

Weird Tales



MAY, 1953

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(Copyright 1936 by Popular Fiction Publishing Company)

THE EYRIE

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Heading by W. H. Silvey

Between Two Dreams

By Felix Marti Ibanez

THE poetical notions that life is a dream and that a dream is the foreshadowing of death, I can prove from personal experience. For my story is that of a man who, because of a dream, may be running headlong into death. I have only one hope: that what I am going to relate is not true; that the dreams I shall tell about are nothing but dreams. But if this is not so, it is possible that I shall not live long enough to finish this story.

I got married today—to the loveliest creature on earth, with the face of a madonna and the body of a Venus. This combination I know is rare, for just as violets are hidden behind ugly bushes, lovely souls are most often found beneath unattractive exteriors, as if God wished them to be enjoyed only by the most perspicacious of lovers. But my Yolanda is a treasure in every way and I could be the happiest man in the world with her. Yet, I fear I shall never know that happiness. Why? Because I am sleepy. And if I fall asleep, I may die.

It all started a few days ago. I was on my way to Yolanda's house. The blue of the sky was melting over the green summits of the palm trees. As the sun went down, the sparrows fell silent in the calm of the twilight. The little plaza across from Yolanda's house was quiet and cozy like an alcove shrouded in darkness.

I would usually leave my law office in San Jose late in the afternoon, have my dinner with a friend or client at the *Club Unión*, and then go to pick Yolanda up at her house for a walk. Sometimes her aunt would accompany us; sometimes we stole away alone and strolled through the park. Yolanda would tell me all about her piano classes and I would tell her all the problems of a lawyer; by then we would be completely

absorbed in each other until the hello of some acquaintance or other brought us back to reality. When it grew dark we would go back to Yolanda's house and sit on the terrace while her aunt dozed, or Yolanda would play the piano.

Thus day had followed day and night had followed night for two years. There is nothing sweeter than courtship in a small town; one day follows another with the rhythmic regularity of a string of beads, interrupted only by a party, a concert, a visit to friends, or a short trip to Cartago.

WE HAD decided to be married on a Sunday in May—that is, two months from today—and we were going to occupy my bachelor's quarters until we could afford something better. We both agreed that it is bad taste to accumulate new possessions just for the sake of display. We preferred to enjoy the few simple antique pieces left us by our families. We have a coffee-pot of hammered silver sumptuous enough to adorn the table of a Peruvian viceroy; our table-linen is as white as foam and edged with the finest Spanish lace; in the living-room we have some large hassocks covered with tooled Moroccan leather, and the high straight-backed chairs in my study still retain all the subtle art of the old Castilian workmen who fashioned them; our library is adorned by books bound in soft leather with titles engraved in gold that glimmers under the lamps. In this simple peaceful setting we were going to live, love, work, and build a home we would be proud of. Truly, I was a fortunate man—until a few days ago.

As I said, I was on my way to Yolanda's house. When I got there, I stopped for a moment in front of the ornamented grill-

The terrifying question was this—what was the dream and what the reality?

work. Have you ever been assailed by a vague feeling of uneasiness you are at a loss to define and yet never releases its grip on your heart? You try to ignore it, but it continues fretting you until it finally wears itself out or else takes refuge in the subconscious. At that moment such a feeling took hold of me. I tried to ignore it completely; I simply told myself that I was worried over something, but did not attempt to define that "something." I bent down to pet Zambo, Aunt Elvira's fat gray cat who looked up at me as if he hardly knew me, and then I knocked at the door. Yolanda appeared almost immediately; at the touch of her lips, I forgot my unhappiness.

It is impossible, however, to fool a woman who is in love with you. As we were discussing whether or not we should invite a certain couple to the wedding, she pressed my arm softly and looked into my eyes.

"Fernando, what is the matter?"

"Nothing. Why do you ask?"

"Because you seem restless; something is bothering you."

"It's nothing, darling; nothing."

"You're keeping something from me and that's not like you. Did something go wrong today?"

"No, everything went all right. Really, nothing's the matter."

"But your thoughts are so far away—Why don't you tell me what it is?"

"Because I don't know what you're talking about."

"You don't want to tell me."

"But there's nothing to tell, except that I love you more every day."

"All right; you have a right to your secrets."

And that was all. I tried to keep the conversation going despite her monosyllables. The truth of the matter was that although I knew she was right, I could not put my finger on what was disturbing me. I felt the vague but real discomfiture which often precedes illness.

"Fernando," she insisted again that night just as I was about to leave, "won't you tell me what the matter is?"

This time I surprised myself. I heard myself speak as if it were someone else, as if the idea which took form in ill-chosen

words were being dragged up from my subconscious by a strange hand:

"I don't know, Yolanda, I really don't know. It's nothing serious—quite absurd, as a matter of fact. Last night I dreamed something that irritated me and you know I never dream."

"What did you dream?"

