the first moment of surprise.

"So you still propose to continue your persecutions towards this lady?" said General Harero, sarcastically.

"Persecutions?"

"That was my word; what other term can express unwelcome visits?"

"It were better, General Harero, that you should remember the change which has taken place in our relative positions, of late, and not provoke me too far."

"I spit upon and defy your authority."

"Then, sir, it shall be exercised on the morrow for your especial benefit."

"Not by you, though," said the enraged rival, drawing his sword suddenly, and thrusting its point towards the heart of Lorenzo Bezan.

But the young soldier had been too often engaged in hand to hand conflicts to lose his presence of mind, and with his uplifted arm shrouded in his cloak, he parried the blow, with only a slight flesh wound upon his left wrist. But General Harero had drawn blood, and that was enough; the next moment their swords were crossed, and a few passes were only necessary to enable Lorenzo Bezan to revenge himself by a severe wound in his rival's left breast. Maddened by the pain of his wound, and reckless by his anger, General Harero pressed hard upon the young officer; but his coolness was more than a match for his antagonist's impetuosity; and after inflicting a severe blow upon his cheek with the flat of his sword, Lorenzo Bezan easily disarmed him, and breaking his sword in twain, threw it upon the steps of the Plato, and quietly walked away leaving General Harero to settle matters between his own rage, his wounds and the surgeon, as best he might, while he sought his own quarters within the palace walls.

General Harero was more seriously wounded than he had at first deemed himself to be, and gathering up the fragments of his sword, he sought the assistance of his surgeon, in a state of anger and excitement that bid fair, in connection with his wounds, to lead him into a raging fever. Inventing some plausible story of being attacked by some unknown ruffian, and desiring the surgeon to observe his wishes as to secrecy, for certain reasons, the wounded man submitted to have his wounds dressed, and taking some cooling medicine by way of precaution, lay himself down to sleep just as the gray of morning tinged the western horizon.

That morning Isabella Gonzales awoke with pleasant memories of her dream, little knowing that the sweet music she had attributed to the creations of her own fancy, was real, and that voice and instrument actually sounded beneath her own chamber window.

"Ah, sister," said Ruez, "how well you are looking this morning."

"Am I, brother?"

The Heart's Secret

"Yes, better than I have seen you this many a long day."

"I rested well last night, and had pleasant dreams, Ruez."

"Last night," said the boy, "that reminds me of some music I heard."

"Music?"

"Yes, a serenade; a manly voice and guitar, I should judge."

"It is strange; I dreamed that I heard it, too, but on waking I thought it was but a dream. It might have been real," mused Isabella, thoughtfully.

"I am sure of it, and though I, too, was but half awake, I thought that I recognized the voice, and cannot say why I did not rise to see if my surmise was correct, but I dropped quickly to sleep again."

"And who did, you think it was, brother?" asked Isabella Gonzales.

"General Bezan, our new lieutenant-governor," said the boy, regarding his sister closely.

"It must have been so, then," mused Isabella, to herself; "we could not both have been thus mistaken. Lorenzo Bezan must have been on the Plato last night; would that I could have seen him, if but for one moment."

"I should like to speak to General Bezan," said Ruez; "but he's so high an officer now that I suppose he would not feel so much interest in me as he did when I used to visit him in the government prison."

Isabella made no reply to this remark, but still mused to herself.

Ruez gazed thoughtfully upon his sister; there seemed to be much going on in his own mind relative to the subject of which they had spoken. At one moment you might read a tinge of anxious solicitude in the boy's handsome face, as he gazed thus, and anon a look of pride, too, at the surpassing beauty and dignity of his sister.

She was very beautiful. Her morning costume was light and graceful, and her whole toilet showed just enough of negligence to add interest to the simplicity of her personal attire. Her dark, jetty hair contrasted strongly with the pure white of her dress, and there was not an ornament upon her person, save those that nature had lavished there in prodigal abundance. She had never looked more lovely than at that hour; the years that had passed since the reader met her in familiar conversation with our hero, had only served still more to perfect and ripen her personal charms. Though there had stolen over her features a subdued air of thoughtfulness, a gentle tinge of melancholy, yet it became her far better than the one of constant levity and jest that had almost universally possessed her heretofore.

Her eyes now rested upon the floor, and the long silken lashes seemed almost artificial in their effect upon the soft olive complexion beneath their shadow. No wonder Ruez loved his sister so dearly; no wonder he felt proud of her while he gazed at her there; nor was it strange that he strove to read her heart as he did, though he kept his own counsel upon the subject.

He was a most observant boy, as we have seen before in these pages, but not one to manifest all of his observations or thoughts. He seemed to, and doubtless did, actually understand Isabella's heart better than she did herself, and a close observer would have noted well the various emotions that his expressive countenance exhibited, while he gazed thus intently at his dearly loved sister. Ruez was a strange boy; he had few friends; but those few he loved with all his heart. His father, sister, and Lorenzo Bezan, shared his entire affection. His inclinations led him to associate but little with those of his own age; he was thoughtful, and even at that age, a day dreamer. He loved to be alone; oftentimes for hours he was thus—at times gazing off upon the sea, and at others, gazing upon vacancy, while his thoughts would seem to have run away with him, mentally and physically. These peculiarities probably arose from his uncommonly sensitive disposition, and formed a sort of chrysalis state, from which he was yet to emerge into manliness.

Kissing her cheek, and rousing her from the waking dream that possessed her now, Ruez turned away and left her to herself and the thoughts his words had aroused. We, too, will leave Isabella Gonzales, for a brief period, while we turn to another point of our story, whither the patient reader will please to follow.

CHAPTER XVI. A DISCOVERY.

"SHE never loved me," said Lorenzo Bezan, in the privacy of his own room, on the morning subsequent to that of the serenade. "It was only my own insufferable egotism and self-conceit that gave me such confidence. Now I review the past, what single token or evidence has she given to me of particular regard? what has she done that any lady might not do for a gentleman friend? I can recall nothing. True, she has smiled kindly—O how dearly I have cherished these smiles! But what are they? Coquettes smile on every one! Alas, how miserable am I, after all the glory and fame I have won!"

Lorenzo Bezan was truly affected, as his words have shown him to be. He doubted whether Isabella Gonzales had ever loved him; her scream and fainting might have been caused by surprise, or even the heat. He had been too ready to attribute it to that which his own heart had first suggested. O, if he only dared to address her now—to see her, and once more to tell how dearly and ardently he loved her still—how he had cherished her by the camp fires, in the battle-field, and the deprivations of war and the sufferings of a soldier's wounds. If he could, if he dared to tell her this, he would be happier. But, how did he know that a proud repulse did not await him! Ah, that was the fear that controlled him; he could not bear to part again from her as he had last done.

While he was thus engaged in reverie alone, a servant, whom he had despatched on an errand, returned to say that General Harero was very ill and confined to his bed; that some wounds he had accidentally received in quelling some street affray had brought on a burning and dangerous fever. On the receipt of this information Lorenzo Bezan wrote a hasty note and despatched the servant once more for a surgeon to come to his quarters; a demand that was answered by the person sent for in a very few minutes. It was the same surgeon who a few years before had so successfully attended Bezan. The recognition between them was cordial and honest, while the new lieutenant-general told him of General Harero's severe illness, and expressed a wish for him to immediately attend the sick man.

