

The Watchman and Southron.

THE SUMTER WATCHMAN, Established April, 1860.

"Be Just and Fear not—Let all the Ends thou Aims' at, be thy Country's, thy God's land Truth's."

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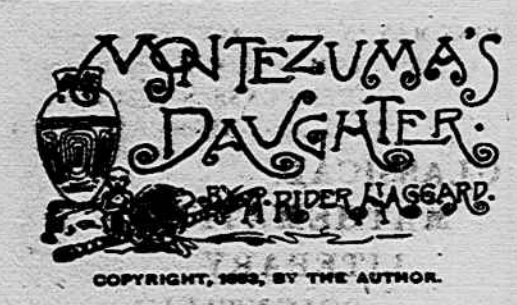
The Watchman and Southron.

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—BY—
N. G. Osteen,
SUMTER, S. C.

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CHAPTER XVII OTOMIE'S COUNSEL.

On the day after the return of Cortes to Mexico, before the hour of dawn, I was awakened from my uneasy slumbers by the whistling cries of thousands of warriors and the sound of atabals and drums. Hurrying to my post of outlook on the little pyramid, where Otomie joined me, I saw that the whole people were gathered for war. So far as the eye could reach, in square, market place and street, they were massed in thousands and tens of thousands. Some were armed with slings, some with bows and arrows, others with javelins tipped with copper and the clubs set with spikes of obsidian that is called maqua, and yet others, citizens of the poorer sort, with stakes hardened in the fire. The bodies of some were covered with golden coils of mail, crested with hair and fashioned like the heads of pumas, snakes or wolves; others wore escarples or coats of quilted cotton, but the most of them were naked except for a loincloth. On the flat, bare, open spaces of the city, also, and even on the top of the teocalli of sacrifice, were bands of men whose part it was to rain missiles into the Spanish quarters. It was a strange sight to see in that red sunrise and one never to be forgotten, as the light flashed from temples and palace walls onto the feather garments and gay banners, the points of countless spears and the armor of the Spaniards, who hurried to and fro behind their battlements making ready their defense.

As soon as the sun was up a priest blew a shrill note upon a shell, which was answered by a trumpet call from the Spanish quarters. Then, with a shriek of rage, the thousands of the Aztecs rushed to the attack, and the air grew dark with missiles. Instantly a wavering line of fire and smoke, followed by a sound as of thunder, broke from the walls of the palace of Aza, and the charging warriors fell like autumn leaves beneath the cannon and arquebus balls of the Christians. For a moment they wavered, and a great groan went up to heaven, but I saw Guatemoc spring forward, a banner in his hand, and turning up again he rushed after him. Now they were beneath the wall of the palace, and the assault began. The Aztecs fought furiously. Time upon time they strove to climb the wall, piling up the bodies of the dead to serve them as ladders, and time upon time they were repulsed with cruel loss. Falling in this, they set themselves to battering it down with heavy beams, but when the breach was made and they clustered in it like herded sheep the cannon opened fire on them, tearing long lanes through their mass and leaving them dead by scores. Then they took to the shooting of flaming arrows, and by this means fired the outworks, but the palace was of stone and would not burn. Thus for 12 long hours the struggle raged unceasingly till the sudden fall of darkness put an end to it, and the only sight to be seen was the flare of countless torches carried by those who sought out the dead, and the only sounds to be heard were the voices of women lamenting and the groans of the dying.

On the morrow the fight broke out again at dawn, when Cortes sallied forth with the greater part of his soldiers and some thousands of his Tlascalalan allies. At first I thought that he aimed his attack at Montezuma's palace, and a breath of hope went through me, since then it might be possible for me to escape in the confusion. But this was not so, his object being to take fire to the houses, from the flat roofs of which numberless missiles were hurled hourly upon his followers. The charges were desperate, and it succeeded, for the Indians could not withstand the shock of the cannon any more, than their naked bodies could turn the Spaniards' steel. Presently scores of houses were in flames, and thick columns of smoke rolled up like those that float from the mouth of Popo. But many of those who rode and ran from the gates of Aza did not come back thither, for the Aztecs clung to the legs of the horses and dragged their riders away living.