"I don't even remember very well. There were mountains, a very tired man and an Indian woman. But it's all so vague. I know it was quite disagreeable. Yes, I remember now. There was a forest and a couple walking in the dark. That's all."

I was surprised when she asked no more questions. We kissed good night and I left, quite reassured that this vagary would pass.

I arrived home and found it lonelier than ever. I wandered about the living-room, arranged things abstractedly, picked up *Don Quixote*, my favorite bed-time reading for several years, and, lighting my pipe, I sat down in my favorite arm-chair. For the first time in my life the immortal book could not command my attention. I read the words, but my mind flickered like the flame in an oil-lamp. Suddenly I felt quite tired, undressed rapidly, put the light out and fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

WHEN I awoke the next morning, I realized immediately that I had been dreaming again and I was assailed by the same strangely disturbing feeling of the day before. While I was having my juice and coffee, I found that I remembered the dream as vividly as if it had been a moving film, and that I could reconstruct every detail:

There was a mountain covered by thick woods, and the night was cold and dark, without moon or stars. The two shadows which were feeling their way through the darkness were not together. One of them was in front, a large figure, slow, hesitant, heavy. The other followed him at some distance and was small, agile, furtive. Shadows and crackling noises filled the scene. The sky was leaden and concave and unwilling to let a single star through. Occasionally the first figure collided against a tree, or stumbled over a stone, or slipped on the wet ground.

For hours the two indefinable people kept trekking through the darkness. The countryside was invisible, but the labored breathing of the pursuer and pursued revealed that it was a steep slope which the large figure was climbing as if it were Calvary, panting and tripping, followed by the light, almost winged creature.

Slowly the darkness lifted, and I saw the first figure—a man—scaling a rocky, overgrown slope. I could only see that he was clothed in some metallic stuff, a hard steely gray quite different from the ashen gray which was filtering through the sky. The man staggered like a drunkard; he slipped and fell constantly. I could not make out his face or anything but his strange apparel like the bark of some metallic tree. He continually looked around; his movements were unmistakably like those of a deer being relentlessly stalked by a pack of hunters.

His pursuer was a woman in Indian dress of polychrome colors which stood out in the morning pallor. There was no doubt she was after this man and that she was trying to avoid being seen by him, for she hid behind trees and rocks to escape detection. She too looked back constantly, as if there were other pursuers and she wanted to escape their attention, too. It was a triple hunt; the man was trying to escape from the woman and the woman from other unseen figures.

When dawn broke with tropical suddenness, the countryside was lighted up like a dark theater after the play. The fugitive, frightened by the light, started to run and then stopped in his tracks. Like an animal at bay, with the Indian woman coming closer and closer, he brought his hand to his side as if about to seize a weapon, and drew it away with a movement of pain. Then he ran into a cave. The girl followed him right in almost immediately.

That was my dream.

THAT day I went through my regular routine, worked, saw some friends, and pecked at my dinner, feeling vaguely disturbed all the time. In the evening Yolanda and I went to the Municipal Theater to hear a Chilean pianist, but I did not feel in a

receptive mood and the evening crept slowly and painfully by like an irritating chore.

When we reached Yolanda's house after the concert, her Aunt Elvira retired immediately, and we were left alone on the terrace facing the moonlit garden. Yolanda, instead of sitting down beside me, kept standing and looking out on the garden. I don't know why I preferred not having to look her in the face. As I was about to leave, Yolanda put her hands on my shoulders, and looked straight into my eyes.

"Did you dream again last night?" she asked.

"Why worry her?" I said to myself, and aloud, "No, I slept like a log."

Then I bade her good night, and returned home, feeling ashamed of my lie. When I entered the house, I did something I seldom do. I poured myself a stiff dose of cognac. Then I sat down in the library with my *Don Quixote*, but I could not read, and kept staring at the reflection of the green lamp in my glass. Finally I drank the stinging liquor down in one gulp and went to bed immediately, trying to concentrate on a case I would work on the next day. But as soon as I got between the sheets, I fell asleep: the sheet was like a curtain that had fallen over my daily life and was raised again on my nightmare.

AS MY eyes opened to my dream, I saw the man I had dreamt of the night before lying in the cave on a muddy floor, trembling with cold. I saw him stir and heard him mumble unintelligible words. Darkness had already filled the cave when the man managed to get up painfully and groped for the exit. From his slow awkward movements I could see that he was sick. He brought one of his hands up to his right side, and the other felt along the rock to find some outlet. Apparently he had spent the day in the cave and now that it was dark, he was resuming his flight. Soon he disappeared among the trees. I then caught sight of another shadow coming out of the cave. It was the Indian woman.

