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THE COMMERCIAL

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THE GOLD-DEVIL!

OR,

California Now and a Hundred Years Ago.

BY GEORGE LIPPARD.

PART FIRST.—*A Hundred years Ago.*

One hundred years ago, an adventurer who had penetrated into the heart of Mexico, was sitting in his *hacienda*, near the City of Montezuma, with the last rays of the setting sun upon his moody brow. His cheek rested on his hand, his eyes were fixed upon the floor, and his lip compressed between his clenched teeth, indicated a mind absorbed in the mazes of a trembling hope, or a troublous memory. The view from the casement was beautiful—the lake and the city of Mexico, bathed in the sun set rays, with the Volcanic Mountain rising in the blue heaven, a lone pyramid of snow and fire, in a canopy of cloudless azure.

But the thoughts of the adventurer were not upon sublime scenery or bewitching landscapes. He was from the land of old Castile; he had wandered to the land of Mexico in search of El Dorado; he was now thirty years of age, with a muscular form clad in dingy velvet, and a pocket—excepting the anti-climax—tenanted by a solitary doubloon. There, Juan Gonzas sat at sunset in his lonely hacienda, near the city of Montezuma, with his cheek on his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the floor.

'Inez!' he sighed, 'El Dorado!'

Inez was a dark eyed, voluptuous lady, who in he had often seen in the city—at the Cathedral, on the Elmeda, at her father's palace, smiling from the balcony—and, without an El Dorado, it was impossible to win her hand. That was the meaning of the words coupled with a sigh.—There was also the thought of a half-wild peasant girl, who oftentime went singing under a burden of fruits and flowers, along the road of the great city. She was a brown cheeked, dark eyed maiden, with the mingled blood of Castile and Mexico throbbing in her viens. Her name, Boyatla, was oftentimes on the lips of the poor adventurer, and once or twice he had spoken to her—she was in sooth a rude wild flower of a beauty, but the lady Inez was beatiful and rich and noble—alas! for poor Coyotla.

Juan sat alone for a long time, until the shadow of evening gathered over the city and the lake, while Popocatepeti flamed like a funeral pyre, through the night.—Suddenly our adventurer became aware of the presence of an intruder, who had entered unobserved, and seated himself at the opposite side of the table. The stranger was remarkable for his height and vigorous form, and also for a singular hood, which relieved his boldly marked features. His eyes were very bright—they sparkled like fire-flies in the gloom. Who the stranger was, or what was the nature of his mission with the poor Castilian, we cannot tell, but it is recorded that this interview lasted until the daylight rushed through the casement, when Juan was discovered with his forehead resting on his hand, and his starting eyes fixed upon the table, while the stranger sat opposite, regarding him with a quiet look and smile.

'El Dorado,' said the stranger in a bland voice. 'There is the map of it—the Jesuits call it California;—he pointed to the parchment which was spread upon the table. 'It is yours, friend Juan, for a mere song. Come, we must be going.'

But Juan pressed his hand against his brow, which was damp with sweat, and fixed his glaring eyes upon the map, murmuring in an impassioned tone—

'This room is full of gold. Gold in the river sands, gold in bars, gold in rocks, and and all in this region, which you say you will discover to me—for what?' He gazed upward in the face of the Stranger, without changing the position of his head, and awaited his reply in breathless suspense. 'I am to sign no parchment, mark ye, barter away my immortal soul. No devil's work now—you understand?'

The Stranger rested his chin upon his hands, and threw one leg over the arm of the chair.

'Parchments!' he echoed, 'a fig for such nonsense. I will discover the gold to you for the sake of doing you a pleasure, I'm an eccentric sort of character, beloved by every body, and respected alike by the Merchant, the Priest and the King. Just come with me—get this gold—marry the Lady Inez, and with your two hundred and thirty millions of millions of bright doubloons, you may become the actual Monarch of a world. Bah! What need of parchments in such a case?'

He smiled pleasantly, while Juan, absorbed in contemplation of the map, felt a soft hand stealing around his neck, under his dark curls, and heard a mild voice whisper, in a tone that startled him—

'The man who sacrifices all his hopes, his home, his days and nights for gold, has no need of parchments or written obligations, to bind his soul to the Evil One.'

It was Coyotla, the half Indian maiden, who had entered into the room and listened to the words of the stranger, and shuddering for her lover, who had never spoken love to her, she whispered the warning in his ear.

Juan heard her voice, he felt the thrill of her pulse, and her hand encountered his neck, but he did not raise his head and gaze upon her face. The map of El Dorado rivetted his soul.