That very day these captives were sacrificed on the altar of Huitzel and in the sight of their comrades, and with them a horse was offered up, which had been taken alive, and was borne and dragged with infinite labor up the steep sides of the pyramid. Indeed never had the sacrifices been so many as during these days of combat. All day long the altars ran red, and all day long the cries of the victims rang in my ears as the maddened priests went about their work for thus they sought to please the gods who should give them victory over the Teules.

Thus the struggle went on day after day till thousands of the Aztecs were dead and the Spaniards were well nigh worn out with hunger, war and wounds, for they could not rest a single hour. At length one morning when the assault was at its hottest Montezuma himself appeared upon the central tower of the palace clad in splendid robes and wearing the diadem. Before him stood heralds bearing golden wands, and about him were the nobles who attended him in his captivity and a guard of Spaniards. He stretched out his hand, and suddenly the fighting was staid and a silence fell upon the place; even the wounded ceased from their groaning. Then he addressed the multitude. What he said I was too far off to hear, though I learned his purport afterward. He prayed his people to cease from war, for the Spaniards were his friends and guests and would presently leave the city of Tenochtitlan. When these cowardly words had passed his lips, a fury took his subjects, who for long years had worshipped him as a god, and a shriek rent the air that seemed to say two words only: "Woman! Traitor!"

Then I saw an arrow rush upward and strike the emperor, and after the arrow a shower of stones, so that he fell down upon the tower roof. Now a voice cried: "We have slain our king! Montezuma is dead!" And instantly, with a dreadful wailing, the multitude fled this way and that, so that presently no living man could be seen where there had been thousands.

I turned to comfort Otomie, who was watching by my side and had seen her royal father fall, and led her weeping into the palace. Here we met Guatemoc, the prince, and his men were fierce and wild. He was fully armed and carried a bow in his hand. "Is Montezuma dead?" I asked. "I neither know nor care," he answered, with a savage laugh, then added: "Now curse me, Otomie, my cousin, for it was my arrow that smote him down, this king who has become a woman and a traitor, false to his manhood and his country."

"I cannot curse you, Guatemoc, for the gods have smitten my father with a madness as you smote him with your arrow, and it is best that he should die, both for his own sake and for that of his people. Still, Guatemoc, I am sure of this—that your crime will not go unpunished, and that in payment for this sacrilege you shall yourself come to a shameful death."

"It may be so," said Guatemoc, "but at least I shall not be betraying my trust," and he went. Now I must tell that, as I believed, this was my last day on earth, for on the morrow my year of godhead expired, and I, Thomas Wingfield, should be led out to execution. Notwithstanding all the turmoil in the city, the mourning for the dead and the fear that hung over like a cloud, the ceremonies of religion and its feasts were still celebrated strictly, more strictly even than before. Thus on this night a festival was held in my honor, and I must sit at the feast crowned with flowers and surrounded by my wives, while those nobles who remained alive in the city did me homage, and with them Cuilahuah, who, if Montezuma were dead, would now be emperor.

It was a dreary meal enough, for I could scarcely be gay, though I strove to drown my woes in drink, and as for the guests, they had little jollity left in them. Hundreds of their relatives were dead and with them thousands of the people. The Spaniards still held their own in the fortress, and that day they had seen their emperor, who they thought was a god, smitten down by one of their own number, and above all they felt that doom was upon themselves. What wonder that they were not merry? Indeed no funeral feast could have been more sad, for flowers and wine and fair women do not make pleasure, and after all it was a funeral feast—for me.

At length it came to an end, and I fled to my own apartments, whither my three wives followed me, for Otomie did not come, calling me most happy and blessed who tomorrow should be with myself—that is, with my own godhead, in heaven. But I did not call them blessed, for rising in wrath, I drove them away, saying that I had but one comfort left, and it was that wherever I might go I should leave them behind.

Then I cast myself upon the cushions of my bed and mourned in my fear and bitterness of heart. This was the end of the

I cast myself upon the cushions of my bed, vengeance which I had sworn to wreak on De Garcia, that I myself must have my heart torn from my breast and offered to a devil.