When the man again appeared, a prong of moon had begun to shine over the horizon, chiselling the shoulders of his armor. The coolness of the night seemed to

strengthen him a bit, as he continued the tortuous ascent. The Indian woman, behind him, seemed both anxious to remain invisible and worried someone was following them. But the immediate enemy was the mountain. Hour after hour the man struggled up the cliff. Silver-plated by the moon, the mountain seemed to stretch like a huge bear lying on its back, its rocks and trees like arches supporting the sky. Lurching like a drunkard, the fugitive seemed to be slowing down; it was hunger, fatigue, or perhaps pain, for he brought his hands to his side more and more frequently. The atmosphere was ghost-like; the night sinister; there was no noise but the wind in the dark trees. The silhouette of remote rocks stood out in the distance; stumps of trees rose like sentinels, hostile, threatening, guarding the ferocious mountain.

When dawn came, all energy seemed to have been drained out of the man; his walk was a continuous zigzag, a constant falling and rising. The Indian woman, whose strength seemed inexhaustible, was quite near him by now, as if she had lost all fear of his discovering her presence in his depleted state. When the horizon was quite pink with morning, the warrior fell as if cut down by one blow, and the woman was upon him.

The man was unconscious. With extraordinary energy she pulled him towards some rocks. Only the weak moon and I were witnesses to her feat. Occasionally she would stop to catch her breath and once I saw her face, handsome, kind, dark brown, with brilliant eyes. She finally reached a cave half hidden among the rocks and dragged the unconscious man into it.

It was then that I caught a glimpse of the man's face: *I was the fugitive warrior!*

For years I had been awakened by the trill of a bird outside my window. It was a tiny merry bird, lemon-colored and with a song as yellow as the lemon itself. Quite accustomed to his chirp, I would give him some crumbs of my toast. I remember my shock when one morning I found him lifeless on my window sill. It's impossible, impossible, my heart told me, while my brain fully took in the tragedy.

The same type of revolt overtook me that

morning when I got up and found myself in my bedroom, with its white walls, facing a window blond with sun, my favorite books within reach of my hands, and my reproductions of Zurbarán and Ribera all around me. The dream was taking on most abhorrent aspects. I was no longer a spectator, but a participant, and I didn't like it at all.

That day was full of errands and work, which was a godsend. I had several visitors from Guatemala. I went to court. I had lunch with some New York clients, and had to go out to consult specialists on various matters. During the day I phoned Yolanda and her voice was so soothing that it seemed to melt the cold hardness of the telephone.

WE DECIDED to go to Cartago that evening to visit some friends. In the middle of the afternoon, I grew so uneasy that I could wait no longer and went to get Yolanda. I interrupted her in the midst of a music lesson. Finding a seat in back of the studio, I could see half the piano and a horrible little, pockmarked girl conscientiously destroying Mozart under Yolanda's indifferent guidance. When the execution was over, Yolanda came up to me with a pale smile. She was wearing a white dress, with a string of amethyst beads; her braided hair was radiant.

"Fernando! What are you doing here so early?"

"I was hoping you were free and we could leave earlier than we had planned."

"But they don't expect us before seven."

"Then let's take a long walk first, and talk."

Without another word, she put her wrap around her and started to walk towards the door with me.

"Aunt Elvira has gone visiting and won't be back until midnight," she said.

The rest of the afternoon was quiet and pleasant. We walked, chatted like magpies, and finally went on to our friends in Cartago where we spent a very charming evening: we had roast suckling pig, salad, and plenty of claret; waltzes on the phonograph and songs by the little daughter of the house. When we started back in my auto-

mobile it was quite late, and when we said good night Yolanda brought her face close to mine.

"Are you still having those foolish dreams?" she asked me.

"Yes," I said, trying to laugh it off, "I'm dreaming in serial form; now the hero and heroine are together and she is going to save his life."

"I don't like these dreams. You must be very tired. I'm going to take very good care of you when we're married."

"Then I'll put off finishing my dream until we are together. It's more fun dreaming in company, anyhow."

But the jocular tone of our voices did not succeed in erasing the vague sense of anxiety I had had all day. When I got home and sat down in my library with my books, which I could not even bring myself to open, I realized how enervated I was and had two shots of cognac.

While the smoke from my pipe rose in spirals, I further realized that I had worked especially hard that day to black out a truth which terrified me. I have never believed in premonitions or in omens or in anything supernatural for that matter. I have always led a solid hardworking life. People might say that my life has been monotonous, but I have liked it that way. I always leave my books in the same place, carefully shut, and never earmark the pages. I like to have reliable friends and an invulnerable reputation. My reading is almost limited to my professional books, the classics, and *Don Quixote*, for they embrace all the teachings of all the other books in the world. Just to admit to myself that for the last three nights I had had a progressive dream, was enough to destroy a world which I had built up with great care and which I had always tried to keep in sober perspective, subject to the laws, weights and measures I had in mind when I arranged it.

I did not even try to analyze my dream, despite the fact that under my friend Doctor Bances' influence, I had been reading the works of Freud; for not only had I found the books most unconvincing, but they did not fit in with my own personal philosophy. Instead, I preferred to anaesthetize my anxieties with another shot of cognac, al-

though that is against my principles, and then get into bed, not wholly without fear. No sooner did my head hit the pillow than I was asleep and the dream started again at the point I had left it the night before.