"But, General Bezan," said the surgeon, "you have little cause for love to General Harero."

"That is true; but still I desire his recovery; and if you compass it by good nursing and the power of your art, remember fifty doubloons is your fee."

"My professional pride would lead me to do my best," replied the surgeon, "though neither I nor any other man in the service loves General Harero any too much."

"I have reasons for my interest that it is not necessary to explain," said General Bezan, "and shall trust that you will do your best for him, as you did for me."

"By the way, general, I have been half a mind, more than once, ever since your return to the island, to tell you of a little affair concerning your sickness at that time, but I feared you might deem it in some measure impertinent."

"By no means. Speak truly and openly to me. I owe you too much to attribute any improper motives to you in any instance. What do you refer to?"

"Well, general, I suppose on that occasion I discovered a secret which I have never revealed to any one, and upon which subject my lips have been ever sealed."

"What was it?"

"Your love for Isabella Gonzales."

"And how, pray, came you to surmise that?" asked Lorenzo Bezan, in surprise.

"First by your half incoherent talk in moments of delirium, and afterwards by finding her portrait, painted probably by yourself, among your effects."

"True. I have it still," said Lorenzo Bezan, musingly.

"But more than that I discovered from the lady herself?" said the surgeon.

"From the lady? What do you mean?" asked General Bezan, most earnestly.

"Why she visited you during your illness, and though she came in disguise, I discovered her."

"In disguise?"

The Heart's Secret

"Yes."

"How did you discover her? I pray you tell me all, if you are my friend."

"By a tear!"

"A tear!"

"Yes, because I knew no servant or lady's maid sent to execute her mistress's bidding would have been so affected, and that led me to watch for further discovery."

"Did she weep?"

"One tear fell from her eyes upon your hands as she bent over you, and it told me a story that I have since sometimes thought you should know."

"A tear!" mused General Bezan, to himself, rising and walking up and down his room in haste; "that must have come from the heart. Smiles are evanescent; kind words, even, cost nothing; but tears, they are honest, and come unbidden by aught save the heart itself. Tears, did you say?" he continued, pausing before the surgeon.

"As I have said, general."

"And she bathed my forehead, you say?"

"She did, and further, left with me a purse to be devoted to supplying your wants."

"This you never told me of before."

"I have had no opportunity, and to speak honestly, it was very well timed and needed."

"Money!" mused Lorenzo Bezan. "Money, that is full of dross; but a tear,—I would to Heaven I had earlier known of that."

"I hope I have caused you no uneasiness, general."

"Enough. Go on your mission to General Harero; save him, if you can; you have already saved me! Nay, do not stare, but go, and see me again at your leisure."

The surgeon bowed respectfully, and hastened away as he was directed.

That tear had removed mountains from Lorenzo Bezan's heart; he hardly knew what further to do under the circumstances. The earliest impulse of his heart was to seek Isabella, and throwing himself at her feet, beg her to forgive him for having for one moment doubted the affection and gentleness of her woman heart. This was the turning point with him if she had a heart, tender and susceptible, and not corroded by coquetry; he had no fear but that he could win it; his love was too true, too devoted, too much a part of his soul and existence to admit of doubt. Joy once more reigned in his heart. He was almost childish in his impatience to see her; he could hardly wait even for an hour.

At last, seating himself at a table, he seized upon pen and paper and wrote as follows:

"ISABELLA GONZALES: I know not how to address you, in what tone to write, or even as to the propriety of writing to you at all; but the suspense I now suffer is my excuse. I need not reiterate to you how dearly I love you; you know this, dear one, as fully as any assertion of my own could possibly express it. It is trite that my love for you has partaken in no small degree of a character of presumption, daring, as an humble lieutenant of infantry, to lift my eyes to one as peerless and beautiful as yourself, and of a class of society so far above what my own humble position would authorize me to mingle with. But the past is past, and now my rank and fortune both entitle me to the entree, to your father's house. I mention not these because I would have them weigh in my favor with you. Far from it. I had rather you would remember me, and love me as I was when we first met.

"Need I say how true I have been to the love I have cherished for you? How by my side in battle, in my dreams by the camp fire, and filling my waking thoughts, you have ever been with me in spirit? Say, Isabella Gonzales, is this homage, so sincere, thus tried and true, unwelcome to you? or do you, in return, love the devoted soldier, who has so long cherished you in his heart as a fit shrine to worship at? I shall see you, may I not, and you will not repulse me, nor speak to me with coldness. O, say when I may come to you, when look once more into those radiant eyes, when tell you with my lips how dearly, how ardently I love you—have ever loved you, and must still love you to the last? I know you will forgive the impetuosity, and, perhaps, incoherent character of this note. LORENZO BEZAN."

We have only to look into the chamber of Isabella Gonzales, a few hours subsequent to the writing of this letter, to learn its effect upon her.

She was alone; the letter she had read over and over again, and now sat with it pressed to her bosom by both hands, as though she might thus succeed in suppressing the convulsive sobs that shook her whole frame. Tears,

The Heart's Secret

the luxury of both joy and sorrow, where the heart is too full of either, tears streamed down her fair cheeks; tears of joy and sorrow both; joy that he was indeed still true to her, and sorrow that such hours, days, nay, years of unhappiness, had been thus needlessly passed, while they were separated from each other, though joined in soul. O, how bitterly she recalled her pride, and remembered the control it had held over her, how blamed herself at the recollection of that last farewell in the prison with the noble but dejected spirit that in spite of herself even then she loved!

She kissed the letter again and again; she wept like a child!

"The queen was right—he had no heart to give. A countess? She might have brought him higher title, a prouder name, richer coffers; but he is not one to weigh my love against gold, or lineage, or proud estates, or even royal favor; such, such is the man to whom I owe my very life, my father's life, Ruez's life, nay, what do I not owe to him? since all happiness and peace hang upon these; and yet I repulsed, nay, scorned him, when he knelt a suppliant at my feet. O, how could a lifetime of devoted love and gentleness repay him all, and make me even able to forgive myself for the untrue, unnatural part I have played?"

She covered her face with her hands, as if to efface the memory of the conduct which she had just recalled so earnestly, and then rising, walked back and forth in her apartment with all the impetuosity of her Creole blood evinced in the deepened color of her cheek, and the brightness of her beautiful eyes. Then once more seating herself, she sat and trotted her foot impatiently upon the floor.

"O, why, why cannot I recall the past; alas, I see my error too late. Pride, pride, how bitterly and surely dost thou bring thine own reward!"

She strove to answer the letter that now lay open before her upon the table, but could scarcely hold the pen, so deep and long drawn were the sighs that struggled in her bosom. Sheet after sheet was commenced and destroyed. Tears drowned out the efforts of her pen, and she knew not what to do. She bit her fair lips in vexation; what should she write? Once more she read his note, and full of the feelings it induced, tried to answer it. But in vain; her sheet was bathed in tears before she had written one line.

"It is but the truth," she said, to herself, "and I do not care if he knows it."

As she thus spoke, she once more seized the pen and wrote:

"In vain have I essayed to write to you. Let these tears be your answer! ISABELLA GONZALES."

If the beautiful girl had studied for months to have answered the letter of him who loved her so well, it would have been impossible for her to have penned a more touching, more truthful, or more eloquent reply than this. Striking a tiny silver bell by her side, a slave approached, and was despatched with this note at once to the palace of the governor-general.