Thus weeping and praying I sank into a half sleep and dreamed that I walked on the hillside near the church path that runs through the garden of the lodge at Ditchingham. The whispers of the wind were in the trees which clothe the bank of the Vineyard hills, the scent of the sweet English flowers was in my nostrils, and the balmy air of June blew upon my brow. It was night in this dream of mine, and I thought that the moon shone sweetly on the meadows and the river, while from every side came the music of the nightingale. But I was not thinking of these delightful sights and sounds, though they were present in my mind, for my eyes watched the church path which goes up the hill at the back of the house, and my heart listened for a footstep that I longed to hear. Then there came a sound of singing from beyond the hill, and the words of the song were sad, for they told of one who had sailed away and returned no more, and presently between the apple trees I saw a white figure on its crest. Slowly it came toward me, and I knew that it was she for whom I waited—Lily, my beloved. Now she ceased to sing, but drew on gently, and her face seemed very sad. Moreover, it was the face of a woman in middle life, but still most beautiful, more beautiful indeed than it had been in the bloom of youth. She had reached the foot of the hill and was turning toward the little garden gate, when I came forward from the shadow of the trees and stood before her. Back she started with a cry of fear, then grew silent and gazed into my face.

"So changed," she murmured. "Can it be the same? Thomas, is it you come back to me from the dead, or is this but a vision?" and slowly and doubtfully the dream wraith stretched out her arms as though to clasp me.

Then I awoke. I awoke, and, lo, before me stood a fair woman clothed in white, on whom the moonlight shone as in my dream, and her arms were stretched toward me lovingly.

"It is I, beloved, and no vision," I cried, springing from my bed and clasping her to my breast to kiss her. But before my lips touched hers I saw my error, for the whom I embraced was not Lily Bozard, my betrothed, but Otomie, who was called my wife. Then I knew that this was the saddest and most bitter of dreams that had been sent to mock me, for all the truth rushed into my mind. Looking my hold of Otomie, I fell back upon the bed and groaned aloud, and as I fell I saw the flush of shame upon her brow and breast, for this woman loved me, and thus my act and words were an insult to her, who could guess well what prompted them. Still she spoke gently, "Pardon me, Teule; I came but to watch and not to waken you. I came also that I may see you alive before the daybreak, hoping that I might be of service or at the least of comfort to you, for the end draws near. Say then, in your sleep did you mistake me for some other woman dearer and fairer than I am, that you would have embraced me?"

"I dreamed that you were my betrothed, whom I love, and who is far across the sea," I answered heavily. "But enough of love and such matters. What have I to do with them who go down into darkness?" "In truth, I cannot tell, Teule. Still I have heard wise men say that if love is to be found anywhere it is in this same darkness of death, that is light indeed. Grieve not, for if there is truth in the faith of which you have told me or in our own, either on this earth or beyond it, with the aid of the spirit you will see your dear before another sun is set, and I pray that you may find her faithful to you. Tell me now, how much does she love you? Would she have lain by your side on the bed of sacrifice as, had things gone otherwise between us, Teule, it was my hope to do?"

"No," I answered; "it is not the custom of our women to kill themselves because their husbands chance to die."

"Perhaps they think it better to live and we again," answered Otomie very quietly, but I saw her eyes flash and her breast heave in the moonlight as she spoke. "Enough of this foolish talk," I said. "Listen, Otomie. If you had cared for me truly, surely you would have saved me from this dreadful doom or prevailed upon Guatemoc to save me. You are Montezuma's daughter. Could you not have brought it about during all these months that he issued his royal mandate, commanding that I should be spared?"

"Do you, then take me for so poor a friend, Teule?" she answered hotly. "Know that for all these months, by day and by night, I have worked and striven to find a means to rescue you. Before he became a prisoner I importuned my father, the emperor, till he ordered me from his presence. I have sought to bribe the priests. I have plotted ways of escape—aye, and Guatemoc has helped, for he loves you. Had it not been for the coming of these accursed Teules and the war that they levied in the city I had surely saved you, for a woman's thought leaps far and can find a path where none seems possible. But this war has changed everything, and, moreover, the star readers and diviners of auguries have given a prophecy which seals your fate, for they have prophesied that if your blood flows and your heart is offered at the hour of noon tomorrow on the altars of Tezcat our people shall be victorious over the Teules and utterly destroy them. But if the sacrifice is celebrated one moment before or after that propitious hour, then the doom of Tenochtitlan is sealed; also, they have declared that you must die, not according to custom, at the temple of arms across the lake, but on the great pyramid before the chief statue of the god. All this is known throughout the land. Thousands of priests are now offering up prayers that the sacrifice may be fortunate, and a golden ring has been hung over the stone of slaughter in such a fashion that the light of the sun must strike upon the center of your breast at the very moment of mid-day. For weeks you have been watched as a jaguar watches its prey, for it was feared that you would escape to the Teules, and we, your wives, have been watched also. At this moment there is a triple ring of guards about the palace, and priests are set without your doors and beneath the window places. Judge, then, what chance there is of escape, Teule."