THE dream started as I, the fugitive, warrior, regained consciousness and found myself stretched out on the floor of a cave. A fire was crackling near me. I turned my head and I saw the flames which filled the cave with smoke; there was a boiling pot which emitted delicious fumes. Near the fire squatted a motionless Indian girl.

My first impulse was to escape, but when I tried to get up the pain in my right side was so sharp that I fainted. When I came to again, the face of the Indian woman was close to mine. It was like a bronze mask, animated by the liquid emeralds of eyes so intense that I was filled with a sweet warmth. Her hands tenderly applied compresses to my side and I realized that there was a gash in my armor. I sat up against the wall as well as I could, and saw that she had covered the entrance to the cave with branches, even at the risk of our being asphyxiated by the smoke. An instant later she brought a metal basin full of some liquid to my lips. It was scorching hot and tasted of fowl. When I finished the broth I sucked on the bones which had floated in it. The Indian woman applied fresh compresses to my side while gazing at me with such tenderness that I was convinced she was my friend and ally. Soon a comfortable torpor overcame me, but just as I closed my eyes the Indian woman, who had been peering out of the cave, came back and motioned to me to get up.

I was angry and shouted that I was wounded and could not walk. She answered in some Indian tongue, as soft and melodious as the clinking of gold doubloons. I could not understand what she was saying, but her gestures were vivid enough. She pointed to the mouth of the cave and gave me to understand that men were approaching. Pointing to the dagger which lay at my side, she conveyed the idea that they were carrying arms and intended to kill me. Then she pointed upwards, implying there was no alternative but to keep right on scaling the

mountain. When I asked her with awkward gestures why she was helping me, she put a soft finger to my lips and smiled.

So it was that, weary and ill, leaning heavily on her, I limped out of the cave and again faced the hostile mountain. Behind us was a forest full of frightening shadows. Before us were slippery slopes, treacherous ground, fearful heights, but perhaps safety. A moment later the first tint of dawn appeared and I woke up.

MY FIRST sensation was one of infinite weariness as if I had been debauching all night, a thing I have never done, not even in my student days. I groaned as I dragged myself out of bed, and dressing was torture. As I shaved, the mirror reflected the lines and yellowish color which are the products of insomnia, and not even the thick strong coffee could rouse me out of my lethargy. Fortunately, it was a bright day and the warmth seemed to neutralize some of the fatigue which stiffened my joints.

The day went by slowly, wearily. Yolanda was with her aunt visiting some relatives in Limon, where they would spend three days. That would give me enough time to pull myself together and perhaps get medical aid, for I was beginning to be quite convinced that my dreams were the result of a year of hard work and financial pressures. In the afternoon I got into my car and took a little ride all alone through the suburbs.

It was one of those triumphant afternoons, all silver and rose, which only Costa Rica can produce. I almost forgot the despair I had felt that morning. As I rode through a tiny village I saw a group of women and children sitting in front of a hut, chattering and laughing, with straw baskets full of grapes at which they pecked like happy little hens, and I envied them with all my heart. I had something to eat at an inn which was deserted except for a pair of silent lovers absorbed in each other. When I returned, a bit refreshed and more cheerful, the first shades of night had fallen and people were coming out to have their aperitifs in the cafes.

I went home and as the first star appeared, I felt so fatigued that I fell asleep

after reading the paper and a chapter of my *Quixote*.

The laughter of the Indian girl awakened me. I had been sleeping in another cave which had probably been our refuge all day. For some time a thread of silk woven through the air by an invisible spider had been tickling my mustache and beard, and I had been making useless attempts to brush it away. Although exhausted and in pain, I could not help smiling. The Indian girl got down on her knees in front of me. The light which filtered through the underbrush covering the mouth to the cave projected silver triangles over her black hair. With hands as delicate as swallow's wings, she washed my face with a cloth dipped in the warm water of a pot boiling over the fire; she combed my matted beard and hair, and finally made me drink a warm dark liquid which revived both my body and spirits. And after that she applied hot compresses to my wound and helped me stand up.

Then I, the fugitive warrior, remembered that I had just had a strange dream. I had dreamed that I was in some city quite different from the cities I had hitherto known. The people were dressed in the strangest clothing; nowhere could I see any armor. I knew that I was in Costa Rica, for the scenery was familiar, but the people and their apparel were completely unrecognizable. I vaguely recalled that I had been sitting at tables, conversing with strange people, and making love to a lovely girl in words that almost sounded foreign. Finally I had climbed into a fabulous vehicle which, although it had no horses, seemed to pull itself along, proceeding at a speed greater than wind and emitting terrible noises. I had no reins and yet my hands were occupied holding on to some sort of wheel which seemed to guide the phenomenal coach. That was all I could remember.