"Why, sister!" said Ruez, entering the room and speaking at the same time, "you look as if you had been weeping. Pray, are you ill?"

"Nay, brother, I am not ill. It was but a slight affair; it is all over now. Where's Carlo, Ruez?"

The attempt to turn the course of conversation to the dog, was not unobserved by the intelligent boy. He saw at once that there was some matter in his sister's heart that was better to remain her own property, and so, with a kiss, he said no more, but sat down at the window and looked off upon the brilliant afternoon effect of the sun and the light land breeze upon the water. Neither spoke for many minutes, until at last Ruez, still looking off upon the waters of the outer harbor, or Gulf Stream, said:

"I wonder where General Bezan keeps himself when off duty?"

"Why, brother?"

"Because I have called there twice, and have not seen him yet."

"Twice!"

"Yes."

"You know it is but a very few days since he arrived here, brother Ruez, and he must be very busy."

"Probably," answered Ruez, stealing a glance towards his sister.

"His present duty must engage a large portion of his time, I suppose."

"O, yes," said the boy, laughing, "just about one quarter as much of his time as was demanded of him when he was a lieutenant in General Harero's division."

"By—the—by, Ruez, they say the general is very ill of some chance wounds."

"The general deserves all he got, beyond a doubt, and there is little fear but that he will recover fast enough."

The Heart's Secret

He's not one of the sort that die easily. Fortune spares such as he is to try people's temper, and annoy humanity."

"But is he decidedly better?" asked Isabella, with some interest.

"Yes, the surgeon reports him out of danger. Yesterday he was in a fever from his wounds. I can't conceive how he got them, and no one seems to know much about it."

"There's Carlo and father, on the Plato; good-by, sister I'm going to join them."

CHAPTER XVII. THE ASSASSIN.

THE apartment where General Harero was confined to his bed by the severe wounds he had received, presented much such an aspect as Lorenzo Bezan's had done, when in the early part of this story the reader beheld him in the critical state that the wounds he received from the Montaros on the road had placed him. It was dark and gloomy then. The same surgeon who had been so faithful a nurse to our hero, was now with the wounded officer. Notwithstanding the excitement of his patient's mind, he had succeeded in quieting him down by proper remedies, so as to admit of treating him properly for his wounds, and to relieve his brain, at least in part, from the excitement of feeling that a spirit of revenge had created there.

A knock was heard at the door just at the moment when we would have the reader look with us into the apartment, and the surgeon admitted a tall, dark person, partly enveloped in a cloak. It was evening; the barracks were still, and the gloom of the sick room was, if possible, rendered greater by the darkness that was seen from the uncurtained window. At a sign from his patient the surgeon left him alone with the new comer, who threw himself upon a camp-stool, and folding his arms, awaited the general's pleasure. In the meantime, if the reader will look closely upon the hard lineaments of his face, the heavy eyebrow, the profusion of beard, and the cold-blooded and heartless expression of features, he will recognize the game man whom he has once before met with General Harero, and who gave him the keys by which he succeeded in making a secret entrance to Lorenzo Bezan's cell in the prison before the time appointed for his execution. It was the jailor of the military prison.

"Lieutenant," said the general, "I have sent for you to perform a somewhat delicate job for me."

"What is it, general?"

"I will tell you presently; be not in such haste," said the sick man.

"I am at your service."

"Have I not always paid you well when employed by me, lieutenant?"

"Nobly, general, only too liberally."

"Would you like to serve me again in a still more profitable job?"

"Nothing could be more agreeable."

"But it is a matter that requires courage, skill, care and secrecy. It is no boy's play."

"All the better for that, general."

"Perhaps you will not say so when I have explained it to you more fully."

"You have tried me before now!" answered the jailor, emphatically.

"True, and I will therefore trust you at once. There is a life to be taken!"

"What! another?" said the man, with surprise depicted on his face.

"Yes, and one who may cost you some trouble to manage—a quick man and a swordsman."

"Who is it?"

"Lorenzo Bezan!"

"The new lieutenant-general?"

"The same."

"Why, now I think of it, that is the very officer whom you visited long ago by the secret passage in the prison."

"Very true."

"And now you would kill him?"

"Yes."

"And for what?"

"That matters not. You will be paid for your business, and must ask no questions."

"O, very well; business is business."

"You see this purse?"

"Yes."

The Heart's Secret

"It contains fifty doubloons. Kill him before the set of to-morrow's sun, and it is yours."

"Fifty doubloons?"

"Is it not enough?"

"The risk is large; if he were but a private citizen, now—but the lieutenant-governor!"

"I will make it seventy-five."

"Say one hundred, and it is a bargain," urged the jailor, coolly.

"On your own terms, then," was the general's reply, as he groaned with pain.

"It is dangerous business, but it shall be done," said the other, drawing a dagger from his bosom and feeling its point carefully. "But I must have another day, as to-night it may be too late before I can arrange to meet him, and that will allow but one more night to pass. I can do nothing in the daytime."

"Very well."

"Where shall I be most likely to meet him, think you?"

"Possibly after twilight, on the Plato, near the house of Don Gonzales."

"I will be on the watch for him, and my trusty steel shall not fail me."

Thus saying, and after a few other words of little importance, the jailor departed.

Maddened by the short confinement and suffering he had experienced, General Harero resolved to rid himself at once of the stumbling block in his path that General Bezan proved himself to be. A reckless character, almost born, and ever bred a soldier, he stopped at no measures to bring about any desired end. Nor was Lorenzo Bezan's life the first one he had attempted, through the agency of others; the foul stains of murder already rested upon his soul. It was some temporary relief, apparently, to his feelings now, to think that he had taken the primary steps to be revenged upon one whom he so bitterly hated. He could think of nothing else, now, as he lay there, suffering from those wounds, and at times the expression of his face became almost demoniac, as he ground his teeth and bit his lips, in the intense excitement of his passions, the struggle of his feelings being so bitter and revengeful.

But we must leave the sick man with himself for a while, and go elsewhere.

Lorenzo Bezan had been pressed with the business incident to his new position, and this, too, so urgently, that he had not yet answered the note he had received from her he had loved so dearly. He had placed it next his heart, however, and would seize upon the first moment to answer it, not by the pen, but in person. It was for this purpose, that, on the same evening we have referred to, he had taken his guitar, and was strolling at a late hour towards the Plato. It was the first moment that he could leave the palace without serious trouble, and thinking Isabella might have retired for the night, he resolved at least to serenade her once more, as he had so lately done.

It would be impossible to justly describe the feelings that actuated the spirit of the lieutenant-governor. His soul was once more buoyant with hope; he loved deeply, ay, more dearly than ever before, and he believed that he was now indeed loved in return. How light was his heart, how brilliant the expression of his face, as he turned his steps towards the spot where his heart had so often returned when the expanse of ocean rolled between him and the spot so dear to him from association. He hurried forward to the steps that ascended from near the end of the Calle de Mercaderes, on to the Plato, but before he had reached it, there came bounding towards him a large dog, which he instantly recognized to be the hound that had so materially aided him in saving the life of Ruez Gonzales, long before.