"Little indeed," I said, "and yet I know a road. If I kill myself, they cannot kill me."

"Nay," she answered hastily, "what shall that avail you? While you live you may hope, but once dead you are dead forever; also, if you must die, it is best that you should die by the hand of the priest. Believe me, though the end is horrible," and she shuddered, "it is almost painless, so they say, and very swift. They will not torture you. That we have saved you, Guatemoc and I, though at first they wished thus to honor the god more particularly on this great day."

"O Teule," Otomie went on, seating herself by me on the bed and taking my hand, "think no more of these brief terrors, but look beyond them. Is it so hard a thing to die, and swiftly? We all must die, today or tonight or the next day, it matters little when, and your faith, like ours, teaches that beyond the grave is endless blessedness. Think then, my friend, tomorrow you will have passed far from this strife and turmoil, the struggle and the sorrows and the daily fears for the future that make the soul sick will be over for you; you will be taken to your peace, where no one shall disturb you forever. There you will find that mother whom you have told me of, and who loved you, and there perhaps one will join you who loves you better than your mother, mayhap even I may meet you there, friend," and she looked at me strangely. "The road that you are doomed to walk is dark indeed, but surely it must be well trodden, and there is light shining beyond it. So be a man, my friend, and do not grieve. Rejoice rather that at so early an age you have done with woes and doubts and come to the gates of joy; that you have passed the thorny, unwatered wilderness and see the smiling lakes and gardens, and among them the temples of your eternal city."

"And now farewell. We meet no more till the hour of sacrifice, for we women who masquerade as wives must accompany you to the first platforms of the temple. Farewell, dear friend, and think upon my

words. Whether they are acceptable to you or no, I am sure of this—that both for the sake of your own honor and because I ask it of you you will die bravely as though the eyes of your own people were watching all." And, bending suddenly, Otomie kissed me on the forehead gently as a sister might and was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII THE KISS OF LOVE.

At length the day dawned. Presently there was a sound of music, and, accompanied by certain artists, my pages entered, bearing with them apparel more gorgeous than any that I had worn hitherto. First, these pages having stripped me of my robes, the artists painted all my body in hideous designs of red and white and blue till I resembled a flag, not even sparing my face and lips, which they colored with carmine hues. Over my heart also they drew a scarlet ring with much care and measurement. Then they did up my hair, that now hung upon my shoulders, after the fashion in which it was worn by generals among the Indians, tying it on the top of my head with an embroidered ribbon red in color, and placed a plume of cock's feathers above it. Next, having arrayed my body in gorgeous vestments not unlike those used by popish priests at the celebration of the mass, they set golden earrings in my ears, golden bracelets on my wrists and ankles, and round my neck a collar of priceless emeralds. On my breast also they hung a great gem that gleamed like moonlit water, and beneath my chin a false beard made from pink sea shells. Then, having twined me round with wreaths of flowers till I thought of the Maypole on Bungay common, they rested from their labors, filled with admiration at their handiwork.

Now the music sounded again, and they gave me two lutes, one of which I must hold in either hand, and conducted me to the great hall of the palace. Here a number of people of rank were gathered, all dressed in festive attire, and here also on dais to which I was led stood my four wives clad in the rich dresses of the four goddesses: Xochi, Xilo, Atla and Clitro, after whom they were named for the days of their widowhood, Atla being the Princess Otomie. When I had taken my place upon the dais, my wives came forward one by one, and kissing me on the brow offered me sweetmeats and meal cakes, in golden platters and ocoas and mescal in golden cups. Of the mescal I drank, for it is a spirit, and I needed inward comfort, but the other dainties I could not touch.