We soon left the cave and we started climbing again. But now the vegetation seemed to be disappearing; the trees were shrinking in size, the thickets were becoming more anaemic, and stubble and rocks replaced the grass. It was as if the hand of some gigantic barber were shaving the mountain of its green beard. The moon shone pure, round and brilliant like a lantern. The

air was cool and smelled of wet earth. Our steps resounded heavily on the ground which was beginning to be covered by frost. The Indian girl hardly reached my shoulder. From time to time, as I leaned on her, my lips brushed her hair, as black as sloe and as sharp-smelling as the thickets. She kept looking back all the time.

THE ascent continued in silence. I was beginning to feel very tired. The peaks seemed to be retreating before us. The sky was already beginning the battle between the blues of the night and the grays of dawn when my companion started to look for a shelter. This time we found rest in a sort of jagged hut formed by two immense rocks. I fell exhausted on the icy ground while the girl gathered branches and leaves to make me a mattress and cover the entrance to the cave. Shortly afterwards I was awakened from my torpor by the warmth of the fire. With wild berries she brewed a hot, strong drink which went immediately to my head. Then she sat down next to me. The flames of the fire danced in her eyes as, with hands as swift as squirrels, she sketched in the air figures of soldiers and Indians in hostile attitudes. I understood then that our pursuers were soldiers like me, guided by Indians like her. I imagined that, for some reason unknown to me, she had deserted them to follow and rescue me. I was so tired that while she was gesticulating I fell asleep again.

When I awoke, the early sun was tinting the rocks which sheltered us. I felt rested, perhaps because during my sleep she had taken my armor off. Her lips, close to mine, were murmuring in a strange tongue. In the crimson shadows, her face was on fire and I felt its warmth on mine. She ran her fingers through my hair, my hands caressed her face, and our lips met. The embers of the fire yielded only an aftermath of heat while her naked body reflected their light. Her soft moaning echoed through the cave.

I woke up in my room in a cold sweat. My first feeling was one of overpowering fear; I had had a dream within a dream—like those paintings that depict a picture within the picture—and the dream within my dream had represented my daily life

right here and now in San Jose. It was enough to drive me mad.

I got up trembling, went to the living-room, poured myself a drink and sat down by the open window. A blacksmith was pounding an anvil in each temple. It could not be: I was living between two dreams. I was beginning to lose my hold on reality. What was real and what was a dream? Were my days real and my nights dreams, or was what I had hitherto taken to be my real life a dream and my dreams my real life? Which was my true personality? Was I a lawyer in San Jose about to get married, or was I a fugitive Spanish soldier who had just made love to an Indian girl in a cave? At night I dreamed that I was one of the *Conquistadores*, yet during the day while sleeping in a cave I dreamed that I was another man in some future period. My night-dreams were retrograde, but the dream within those dreams was prophetic of the future. Which was a dream?

I SPENT hours torturing myself with these questions. When I had finished all the cognac, I still felt no relief. I did not know what to do. Three times I picked up the phone to call Yolanda in Puerto Limon and then hung up again. For the truth was that my dreams had more power over me already than my daily life. The hours I spent at the office and—what blasphemy!—the hours I spent with Yolanda, were now pale images compared with that moment of love I had just had with the Indian girl in a cave, with the danger of death hovering all around us. With shame I discovered that I preferred this strange girl who spoke an outlandish tongue to the Yolanda who was to be my wife soon, and the hazardous existence of a tracked animal was more fascinating than my life as a respectable lawyer. There was no longer any distinction between day and night. Both were dreams, only one was much more romantic and intriguing than the other. But the terrifying question was this; what was the dream and what the reality? I told myself over and over that I was the victim of an inexplicable network of nightmares, yet these nightmares seemed more real than my waking life.

Vaguely I recall the day that followed

that awful night. I made an effort to put my affairs in order. I remember I finally dropped everything and went out and walked for hours. San Jose was spread out, happy and placid, under the rising sun. Things around me loomed with a newly acquired importance, as if they wanted to be noticed, to tell me that *they* were real. The sparrows were chirping on the roofs; there were beggars on the corners and pious old women in the churches, a solitary dog was looking up at the sky, and a sentimental seamstress was gazing out on the street through her window. Life was good, quiet, cheerful, under that radiant sun which gives light to the sky and warmth to our veins.

When night fell and I went to bed, I tried to analyze how my dream had begun, but I couldn't. As soon as I lay down I fell asleep, only to open my eyes in the same cave, with the Indian girl's hair, smelling of dry leaves, brushing by my lips.

This time my dream was intense, quick, brutally concise. The girl and I woke up as a ray of the moon played over her face. I remember we embraced again and I could almost taste the moon on her lips. When we crawled out of our cave, the tree stumps and jutting rocks had almost totally blended into the darkness.