At the same moment a hand was laid roughly upon his shoulder, but was instantly removed and on turning to see what was the meaning of this rude salutation, the young general discovered a large, dark figure struggling with the hound, who, upon his calling to him, seemed to relinquish the hold he had of the man's throat, and sprang to his side, while the person whom the dog had thus attacked, disappeared suddenly round an angle of the Cathedral, and left Lorenzo Bezan vastly puzzled to understand the meaning of all this. The man must evidently have raised his arm to strike him, else the dog would not have thus interposed, and then, had the stranger been an honest man, he would have paused to explain, instead of disappearing thus.

"I must be on my guard; there are assassins hereabouts," he said to himself, and after a moment's fondling of the hound, who had instantly recognized him, he once more drew nearer to the Plato, when suddenly the palace bell sounded the alarm of fire. His duty called him instantly to return, which he was forced to do.

It was past midnight before the fire was quenched, and Lorenzo Bezan dismissed the guard and extra watch that had been ordered out at the first alarm, and himself, greatly fatigued by his exertions and care in subduing the fire, which in Havana is done under the direction and assistance of the military, always, he threw himself on his

The Heart's Secret

couch, and fell fast asleep.

Early the subsequent morning, he despatched a line to Isabella Gonzales, saying that on the evening of that day he would answer in person her dear communication; and that though pressing duty had kept him from her side, she was never for one moment absent from his heart. He begged that Ruez might come to him in the meantime, and he did so at once. The meeting between them was such as the reader might anticipate. The officer told the boy many of his adventures, asked a thousand questions of his home, about his kind old father, Isabella, the hound, and all. While Ruez could find no words to express the delight he felt that the same friend existed in General Bezan, that he had loved and cherished as the captain of infantry.

"How strange the fortune that has brought you back again, and so high, too, in office. I'm sure we are all delighted. Father says you richly deserve all the honor you enjoy, and he does not very often compliment any one," said the boy.

The twilight had scarcely faded into the deeper shades of night, on the following evening, when Lorenzo Bezan once more hastened towards the Plato, to greet her whom he loved so tenderly and so truly—she who had been the star of his destiny for years, who had been his sole incentive to duty, his sole prompter in the desire for fame and fortune.

In the meantime there was a scene enacting on the Plato that should be known to the reader. Near the door of the house of Don Gonzales, stood Isabella and Ruez, and before them a young person, whose dress and appearance betokened the occupation of a page, though his garments were soiled and somewhat torn in places. Isabella was addressing the youth kindly, and urged him to come in and rest himself, for he showed evident tokens of fatigue.

"Will you not come in and refresh yourself? you look weary and ill."

"Nay, lady, not now. You say this is the house of Don Gonzales?"

"Yes."

"And are you the daughter of that house?" continued the page.

"I am."

"I might have known that without asking," said the page, apparently to himself.

"Indeed, do you know us, then?" asked Isabella, with some curiosity.

"By reputation, only," was the reply. "The fine of beauty travels far, lady."

"You would flatter me, sir page."

"By our lady, no!"

"Where last thou heard of me, then?"

"Far distant from here, lady."

"You speak and look like one who has travelled a long way," said Isabella.

"I have."

"Do you live far from here, then?" asked Ruez, much interested in the stranger.

"Yes," was the reply. "Lady, I may call on you again," continued the page, "but for the present, adieu."

Turning suddenly away, the stranger walked leisurely towards the head of the broad stairs that led from the Plato to the street below, and descended them.

At the same moment, Lorenzo Bezan, on his way to Isabella Gonzales, had just reached the foot of the stairs, when hearing quick steps behind him, he turned his head just in time to see the form of the page thrown quickly between the uplifted arm of the same dark figure which he had before met here, and himself—and the point of a gleaming dagger, that must else have entered his own body, found a sheath in that of the young stranger, who had thus probably saved his life. More on the alert than he had been before for danger, Lorenzo Bezan's sword was in his hand in an instant, and its keen blade pierced to the very heart of the assassin, who fell to rise no more.

Such, alas, seemed to be the fate of the page who had so gallantly risked, and probably lost, his own life, to protect that of the lieutenant-governor.

"Alas, poor youth," said Lorenzo Bezan, "why didst thou peril thy life to save me from that wound? Canst thou speak, and tell me who thou art, and what I shall do for thee?"

"Yes, in a few moments; bear me to Don Gonzales's house, quickly, for I bleed very fast!"

Lorenzo Bezan's first thought, on observing the state of the case, was to obtain surgical aid at once, and preferring to do this himself to trusting to the strange rabble about him, he turned his steps towards the main

The Heart's Secret

barracks, where he expected to find his friendly surgeon whom he had despatched to serve General Harero. He found his trusty professional man, and hastily despatched him to the house of Don Gonzales, bidding him exercise his best skill for one who had just received a wound intended for his own body.

We, too, will follow the surgeon to the bedside of the wounded page, where a surprise awaited all assembled there, and which will be described in another chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE DISGUISE.

WITH the assistance of some passers-by, the wounded page was borne, as he had desired, to Don Gonzales's house, while, in accordance with an order from Lorenzo Bezan, the now lifeless body of the jailor, for he it was who had attempted the life of the lieutenant-governor, was borne away to the barrack yard. At the door of Don Gonzales's house the page was met by Ruez and Isabella; and those who held the wounded boy, hastily telling of his hurt, and the manner in which it was received, carried him, as directed by Isabella, to her brother's room, and a surgeon was at once sent for.

"Sister," whispered Ruez, "did you hear what those people said?"

"What, brother?"

"Why, that the page saved the life of the lieutenant-governor, Lorenzo Bezan?"

"Yes."

"He must have been hard by, for the page had only just left us."

"True."

"Yet he was not with the rest who entered the house," continued Ruez.

"No," answered Isabella, "some one said he hastened away for a surgeon."

"Hark!"

"Who called you, just now, sister?" asked the brother.

"It was only the groan of that poor boy. I wish they would bring the surgeon."

"But he calls your name; go to him, dear Isabella."

"O, they have found the surgeon, and here he comes," said his sister.

And thus indeed it was. Entering the apartment, the surgeon prepared to examine the wound, but in a moment he called to Isabella, saying:

"Lady, this individual is one of thine own sex! and, I am very sorry to say, is mortally wounded."

"A woman!"

"Yes, lady; see, she would speak to you; she beckons you near."

"Lady, I need not ask what that professional man says. I know too well by my own feelings that I must die, indeed that I am dying!"

"O, say not so; perhaps there may yet be hopes," said Isabella, tenderly.

"Nay, there is none; indeed it is better, far better as it is."

"Why, do you wish to die?" asked Isabella, almost shrinking from her.

"Yes. There is nought left for me to live for, and it is sweet to die, too, for him, for him I have so dearly, so truly loved!"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"General Bezan!"

"You love him?"

"Ay, lady, I believe far better than you can ever do."

"Me!"

"Yes, for I know your own heart, and his true love for you!"

"Who are you?"

"That matters not. But where is he? I thought he followed me here."

"He went for the surgeon, and I have not seen him," was the reply.

Isabella trembled, for at that moment General Bezan, hastening back from the surgeon's, and despatching some matter that occurred by the way, now entered the house, and was greeted most cordially by Don Gonzales and Ruez. And from them he learned the extent of the injury, and, moreover, that the supposed page was a woman, disguised in a page's costume.

"Ah, general!" said Don Gonzales, "I fear, this is some little affair of gallantry on your part that will result

rather seriously."