These ceremonies being finished, there was silence for awhile, till presently a band of filthy priests entered at the far end of the chamber, clad in their scarlet sacrificial robes. Blood was on them everywhere; their long locks were matted with it; their hands were red with it; even their fierce eyes seemed full of it. They advanced up the chamber till they stood before the dais. Then suddenly the head priest lifted up his hands, crying aloud: "Adore the immortal god, ye people," and all those gathered there prostrated themselves, shouting: "We adore the god!"

Thrice the priest cried aloud, and thrice they answered him thus, prostrating themselves at every answer. Then they rose again, and the priest addressed me, saying:

"Forgive us, O Tezcat, that we cannot honor you as it is meet, for our sovereign should have been here to worship you with us. But you know, O Tezcat, how sore is the strait of our servants, who must wage war in their own city against those who blaspheme you and your brother gods. You know that our beloved emperor lies wounded, a prisoner in their unholy hands. When we have gratified your longing to pass beyond the skies, O Tezcat, and when in your earthly person you have taught us the lesson that human prosperity is but a shadow which flies away, in memory of our love for you intercede for us, we beseech you, that we may smite these wicked ones and honor you and them by the rite of their own sacrifice. O Tezcat, you have dwelt with us but a little while, and now you will not suffer that we hold you longer from your glory, for your eyes have longed to see this happy day, and it is come at last. We have loved you, Tezcat, and ministered to you. Grant in return that we may see you in your splendor, who are our little children, and till we come watch well over our earthly welfare and that of the people among whom you have designated to sojourn."

Having spoken some such words as these, that at times could scarcely be heard because of the sobbing of the people and of my wives who wept loudly, except Otomie alone, this villainous priest made a sign, and once more the music sounded. Then he and his band placed themselves about me, my wives, the goddesses, going before and after, and led me down the hall and on to the gateways of the palace, which were thrown wide for us to pass. Looking round me with a stony wonder, for in this my last hour nothing seemed to escape my notice, I saw that a strange play was being played about us. Some hundreds of paces away the attack on the palace of Aza, where the Spaniards were entrenched, raged with fury. Bands of warriors were attempting to scale the walls and being driven back by the deadly fire of the Spaniards and the pikes and clubs of the Tlascalalan allies, while from the roofs of such of the neighboring houses as remained unburned, and more especially from the platform of the great teocalli, on which I must presently give up the ghost, arrows, javelins and stones were poured by thousands into the courtyards and outer works of the Spanish quarters.

Five hundred yards away or so raged this struggle to the death, but about me, around the gates of Montezuma's palace on the latter side of the square, was a different scene. Here were gathered a vast crowd, among them many women and children, waiting to see me die. They came with flowers in their hands, with the sound of music and joyous cries, and when they saw me they set up such a shout of welcome that it almost drowned the thunder of the guns and the angry roar of battle. Now and again an ill aimed cannon ball would plow through them, killing some and wounding others, but the rest took no heed, only crying the blessings: "Welcome, Tezcat, and farewell. Blessings on you, our deliverer; welcome and farewell!" We went slowly through the press, treading on a path of flowers, till we came across the courtyard to the base of the pyramid. Here at the outer gate there was a halt because of the multitude of people, and while we waited a warrior thrust his way through the crowd and bowed before me. Glancing up, I saw that it was Guatemoc.

"Teule," he whispered to me, "I leave my charge yonder," and he nodded toward the force who strove to break a way into the palace of Aza, "to bid you farewell. Doubtless we shall meet again ere long. Believe me, Teule, I would have helped you if I could, but it cannot be. I wish that I might change places with you. My friend, farewell. Twice you have saved my life, but yours I cannot save."

"Farewell, Guatemoc," I answered. "Heaven prosper you, for you are a true man."