Holding each other by the hand, we advanced with greater energy than the previous night, as if love had lent wings to our tired feet. What followed happened so suddenly we could not make out from what side we were attacked. As we entered a narrow passage bordered by craggy rocks rising to the top of the mountain, we heard shouts and alarms in the distance. Like two stags at bay, we looked about in panic for a place to hide. The night was becoming colder, yet we were sweating with fear.

Then we saw some shadows outlined on a mound, heard the sound of taut strings like maddened hornets, and I felt something like the blow of a fist on my shoulder. We were running desperately up the mountain, slipping, falling, getting up, protected by the darkness, betrayed by the moon, crawling under rocks, climbing over boulders, zigzagging on flat land. But we were forever ascending, as if only the sky could afford us protection. Blood was flowing from

my shoulder down to my hand, and like a wolf I licked my palm with my tongue. A weapon still stuck in my flesh, but I did not dare to stop to pull it out.

When I finally stopped, about to faint, I felt the Indian girl dragging me into a cave. Our bodies dropped on the wet ground. I writhed in pain while the girl bent over me. Her hands fluttered over my shoulder, and I groaned in agony. A second later she had a strange weapon in her hands. An arrow, a strange arrow, with a triangular head and four more heads on each point of the triangle. I could see the blood flowing from my wound, fortunately not very deep, as she bound it with a strip of cloth. Only then could I discern in the light of the moon that she too was wounded. Her right hand was pierced right through by an arrow and the wound was wide and raw like a bloody mouth. Our lips united in a kiss which tasted of blood. And I woke up.

FOR the first time since I had started having my terrible nightmares, my waking was neither sudden nor clear-cut. Up to then, my days and nights, my life during the day and the life I led at night—for I dare not say dream and reality—were separated by the opening of my eyes. This time it was wholly different. I opened my eyes in my bedroom but something of my dream still held over. Instead of feeling that everything about my dream had faded, except the memory of it, it seemed to me that I was still connected to it by some invisible thread. I sat up in bed unable to make out what was the matter, but as I lifted my hand to press my forehead, I realized what it was. My pajamas over my right shoulder were bloody. With a jerk I bared my shoulder: right at the collar bone there, was a triangular wound with four small tears on each point, all covered by fresh blood.

Uttering a cry of panic, I leaped out of bed, ran to the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror, unable to accept the full impact of reality. I placed a finger on the wound, smelled and licked the blood, and finally, with a wrench, had to admit to myself that I had been wounded by a dream.

Moaning with horror, I bandaged myself with a handkerchief. I was not bleeding

much but I had a good deal of pain. Almost without thinking I ran out of the house, jumped into my car and drove in the direction of the house of my good friend, Dr. Aunas. Half way there, I changed my mind and making an abrupt turn I made straight for the house of Dr. Bances, head psychiatrist of the Chapui Hospital. If my wound had really been inflicted mentally, only a psychiatrist could cure me.

I clung to the wheel trying not to think, not to remember, not to understand, in a word, not to accept, otherwise my reason would go. Everything that had happened to me had to have some logical explanation. No, I was living right here in San Jose, in Costa Rica, in the twentieth century. It was all a dream, a nightmare, but a more appalling nightmare than Edgar Allan Poe could ever have imagined.

My brain throbbed even more fiercely than the ill-banded wound in my shoulder. It can't be, it can't be, I kept telling myself; that nightmares of endless flight over rocky mountain should leave me exhausted and beaten, that was understandable, but that a dream about being wounded by an arrow in the shoulder should end in my awakening with a bloody wound in the very same place and of the very same type that I had dreamed, that was utterly impossible.

My friend Bances ushered me into his office immediately. Knowing his sybaritic habits, I guessed that he must have been having breakfast in bed when I arrived, but in Costa Rica friendship is friendship. His obesity overflowed the sumptuous robe he was wearing. He was unshaven, his hair uncombed, and his eyes still full of sleep. On the lapel of his robe were perched some brown toast crumbs and his mustache was wet with coffee. The office—large, dark, rich with pictures and statuettes—was cool and peaceful. Without a word, I took off my coat and shirt and showed him the wound.

HE LOOKED at it but made no comment. I could see the wound in a mirror—triangular with torn ends, the blood dried but oozing a pink watery substance—as his experienced hands felt around it, washed it, disinfected it, and applied a salve and bandages. Then he helped me put

my coat on and offered me a shot of whiskey, which I accepted, and a cigar which I refused. He went out for a moment and came back with a silver tray holding a coffeepot, two cups, spoons and a sugar bowl. He served me, then helped himself, lit a cigar, and sat down facing me, now totally awake, like a jovial, self-satisfied Buddha.

Clever psychiatrist that he was, he asked me no questions and used his silence to force me to speak. I told him everything, from the very beginning, but contrary to my expectations, telling him relieved me in no way. My voice sounded as if someone else were speaking and the story became even more fantastic. I did not believe it myself and felt that nobody else would believe it either. Bances never interrupted me and only when I finished did he put out his cigar with a resolute gesture.