"Be assured, sir," said the soldier, "that I cannot in any way explain the matter, and that I think there is some decided mistake here."

"Let us go to her apartment and see what can be done for her injury," said General Bezan, after a moment's pause, "be she whom she may."

Just as they entered the apartment, the surgeon had loosened the dress of the sufferer at the throat, and there fell out into sight the insignia of the golden fleece and cross of St. Sebastian, in a scroll of diamonds that heralded the royal arms of Spain, and which none but those in whose veins coursed royal blood could wear! The surgeon started back in amazement, while Don Gonzales uncovered out of respect to the emblem. Springing to the side of the couch, General Bezan turned the half averted face towards him, while he seized the hand of the sufferer, and then exclaimed:

"Is this a miracle—is this a dream—or is this really the Countess Moranza?"

"It is the Countess Moranza," replied the suffering creature, while her eyes were bent on Lorenzo Bezan with an expression of most ineffable tenderness.

All this while Isabella stood aghast, quite in the rear of them all; but that look was not lost upon her; she shuddered, and a cold perspiration stood upon her brow. Had she lived to see such a sight—lived to see another preferred to herself? Alas, what knew she of the scene before her? was it not a shameless one? Had Lorenzo Bezan deceived this high-born and noble lady, and leaving her to follow him, came hither, once more to strive for her love? Her brain was in a whirlwind of excitement, the room grew dark, she reeled, and would have fallen but for the assistance of Ruez, who helped her to her room, and left her there, himself as much amazed at what he had seen as his sister could possibly be.

"Has she gone?" asked the sufferer.

"Who, lady?" said the soldier, tenderly.

"Isabella Gonzales."

"Yes," replied the father. "Do you desire to see her?"

"O yes, I must see her, and quickly; tell her I must see her."

The father retired; while Lorenzo Bezan said, as he bent over the person of the countess:

"Alas, I cannot ask thee now what all this means; you are too ill to talk; what may I, what can I do for thee?"

"Nothing, Lorenzo Bezan. Draw nearer—I have loved thee dearly, passionately loved thee, loved thee as a woman can love; it was not designed that I should win thy heart—it was already another's; but it was designed, the virgin be thanked, that though I might not wed thee, I might die for thee!"

"O, countess, countess, your words are like daggers to my heart. I have been a thoughtless, guilty wretch, but, Heaven bear me witness, I did not sin knowingly!"

"Nay, speak not one word. I am dying even now; leave me for a while. I would be alone with this lady; see, she comes, trembling and bathed in tears!"

Lorenzo Bezan, almost crazed with the contending emotions that beset him, knew not what to say—what to do; he obeyed her wish, and left the room, as did also the rest, leaving Isabella and the Countess Moranza alone together. General Bezan walked the adjoining room like one who had lost all self-control—now pressing his forehead with both hands, as if to keep back the press of thoughts, and now, almost groaning aloud at the struggling of his feelings within his throbbing breast. The light broke in upon him; while he had been so happy, so inconsiderate at Madrid, in the society of the beautiful and intelligent woman; while he had respected and loved her like a brother, he had unwittingly been planting thorns in her bosom! He saw it all now. He even recalled the hour when he told her of his love for Isabella Gonzales—and remembered, too, the sudden illness that she evinced. "Alas! how blind I have been, how thoughtless of all else but myself, and my own disappointments and heart-secrets. Next to Isabella, I could have loved that pure and gentle being. I did feel drawn to her side by unspeakable tenderness and gratitude for the consolation she seemed ever so delicately to impart; but for this right hand I would not have deceived her, the virgin bear me witness."

The moments seemed hours to him, while he waited thus in such a state of suspense as his frame of mind might be supposed to indicate. The surgeon entered to take his leave.

"How is she, sir?" asked Lorenzo Bezan, hastily.

"I have not seen her since we left her with Don Gonzales's daughter. She desired to be left alone with her, you

The Heart's Secret

remember, and it is best to do as she wishes. My skill can do her no good. She cannot live but a very few hours, and I may as well retire."

"There is, then, no hope for her, no possibility of recovery?"

"None!"

Throwing himself into a chair, Lorenzo Bezan seemed perfectly overcome with grief. He did not weep, no tears came to his relief; but it was the fearful struggle of the soul, that sometimes racks the stout frame and manly heart. The soldier who had passed so many hours on the battle-field—who had breathed the breath of scores of dying men, of wounded comrades, and bleeding foes, was a child now. He clasped his hands and remained in silence, like one wrapped in prayer.

He had not remained thus but a short time, when a slave summoned him to the bedside of the dying countess. He found her once more alone. Isabella had retired to her own apartment.

"General," said the sufferer, holding out her hand, which he pressed tenderly to his lips!

"Forgive me, Countess Moranza, pray forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive, and for my sake charge yourself with no blame for me. It is my dying request, for I can stay but a little longer. I have one other to make. You will grant it?"

"Anything that mortal can do I will do for thee."

"Take, then, this package. It contains papers and letters relative to myself, my estates, and to you. Strictly obey the injunctions therein contained."

"I will," said the soldier, kneeling.

"This promise is sacred, and will make me die the happier," she said, drawing a long sigh. "I have explained to her you love the cause of my singular appearance here, and have exculpated you from all blame on my account."

"Ah! but countess, it is terrible that you should have sacrificed your life to save mine."

"Say not so; it is the only joy of this moment, for it has saved me from the curse of the suicide!" she almost whispered, drawing him closer to her side as she spoke. "I could not live, save in the light of your eyes. I knew you were poor, comparatively so—that fortune would place your alliance with her you have loved beyond question as to policy. I resolved to follow you—do all in my power to make you happy—ask of you sometimes to remember me—and then—"

"O, what then?" said Lorenzo Bezan, almost trembling.

"Die by my own hands, in a way that none should know! But how much happier has Heaven ordered it. I could have wished, have prayed for such a result; but not for one moment could I have hoped for it. As it is I am happy."

"And I am wretched," said the soldier; "had the choice been offered me of thy death or mine, how quickly would I have fallen for thee, who hast been more than a sister, a dear, kind sister to me."

The sufferer covered her face with her hands; his tender words, and his gentle accents of voice, and the truthful expression of his face, for one moment reached her hear; through its most sensitive channel! But the struggle was only for a moment; the cold hand of death was upon her; she felt even the chill upon her system. A slight shudder ran through her frame. She crossed her hands upon her bosom, and closing her eyes, breathed a silent prayer, and pressed the glittering cross that hung about her neck fervently to her lips. Then turning to the soldier she said:

"You may well love her, general, for she is very beautiful, and worthy of you," referring to Isabella Gonzales, who had just returned to her apartment.

"She is as lovely in person as in mind. But, alas! must I stand here powerless, and see you, but an hour ago so perfectly well, so full of life and beauty, die without one effort to save you?"

"It is useless," said the sufferer. "I feel that the surgeon is correct, and I must die very shortly."

"O, that I might save you, countess, even by mine own life!"

"You would do so, I know you would; it is so like your nature," she said, turning her still beautiful eyes upon him.

"I would, indeed I would," answered General Bezan.

A sweet smile of satisfaction stole over her pale features as she once more languidly closed her eyes, and once more that ominous shudder stole through her frame.

"It is very cold, is it not?" she asked, realizing the chill that her paralyzed circulation caused.

The Heart's Secret

"Alas, countess, I fear it is the chill of death you feel!"