The light of the rising sun streamed through the casement over Juan's pallid brow, and over the mild, timid face of Coyotla, while the visage of the stranger was a shadow. The empty goblet on the floor glittered like fire coal. At this moment Juan raised his head, and shuddered as he caught a gleam of a face which grinned upon him from an aperture in the wall.

"It is the face of Death,' he faltered, and reached forth his hand to grasp the hand of Coyotla. 'Take your map. Here is El Dorado,' and clasped the hand of the Mexican girl, while his haggard face was overspread by a momentary smile. 'Here, in the light of Home, shines the true Dorado.'

Keeping his hand beneath his chin, the Stranger whispered gently, as his eyes devoured Juan's face—Gold in the rivers' sands. Gold in bars. Gold in rocks.—With this room full of gold, you can sway the commerce of the world.'

And then Coyotla and the Stranger contended for the possession of Juan, while the skeleton face grinned merrily above, and the map of El Dorado glowed in the sunshine, from the table. Who conquered? Let us see.

'Are we almost there?' asked Juan, as, toward the close of a beautiful day they entered the confines of a gloomy ravine, whose perpendicular rocks were topped with pines—'I am hungry and footsore, and by the Mass! it seems to me, that in these twenty days we've journeyed as many thousand miles. You have not spoken since we left the Jesuit Mission of San Jose this morning. Tell me, are we near it yet—this El Dorado?'

And as he spoke, the stranger drew his cowl over his singularly marked countenance, and murmured—Very near!' while they passed into the depths of the ravine, where a twilight gloom slept like a raven, among the rocks and trees.

'By the Mass! This is glorious! Gold in the sands gold in bars, gold in rocks!—The poor Coyotla was a silly thing. Now for Inez and the empire of the world. But first of all a room full of gold. This was your promise, my good friend.'

They crossed a brook which sang and sparkled through the twilight. The stranger beat down and scooped a handful of sand from the rivulet—sand which sparkled with countless points of light.

'Gold is in the sands,' he whispered—and they went deeper into the gloom, following the course of the brook, until they came to the cavern through whose mouth it pattered gaily. The stranger led Juan through the cavern mouth, and presently they stood beneath an immense roof of rocks, illumed by a light, which seemed to flow from the bowels of the earth.

'Gold in bars!' murmured the stranger; and Juan, with his heart palpitating with the very agony of rapture, saw the gold bars, huge, cumbrous and glittering, piled up along the cavern floor, like logs of wood before a famer's door.

'Two hundred billions of millions of doubloon's cried Juan. 'Coyotla was a fool—decidedly.'

The stranger led him onward from the cavern into a dark passage which sunk into the bowels of the earth, and which was, in fact, an inclined plane of a mile or two in length.

'Gold in rocks!' said the stranger, as they passed from darkness into light. Juan uttered an incoherent shriek of joy. He stood on the threshold of a cavern in which gold was heaped in masses, like blocks of granite in a quarry. A light emitted from these rocks filled the place with a golden light. The very air breathed of gold.

Juan, in the very extravagance of his joy, attempted to move one of the smallest rocks, but his effort was in vain. All the force of his sinews, braced for the work by the very madness of rapture, could not stir the mass one solitary inch.

'Gold, gold, gold!' he said. Certainly, Coyotla was a fool. Millions, billions, trillions, and trillions, millions and millions!—By-the-bye, my good fellow, I'm as hungry as a *lepero* after a three days fast. Can we have a nice fowl or two, done to a turn, or a flask of wine or so, would not be difficult to take.'

'Eat!' said the stranger, who was seated upon a rock of gold, with his legs arranged cross wise like a Turk; 'eat!—drink' and as the cowl fell back from his face, he reached forth his hands toward Juan. One hand was filled with golden sand—the other grasped a golden stone, worth perchance some hundreds of thousands of dollars.

'You mock me,' faltered Juan, shuddering he knew not why.

'Eat! drink!' said the stranger; and the gold cavern rung with his hollow laughter.

'I will leave this place,' cried Juan, turning pale and red again as he spoke.—Friend, I am not yet in your power. You unmasked yourself too soon. I have not signed my soul away—you have no parchment stamped with my name wirtten in blood.

'The man who sacrifices hope, and home, and all the labors of life for gold, needs no parchment scroll to bind him to the gold Devil!'—and again he smiled, turning his eyeballs to the light, with a look of horrible mockery. 'There is no going back in the gold hunt, my dear.' Then, to the silent horror of Juan Gonzas, the mouth of the cavern was closed by a huge rock of gold, weighing some twenty tons, and he was alone there with the Gold Dev-