"Fernando," he said, "we have known each other for many years, since our student days in Madrid, and we have been loyal friends. That is why I do not want to treat you like a patient off the street. What you have just told me is fantastic and without precedent, and if anyone else had come to me with such a tale, I would consider him a paranoiac, a schizophrenic, or a victim of hallucinations. But I know you very well. The fact that you did not go to a doctor to have your wound treated and instead came to me, a psychiatrist who scarcely knows how to make a bandage, means that for you the mental wound, the psychic lesion, is more important than the actual flesh wound. That, plus the coherence of your story is enough to convince me of your sanity.

"I'm afraid that I shall not be able to help you very much, except in one thing. You are sane, I would even say as sane as I, if I weren't, like so many people, as mad as a hatter. You are as normal as any of us can be, living in these mad times. Your fear of insanity is your certificate of mental health. But that doesn't satisfy you. Even though I pronounce you sane, you are disturbed in some way.

"You would like an explanation and I'd like to give you one, but frankly I don't know what to say. If you were ill, it would be something else. But under these circumstances I really don't know what to tell you.

Overworked and suffering from the inevitable emotional strain of your coming marriage, you are having a nightmare which, as an unfortunate result of our mechanized psychic machine, has got hold of you and plays itself out in episodes every time you fall asleep. That gives you the feeling that you are living a double life. But don't worry. You are awake now. You are with me, your fat friend Bances. And you must realize this: what you experience while asleep is only a dream and *this right here* is reality. However, reality and fantasy have become so mixed up in your life that you don't know exactly when you are awake and when you are asleep.

"But just how did your dream become physical reality? Right now I cannot analyze the contents of your dream. I'm leaving for Panama-by-plane-in-about-two-hours-to take care of a very serious case—a relative of a cabinet minister—but I shall be back at the latest in two days and we'll immediately start to psychoanalyze your dream. I don't know why you chose such a historical fantasy as your theme, but the essential thing is to find out why a nightmare has become a real wound, with real blood. I can offer you two tentative explanations: one is the effect of dreams on our organism. I might quote you thousands of cases—with the help of my books, of course—of people who dreamed of something and then woke up to find their dreams had come true psychosomatically. Some dreamed they had become blind, others paralyzed, deaf, mute, and awoke with those very defects. Of course, it only lasted for a short while, until the effect of the dream on the mind of the individual wore off.

"We know that the mind can create stigmas. Saint Theresa dreamed she was living through the passion of Christ and woke up with her hands and feet pierced, simply proving that the mind is all-powerful and can translate dreams or suggestions into actualities like wounds or blood. We have been able by hypnosis to open wounds in the flesh, redden areas of the skin, and even paralyze people or anaesthetize zones of the body to pain or shock. In the same way, a dream can have an effect on the body and create actual lesions.

"Unfortunately, we cannot explain your dream that easily. Skin wounds and lesions, which we call stigmata by analogy with those of Saint Theresa are amorphous, ill-defined lesions. They are sores and ulcers more than wounds. Yours is a wound made by some cutting instrument, there's no doubt of it. You say it was caused by an arrow. I can assure you—and any surgeon will substantiate what I say—that this lesion," and his thick fleshy finger—like a sausage pointed to my shoulder, "is not the result of a dream. It was made by a sharp instrument. I know enough anthropology to identify the instrument too. You were wounded by an arrow which was used three centuries ago by the Indian tribes that lived in the region around the Irazu volcano.

"No, don't be alarmed. I'm not feeding you more terrors. I have another explanation. When you fell asleep and dreamed, your nightmare was so strong that under its effect you subconsciously wanted to dramatize it on your own body. If you had dreamed that you had leprous ulcers you would have got up with ulcers brought about solely by the effect of your mind on your body; for our bodies are just wax moulded by our psyche. But you dreamed that you were wounded by an arrow and I think that during an attack of somnambulism you got up and you went somewhere—God only knows where!—where you could find this type of arrow—maybe some museum—and you inflicted a wound on yourself. It was an unconscious self-mutilation which you cannot remember, and you did it just to translate the fantasy of your nightmare into a real image."

There was a drawn-out silence. For the first time I grew aware of the tictac of an enormous grandfather clock. The brilliant sun outside forced its bars of gold through the drawn Venetian blinds into the room. The aroma of coffee blended with tobacco smoke. My shoulder pained terribly. I looked Bances straight in the face, but he avoided my eyes.

"Bances—"

"Yes?" he said, without looking at me.

"Bances, I want to ask you one thing."

"Go ahead."

"I want the truth."

"What is it?"

"Have you ever testified in court in your capacity as a psychiatrist?"

"You know I have."

"Do you claim to be an authority on self-inflicted wounds?"

"I often have to give testimony concerning such things."

"Then don't beat around the bush. You've seen my wound and its position on my body. Let us assume I could get this type of arrow which no longer exists except in museums. Was it humanly possible for me—asleep or awake—to wound myself this way?"