"So soon? well, I am prepared," she said, once more kissing the cross.

"Heaven bless and receive your pure and lovely spirit," he said, devoutly, as she once more replaced her hand within his own.

"Farewell, Lorenzo Bezan. Sometimes think kindly of the Countess M-o-r-a-n-z-a!"

She breathed no more. That faithful and beautiful spirit had fled to heaven!

CHAPTER XIX. THE AVOWAL.

THERE had seemed to be a constantly recurring thread of circumstances, which operated to separate Lorenzo Bezan and Isabella Gonzales. Isabella had received a fearful shock in the remarkable occurrences of the last few days. The devoted love of the countess, her self-sacrificing spirit, her risk and loss of her life to save him she loved, all had made a most indelible impression upon her. There was a moment, as the reader has seen, when she doubted the truth and honor of Lorenzo Bezan; but it was but for a moment, for had not his own truthfulness vindicated itself to her mind and heart, the words of the Countess Moranza had done so. That faithful and lovely woman told her also of the noble spirit of devoted love that the soldier bore her, and how honestly he had cherished that love he bore for her when surrounded by the dazzling beauty and flattery of the whole court, and bearing the name of the queen's favorite.

All this led her of course to regard him with redoubled affection, and to increase the weight of indebtedness of her heart towards one whom she had treated so coldly, and who for her sake had borne so much of misery. "But ah!" she said to herself, "if he could but read this heart, and knew how much it has suffered in its self-imposed misery, he would indeed pity and not blame me. I see it all now; from the very first I have loved him—from the hour of our second meeting in the Paseo—poor, humble and unknown, I loved him then; but my spirit was too proud to own it; and I have loved him ever since, though the cold words of repulse have been upon my tongue, and I have tried to impress both him and myself to the contrary. How bitter are the penalties of pride—how heavy the tax that it demands from frail humanity! No more shall it have sway over this bosom!" As she spoke, the beautiful girl threw back the dark clustering hair from her temples, and raised her eyes to heaven, as if to call for witness upon her declaration.

The proper steps were taken for sending the body of the countess home to Madrid, where it would receive the highest honors, and those marks of distinction which its connection with the royal blood of Spain demanded. Lorenzo Bezan mourned sincerely the loss of one who had been so dear and kind a friend to him. An instinctive feeling seemed to separate Isabella and the lieutenant-governor for a brief period. It was not a period of anxiety, nor of doubt, concerning each other. Strange to say, not one word had yet been exchanged between them since that bitter farewell was uttered in the prison walls of the military keep. No words could have made them understand each other better than they now did; each respected the peculiar feelings of the other. But weeks soon pass, and the time was very brief that transpired before they met in the drawing-room of Don Gonzales's house. Ruez welcomed Lorenzo Bezan as he entered, led him to the apartment, and calling his sister, declared that they must excuse him, for he was going with his father for a drive in the Paseo.

Lorenzo Bezan sat for some moments alone, when he heard a light footstep upon the marble floor of the main hall, and his heart throbbed with redoubled quickness. In a moment more Isabella Gonzales stood before him; her eyes bent upon the floor, seemed immovably there; she could not raise them; but she held forth her hand towards him! He seized it, pressed it to his lips again and again, then drawing her closely to his bosom, pressed his lips to her forehead, and asked:

"Isabella, Isabella, do you, can you really love me?"

"Love you, Lorenzo Bezan?"

"Yes, dear one, love me as I have for years loved you."

She raised her eyes now; they were streaming with tears; but through them all she said:

"I have looked into my heart, and I find that I have ever loved you!"

"Sweet words! O, happy assurance," said the soldier, rapturously.

"One word will explain all to thee. I was spoiled when in childhood. I was told that I was beautiful, and as I grew older a spirit of haughtiness and pride was implanted in my bosom by the universal homage that was offered to me on all hands. I had no wish ungratified, was unchecked, humored, in short spoiled thy affectionate indulgence, and but for one good influence—that exercised by the lovely character of my dear brother, Ruez—I fear me, I should have been undeniably lost to the world and myself in some strange denouement of my life. A

The Heart's Secret

startling and fearful event introduced you to me under circumstances calculated to fix your form and features forever in my memory. It did so. I could not but be sensible of your noble and manly qualities, though seen through what was to my mind a dark haze of humble associations.

"This was my first impression of you. You boldly wooed me, told me you loved me above all else. Your very audacity attracted me; it was so novel, so strange to be thus approached. I, who was the acknowledged belle of Havana, before whom the best blood and highest titles of the island knelt, and who was accustomed to be approached with such deference and respect, was half won before I knew it, by the Lieutenant Lorenzo Bezan, on the Plato. Singular circumstances again threw us together, where again your personal bravery and firmness served us so signally. I knew not my own heart even then, though some secret whisperings partly aroused me, and when you were sent to prison, I found my pride rising above all else. And yet by some uncontrollable impulse I visited you, disguised, in prison; and there again I can see how nearly I had acknowledged my true feelings; but once more the secret whisper sounded in my ear, and I left you coldly, nay, almost insultingly. But bitterly have I wept for that hour.

"In vain have I struggled on, in vain strove to forget; it was impossible; and yet, never until you sent me that note, have I frankly acknowledged, even to my own heart, the feeling which I have so long been conscious of. Ah, it has been a bitter experience that I have endured, and now I can see it all in its true light, and own to thee freely, that I have loved even from the first."

While she had spoken thus, Lorenzo Bezan had gently conducted her to a couch, and seated by her side he had held her hand while he listened and looked tenderly into the depths of her lustrous and beautiful eyes. He felt how cheaply he had earned the bliss of that moment, how richly he was repaid for the hardships and grief he had endured for Isabella's sake.

"Ah, dearest, let us forget the past, and live only for each other and the future."

"Can you so easily forget and forgive?" she asked him, in softest accents.

"I can do anything, everything," he said, "if thou wilt but look ever upon me thus," and he placed his arms about that taper waist, and drew her willing form still nearer to his side, until her head fell upon his shoulder. "There will be no more a dark side to our picture of life, dear Isabella."

"I trust not."

"And you will ever love me?"

"Ever!" repeated the beautiful girl, drawing instinctively nearer to his breast.

At that moment, Ruez, returning from the Plato to procure some article which he had left behind, burst hastily into the room, and, blushing like a young girl at the scene that met his eye, he was about to retire hastily, when Lorenzo Bezan spoke to him, not the least disconcerted; he felt too secure in his position to realize any such feeling:

"Come hither, Ruez, we have just been speaking of you."

"Of me?" said the boy, rather doubtfully, as though he suspected they had been talking of matters quite foreign to him.

"Yes, of you, Ruez," continued his sister, striving to hide a tell-tale blush, as her eyes met her brother's. "I have been telling General Bezan what a dear, good brother you have been to me—how you have ever remembered all his kindnesses to me; while I have thought little of them, and have been far from grateful."

"Not at heart, sister," said the boy, quickly; "not always in your sleep, since you will sometimes talk in your day dreams!"

"Ah, Ruez, you turned traitor, and betray me? well, there can be little harm, perhaps, to have all known now."

"Now?" repeated Ruez. "Why do you use that word so decidedly?"

"Why, you must know, my dear Ruez," said the general, "that a treaty has been partially agreed upon between us, which will necessarily put all hostilities at an end; and, therefore, any secret information can be of no possible use whatever."