Then we passed on. At the foot of the pyramid the procession was formed, and here one of my wives bade me adieu after weeping on my neck, though I did not weep on hers. Now, the road to the summit of the teocalli winds round and round the pyramid, every mountain higher as it winds, and along this road we went in solemn state. At each turn we halted, and another wife bade me a last goodbye, or one of my instruments of music, which I did not grieve to see the last of, or some article of my strange attire was taken from me. At length, after an hour's march, for our progress was slow, we reached the flat top of the pyramid that is approached by a great stair, a space larger than the area of the churchyard here at Ditchingham, and unfenced at its lofty edge. Here on this dizzy place stood the temples of Huitzel and Tezcat, soaring structures of stone and wood, within which were placed the horrid effigies of the gods, and dreadful chambers stained with sacrifice. Here, too, were the holy fires that burned eternally, the sacrificial stones, the implements of torment and the huge drum of snakes' skins, but for the rest the spot was bare. It was bare, but not empty, for on that side which looked toward the Spanish quarters were stationed some hundreds of men, who hurled missiles into their camp without ceasing. On the other side were gathered a concourse of priests awaiting the ceremony of my death. Below the great square, fringed about with burnt out houses, was crowded with thousands of people, some of them engaged in combat with the Spaniards, but the larger part collected there to witness my murder.

Now, we reached the top of the pyramid, two hours before midday, for there were still many rites to be carried out ere the moment of sacrifice. First I was led into the sanctuary of Tezcat, the god whose name I bore. Here was his statue or idol, fashioned in black marble and covered with golden ornaments. In the hands of this idol was a shield of burnished gold on which its jeweled eyes were fixed, reading there, as his priests fabled, all that passed upon the earth he had created. Before him also was a plate of gold, which with muttered invocations the head priest cleansed as I watched, rubbing it with his long and matted locks. This done he held it to my lips that I might breathe on it, and I turned faint and sick, for I knew that it was being made ready to receive my heart, which I felt beating in my breast.

Now, what further ceremonies were to be carried out in this unholy place I do not know, for at that moment a great tumult arose in the square beneath, and I was hurried from the sanctuary by the priests. Then I perceived this: Galled to madness by the storm of missiles rained upon them from their crest, the Spaniards were attacking the teocalli. Already they were pouring across the courtyard in large companies, led by Cortes himself, and with them came many hundreds of their allies, the Tlascalalans. On the other hand, some thousands of the Aztecs were rushing to the foot of the first stairway to give the white men battle; there. Five minutes passed, and the fight grew fierce. Again and again, covered by the fire of the arquebuses, the Spaniards charged the Aztecs, but their horses slipping upon the stone pavement at length they dismounted and continued the fray on foot. Slowly and with great slaughter the Indians were pushed back, and the Spaniards gained a footing on the first stairway. But hundreds of warriors still crowded the lofty winding road, and hundreds more held the top, and it was plain that if the Spaniards won through at all the task would be a hard one. Still a fierce hope smote me like a blow when I saw what was toward. If the Spaniards took the temple, there would be no sacrifice. No sacrifice could be offered till midday, so Otomie had told me, and that was not far hard upon two hours. It came to this, then—if the Spaniards were victorious within two hours, there was a chance for me; if not, I must die.

Now, when I was led out of the sanctuary of Tezcat I wondered because the Princess Otomie, or rather the Goddess Atla, as she was then called, was standing among the chief priests and disputing with them, for I had seen her bow her head at the door of the holy place and thought that it was in token of farewell, seeing that she was the last of the four women to leave me. Of what she disputed I could not hear because of the din of battle, but the argument was keen, and it seemed to me that the priests were somewhat dismayed at her words and yet had a fierce joy in them. It appeared also that she won her cause, for presently they bowed in obedience to her, and turning slowly she swept to my side with a peculiar majesty of gait that even then I noted. Glancing up at her face also, I saw that it was alight as though with a great and holy purpose, and, moreover, that she looked like some happy bride passing to her husband's arms.

"Why are you not gone, Otomie?" I said. "Now it is too late. The Spaniards surround the teocalli, and you will be killed or taken prisoner."

"I await the end, whatever it may be," she answered briefly, and we spoke no more for awhile, but watched the progress of the fray, which was fierce indeed. Grimly the Aztec warriors fought before the symbols of their gods and in the sight of the vast concourse of people who crowded the square beneath and stared at the struggle in silence. They hurled themselves upon the Spanish swords, they gripped the Spaniards with their hands, and screaming with rage dragged them to

the steep sides of the roadway, proposing to cast them over. Sometimes they succeeded, and a ball of men clinging together would roll down the slope and be dashed to pieces on the stone flooring of the courtyard, a Spaniard being in the center of the ball. But do what they would, like some vast and writhing snake, still the long array of Teules, clad in their glittering mail, plowed its way upward through the storm of spears and arrows. Minute by minute and step by step they crept on, fighting as men fight who know the fate that awaits the desecrators of the gods of Anahuac, fighting for life and honor and safety from the stone of sacrifice.

Thus an hour went by, and the Spaniards were half way up the pyramid. Louder and louder grew the fearful sounds of battle, the Spaniards cheered and called on their patron saints to aid them, the Aztecs yelled like wild beasts, the priests screamed invocations to their gods and cries of encouragement to their warriors, while above all rose the rattle of the arquebuses, the roar of the cannon and the fearful note of the great drum of snake's skin, on which a half naked priest beat madly. Only the multitudes below never moved nor shouted. They stood silent, gazing upward, and I could see the sunlight flash on the thousands of their staring eyes.

Now, all this while I was standing near the stone of sacrifice, with Otomie at my side. Round me were a ring of priests, and over the stone was fixed a square of black cloth supported upon four poles, which were set in sockets in the pavement. In the center of this black cloth was sewed a golden funnel, measuring 6 inches or so across at its mouth, and the sunbeams passing through this funnel fell in a bright patch the size of an apple upon the space of pavement that was shaded by the cloth. As the sun moved in the heavens, so did this ring of light creep across the shadow till at length it climbed the stone sacrifice and lay upon its edge.

Then, at a sign from the head priest, his ministers laid hold of me and plucked what was left of my fine clothes from me as cruel boys pluck a living bird till I stood naked except for the paint upon my body and a cloth about my loins. Now I knew that my hour had come, and, strange to tell, for the first time this day courage entered into me, and I rejoiced to think that soon I should have done with my tormentors. Turning to Otomie, I began to bid her farewell in a clear voice, when to my amazement I saw that, as I had been served so she was being served, for her splendid robes were being torn off her, and she stood before me arrayed in nothing except her beauty, her flowing hair and a brodered smock.

"Do not wonder, Teule," she said in a low voice, answering the question my tongue refused to frame. "I am your wife, and yonder is our marriage bed, the first and last. Though you do not love me, today I die your death and at your side, as I have the right to do. I could not save you, Teule, but at least I can die with you."

At the moment I made no answer, for I was stricken silent by my wonder, and before I could find my tongue the priests had cast me down, and for the second time I lay upon the stone of doom. As they held me a yell fiercer and longer than any which had gone before told that the Spaniards had got foot upon the last stair of the ascent. Scarcely had my body been set upon the center of the great stone when that of Otomie was laid beside it, so close that our sides touched, for I must lie in the middle of the stone, and there was no gap for her. Then, the moment of sacrifice not being come, the priests made us fast with cords which they knotted to copper rings in the pavement and turned to watch the progress of the fray.

For some minutes we lay thus side by side, and as we lay a great wonder and gratitude grew in my heart, wonder that a woman could be so brave, gratitude for the love she gave me, sealing it with her lifeblood, because Otomie loved me so well that she desired to die thus at my side rather than to live on in greatness and honor without me. Of a sudden, in a mo-



For some minutes we lay thus side by side, ment while I thought of this marvel, a new light shone upon my heart, and it was changed toward her. I felt that no woman could ever be so dear to me as this glorious woman—no, not even my betrothed, I felt—nay, who can say what I did feel? But I know this—that the tears rushed to my eyes and ran down my painted face, and I turned my head to look at her. She was lying as much upon her left side as her hands would allow; her long hair fell from the stone to the paving, where it lay in masses, and her face was toward me. So close was it indeed that there was not an inch between our lips.

"Otomie," I whispered, "listen to me. I love you, Otomie." Now I saw her breast heave beneath the bands and the color come upon her brow.

"Then I am repaid," she answered, and our lips clung together in a kiss, the first, and, as we thought, the last. Yes, there we kissed, on the stone of sacrifice, beneath the knife of the priest and the shadow of death, and if there has been a stranger love scene in the world I have never heard its story.

"Oh, I am repaid," she said again. "I would gladly die a score of deaths to win this moment. Indeed I pray that I may die before you take back your words, for,

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