"Is it so, Isabella?" asked Ruez, inquiringly, of his sister.

"Yes, brother, we are to 'bury the hatchet,' as the American orators say."

"Are you in earnest? but no matter; I am going—let me see, where was I going?"

"You came into the room as though you had been shot out of one of the port-holes of Moro Castle," said the general, playfully. "No wonder you forget!"

The Heart's Secret

The boy looked too full for utterance. He shook the general's hand, heartily kissed Isabella, and telling them he believed they had turned conspirators, and were about to perpetrate some fearful business against the government, and sagely hinting that unless he was also made a confidant of, he should forthwith denounce them to Tacon, he shook his hand with a most serious mock air and departed.

It would be in bad taste for us, also, not to leave Isabella and Lorenzo Bezan alone. They had so much to say, so much to explain, so many pictures to paint on the glowing canvass of the future, with the pencils of hope and love, that it would be unfair not to permit them to do so undisturbed. So we will follow Ruez to the volante, and dash away with him and Don Gonzales to the Paseo, for a circular drive.

"I left General Bezan and Isabella together in the drawing-room," began Ruez to his father, just as they passed outside of the city walls.

"Yes. I knew he was there," said the father, indifferently.

"That was a very singular affair that occurred between him and the Countess Moranza."

"Queer enough."

"Yet sister says that the general was not to blame, in any respect."

"Yes, I took good care to be satisfied of that," said the father, who had indeed made it the subject of inquiry.

"Had he been guilty of deceiving that beautiful and high-born lady, he should never have entered my doors again. I should have despised him."

"He seems very fond of Isabella," continued the boy, after a brief silence.

"Fond of her!"

"Yes, and she of him," said Ruez.

"Lorenzo Bezan fond of my daughter, and she of him?"

"Why, yes, father; I don't see anything so very strange, do you?"

"Do I? Lorenzo Bezan is but a nameless adventurer—a—a—"

"Stop, father—a lieutenant-governor, and the queen's favorite."

"That is true," said Don Gonzales, thoughtfully. "Yes, but he's poor."

"How do you know, father?"

"Why, it is but reasonable to think so; and my daughter shall not marry any one with less position or fortune than herself."

"As to position, father," continued the boy, "General Bezan wears orders that you would give half your fortune to possess!"

"I forgot that."

"And has already carved a name for himself in Spanish history," said Ruez.

"True."

"Then I see not how you can complain of him on the score of position."

"No; but he's poor, and I have sworn that no man, unless he brings as large a fortune as Isabella will have in her own right, shall marry her. How do I know but it may be the money, not Isabella, that he wants?"

"Father!"

"Well, Ruez."

"You are unjust towards the noble nature of that man; there are few men like him in the queen's service, and it has not required long for her to discern it." As the boy spoke, he did so in a tone and a manner that almost awed his father. At times he could assume this mode, and when he did so, it was because he felt what he uttered, and then it never failed of its influence upon the listener.

"Still," said Don Gonzales, somewhat subduedly, "he who would wed my peerless child must bring something besides title and honor. A fortune as large as her own—nothing else. This I know Lorenzo Bezan has not, and there's an end of his intimacy with your sister, and I must tell her so this very evening."

"As you will, father. You are her parent, and can command her obedience; but I do not believe you can control Isabella's heart," said Ruez, earnestly.

"Boy, I do not like thee to talk to me thus. Remember thy youth, and thy years. Thou art ever putting me to my metal."

"Father, do I not love thee and sister Isabella above all else on earth?"

"Yes, yes, boy, I know it; thou dost love us well; say no more."

The Heart's Secret

Ruez had broken the ice. He found that it was time, however, to be silent now, and leaning back thoughtfully in the volante, he neither spoke again, nor seemed to observe anything external about him until he once more entered the Plato and his father's noble mansion.

CHAPTER XX. HAPPY FINALE.

WHEN Don Gonzales returned from his drive with Ruez, and while he was still thinking upon the subject which the boy had introduced, relative to Lorenzo Bezan and Isabella, he found the general awaiting his return and desiring an interview with him. This was of course granted, and the two retired to the library of Isabella's father, where the soldier resolved to make at once, and in plain terms, an offer of his hand to this daughter of the old house of Gonzales, and to beg her parents permission for their union. Being in part prepared for this proposal, as we have already seen, the father was not taken at all aback, but very politely and considerately listened to his guest. At last, however, when it came his turn to speak, he was decided.

"I will tell you honestly, general, that, while I fully realize the great service you have done me and mine; while I cannot but admire the tact, talent, and noble characteristics that have so quickly elevated you to a niche in the temple of fame, still I am a very practical man, and look well to worldly matters and immediate interests. This has been my policy through life, and I have ever found that it was a good and sound one, and carried me on well."

"As a general rule, perhaps, it is a very good one," added Lorenzo Bezan, to fill up a pause where he seemed expected to say something.

"Now as to the matter which you propose, aside from the matter as to whether Isabella herself would consent, or—"

"I beg pardon, sir, for interrupting you, but on that score I have her assurance already."

"You are very prompt, sir. Perhaps it would have been it little more in accordance with propriety to have first spoken to me."

"You have a right to question the point, and perhaps are correct, but to this there is little consequence attached," said General Bezan, very decidedly.

"Well, sir, it is proper to come at once to the point, and I will do so. I have registered an oath; let me tell you, then, that my daughter shall never espouse any man unless his fortune is fully equal to her own, and this oath I shall most religiously keep!"

"You have made a strange resolve, sir, and one which will affect your daughter's happiness, no less than it will do mine."

"The oath is registered, General Bezan, and if necessary I am prepared to strengthen it by another; for it has been my resolve for years."

"You are so decided, sir, that of course no argument on my part would in the least influence you. But I trust you will consider of this matter seriously, at least, and I may again speak to you upon the subject."

"I shall always be happy and proud to meet General Bezan as a particular friend in my own house, or elsewhere," continued Don Gonzales, "but there, we must understand each other, our intimacy ceases, or as to the proposal of becoming my son-in-law, you will see that it is totally out of the question, when you remember my religiously registered oath upon the subject."

"For the present, then, I must bid you good-day, sir," said the soldier, turning from the apartment, and seeking the governor's palace.

When he had left, Isabella's father summoned her to his own room, and telling her at once the conversation he had just passed with General Bezan, reiterated to her that nothing would move him from the resolve, and she must learn to forget the young soldier, and place her affections upon some wealthy planter of the island, who coupled with good looks and a pleasing address, the accompaniments of a full purse and broad estates. Isabella made no reply to her father; she was confounded at the cupidity of his spirit; he had never spoken thus to her before. She loved him dearly, and grieved that he was susceptible of being influenced by such a grovelling consideration, and with a new cloud hovering over her brow, and its shadow shutting out the gleam of hope that had so lately been radiating it, she left him.

The reader may well imagine the state of mind in which Lorenzo Bezan sought the privacy of his own apartment in the palace. To fall again from such high hopes was almost more than he could bear, and he walked

The Heart's Secret

his room with hurried and anxious steps. Once he sat down to address a letter to Isabella, for he had not seen her since he left Don Gonzales, and he did not know whether her father would inform her of their conversation or not. But after one or two ineffectual efforts, he cast the paper from him, in despair, and rising, walked his room again. To an orderly who entered on business relating to his regular duty, he spoke so brief and abruptly as to startle the man, who understood him only in his better and calmer moods. Again was his cup of bliss, dashed to the earth!

"I had some undefined fear of it," he said to himself. "I almost felt there would be some fearful gulf intervene between Isabella and myself, when I had again left her side. O, prophetic soul, though our eyes cannot fathom the future, there is an instinctive power in thee that foretells evil. My life is but a sickly existence. I am the jest and jeer of fortune, who seems delighted to thwart me, by permitting the nearest approach to the goal of happiness, and yet stepping in just in time to prevent the consummation of my long cherished hopes."

As he spoke thus, he sat down by the side of his table, and casting his eyes vacantly thereon, suddenly started at seeing the address of his own name, and in the hand of the Countess Moranza. It was the package she had handed to him at her dying moment. In the excitement of the scene, and the circumstances that followed, he had not opened it, and there it had since laid forgotten. He broke the seal, and reading several directions of letters, notes, and small parcels, among the rest one addressed to the queen, he came to one endorsed as important, and bearing his own name, Lorenzo Bezan.

He broke the seal and read, "The enclosed paper is my last will and testament, whereby I do give and bequeath to my friend, General Lorenzo Bezan, my entire estates in the Moranza district of Seville, as his sole property, to have and to hold, and for his heirs after him, forever. This gift is a memento of our friendship, and a keepsake from one who cherished him for his true nobility of soul!"

Could he be dreaming? was he in his senses? Her entire estates of Moranza, in Seville—a princely fortune given to him thus? He could not believe his senses, and moved about his room with the open letter in his hand, not knowing what he did. It was long before he could calm his excitement. What cared he for fortune, except so far as it brought him near to her he loved. It was this that so sensibly affected him; the bright sun of hope once more burst through the clouds.

"Her father says that the suitor of Isabella Gonzales must bring as large a fortune to her as she herself possesses. As large? here I am endowed with the possession of an entire Spanish district—almost a small principality. Fortune? it would outnumber him in doubloons a thousand times over. I happen to know that district—rich in castles, convents, churches, cattle, retainers. Ah, Countess Moranza, but it sadly reminds me of thy fate. Thou didst love me, ay, truly—and I so blind that I knew it not. But regrets are useless; thy memory shall ever be most tenderly cherished by him whom thou hast so signally befriended, so opportunely endowed."

The reader may well suppose that Lorenzo Bezan spared no time in communicating the necessary facts to Don Gonzales, which he did in the following brief notice:

"Finding, after inquiry, as to your pecuniary affairs, and also after a slight examination of my own that, in relation to the matter of property, I am possessed of a fortune that would be valued many times beyond your own, I am happy to inform you that the only objection you mentioned to my proposal relative to your daughter, is now entirely removed. Concerning the details of this business I shall do myself the honor to make an early call upon you, when I will adduce the evidence of the statement I have made herein. Sincerely yours, LORENZO BEZAN, Lt. Gov. and Gen'l Commanding. Given at the palace, Havana."

Don Gonzales was no less surprised on the reception of this note, than Lorenzo Bezan had been when he first discovered the princely gift that the generous countess had endowed him with. To do him justice, it was the only objection he had to Lorenzo Bezan, and he secretly rejoiced that the circumstances stated would enable him to give a free consent to the union of two souls which seemed so completely designed for each other. He called to Ruez, who had already heard the state of affairs from his father, and told him at once; and it was, of course, not long after that Isabella dried her tears, and stilled her throbbing heart by a knowledge that the last objection to the happy union was obviated.

Don Gonzales, when he received the letter, and had carefully examined it, even went personally to the palace to tender his congratulations to the young lieutenant-governor, and to tell him that he had no longer any objections to raise as to the proposal which he had so lately taken occasion to make, relative to Isabella.

"We, then, have your free consent as to our early union, Don Gonzales?"

"With all my heart, General Bezan, and may the virgin add her blessing."

The Heart's Secret

"I see, sir, you look anxious as to how I came in possession of this princely fortune."

"I am indeed filled with amazement; but the evidence you offer is satisfactory."

"At another time I will explain all to you," replied Lorenzo Bezan, smiling.

"It is well; and now, sir, this matter of so much importance to my peace of mind is settled."

Thus saying, Don Gonzales shook the soldier's hand warmly, and departed, really delighted at the result of the matter, for had not General Bezan brought the requisite fortune, the old Spaniard would have religiously kept his oath; and, if not influenced by honor and consciousness in the matter of fulfilling his sacred promise, he would have been led to do so through fear, he being in such matters most superstitious.

Lorenzo Bezan resolved that little time should intervene before he availed himself of the promise of Isabella's father. "Once mine, I shall fear no more casualties, and shall have the right not only to love, but to protect her. We know each other now, better, perhaps, than we could have done save through the agency of misfortune, and ere to-morrow's sun shall set, I hope to call her mine."

As the moon swept up from out the sea that night, and tinged the battlements of Moro Castle, and silvered the sparkling bay with its soft light, two forms sat at one of the broad balcony windows of Don Gonzales's house. It was Lorenzo Bezan and Isabella. They were drinking in of the loveliness of the hour, and talking to each other upon the thousand suggestions that their minds busily produced as connected with the new aspect of their own personal affairs. The arm of the gallant soldier was about her, and the soft curls of her dark hair lay lovingly about his neck as she rested her head upon his shoulder.

We might depict here the splendors of the church of Santa Clara, where Isabella and Lorenzo Bezan were united; we might elaborate upon their perfect happiness; state in detail the satisfaction of Don Gonzales, and show how happy was the gentle, thoughtful, kind-hearted and brave Ruez; and we might even say that the hound seemed to realize that General Bezan was now "one of the family," wagging his tail with increased unction, and fawning upon him with more evident affection. But when we say that all were happy, and that the great aim of Lorenzo Bezan's heart was accomplished, the reader will find ample space and time to fill up the open space in the picture.

General Harero, fearing the disclosure in some way of his villany in attempting, through his agent, the now dead jailor, the life of Lorenzo Bezan, immediately resigned his post, and sought an early opportunity to return to Spain. Here he fell in a duel with one whom he had personally injured, and his memory was soon lost to friends and foes.

"Sister," said Ruez, to Isabella, a few days after her marriage with the lieutenant-governor, "are you going to have Lorenzo Bezan cashiered? Are you going to complain of him, as you promised me you should do?"

"You love to torment me, Ruez," said the blooming bride, with affected petulance.

"That is not answering my question," continued her brother.

"If you don't have a care, I'll complain of you, Ruez, for that piece of business in the guardhouse!"

"I've no fear about that now, since it has resulted so well."

"That's true; but it is really perplexing to have you always right. I do declare, Ruez, I wish you would do something that will really vex me so that I can have a good quarrel with you."

"No you don't, sister."

"Yes, I do."

"Tut! tut!" said Lorenzo Bezan, entering at that moment; "I thought I heard a pistol discharge."

"Only a kiss, general," said Ruez, pleasantly. And this was a sample of the joy and domestic peace of Don Gonzales's family.

In Isabella's ignorance of the tender and truthful promptings of her own bosom, we have shown you the HEART'S SECRET, and in the vicissitudes that attended the career of Lorenzo Bezan, the FORTUNES OF A SOLDIER.

THE END.