Silence. More smoke. The beat of the clock was one with the triple beat of my wound; my heart, and my brain.

"Fernando, you could not have wounded yourself. It was caused by an arrow shot from a great distance."

I LEFT Bances despite his offer to stay in town and take care of me; I promised him to consult a surgeon friend of his and then come back to see him as soon as he returned. With difficulty I persuaded him to let me go. Like a well-trained automaton I went to my office, took care of the mail, had lunch, and went back to work. When I closed the office I let out a sigh of relief and another of anguish. Before me now yawned the prospect of another night of dreams; I would again be submerged in a fearful confused world of terrors and anxieties. But there was one compensation: I would see the Indian girl.

After having dinner at the club, I started home. The irony of the situation struck me fully when some neighbors, on their way to the movies, greeted me with their usual friendliness. How could they understand that as soon as I closed my eyes I would be whisked away from San Jose and back three centuries to a world where men were hounded like animals, and where one loved, lived, and died savagely; where the respectable San Jose lawyer became a hirsute bearded soldier, fleeing into nowhere, led by an Indian girl of passionate body and eloquent eyes?

Back in my study, I telephoned Puerto Limon. Yolanda's voice was full of anxiety.

"Darling," she said, "I expected you to

call yesterday. Why didn't you? How do you feel?"

"I'm fine—everything is fine," I lied.

"But if you want a honeymoon, I have to work hard now. I'm settling all sorts of details, running around day and night, so I can have some time alone with you later."

A pause. Her silence froze my false heartiness.

"Yolanda, are you there?"

"Of course. But I'm worried. Are you really all right?"

"Silly girl! Of course I am. Why do you ask? Oh, I'm a little tired, but that's natural. When are you coming back? I miss you so!"

"I'll be back tomorrow. But if you need me now . . . Tell me! I want you to swear that you're all right."

There was no doubt about it. She knew that something was wrong.

"Word of honor, Yolanda. Except that without you, San Jose is a desert and I am lost in it."

After a few more words of farewell, the conversation came to an end.

I hung up the receiver and walked to the window. The night had come softly, almost on tiptoe, like a discreet lady's maid. The sleeping garden throbbed quietly under the blinking stars. The perfume of the jasmine seemed to rise to the distant constellations. An invisible frog was croaking at the blue clean star which, like a street-lamp, hung over my garden. The whisper of a fountain was lulling. Suddenly I was aware that no longer did I see the stars, but rather the threads of silver, spider-webs of gold, brambles of colors, through the tears which blinded my eyes. I pulled the curtains together, undressed quickly, and got into bed anticipating the terror and delight that was approaching. As soon as I stretched out I felt a tidal wave overwhelming me, and I scarcely had time to put the light out.

ONCE more I was lying in a cave and the Indian girl was seated at my side. I had just awakened and I was aware that I had been dreaming again that I was in a strange city, riding a horseless carriage which sped along like the wind; I had talked to a fat man in a house full of strange objects, and later I had talked into a weird

small instrument. (When I woke up in my room, I realized that this dream within my dream had reproduced exactly the events of the previous day, including my visit to Bances and my telephone call to Yolanda!) I didn't tell my dream to the Indian girl, who was changing the bandage on my wound. Inside the cave it was warm and pleasant and I felt relaxed and happy. My armor lay nearby, like a silver skeleton. She had taken off her blouse and leather skirt and was wearing only a thin garment which outlined her magnificent figure.

When she was finished with the bandaging, her brown fingers started tracing signs and figures on the ground. First she drew a high mountain and two figures which I guessed were supposed to be she and I, and indicated with gestures that we were climbing, always climbing. Then she made a rough sketch of figures, some looking like me and others like her: our enemies, soldiers and Indians. With dramatic gestures she indicated to me that on the top of the mountain we were scaling there was a passage leading to a valley. There, she gave me to understand with a sweep of her hand that erased the figures she had traced, we would find liberty. I signalled my agreement to her and made an effort to stand up, but she held me down. She pointed to the top of the mountain which stood between us and the passage leading to freedom, she drew a crown of zigzagging rays, she accompanied her sketch with shouts and grimaces, and finally went over to the fire and piled the burning wood into a mound to indicate the apex of the mountain. Then I understood: we were scaling the volcano Irazu. The passage we were going to cross was often covered by flames and lava from the volcano. If we were lucky we would escape our pursuers; otherwise our flight would end in death. And what a death! In an abyss of fire, among the flames of hell.

I pressed her hands in mine, and when she let out a moan I remembered she too had been wounded and had bandaged her own wound with some rags. Carefully I unbandaged it and saw that the palm of her hand had been pierced right through by the arrow. The wound was clean but large, and the blood was already dry. I washed it and

bandaged it up again. Then we sat close to one another. Her skin was living copper, her eyes clear and serene, but age-old sadness crouched in the corner of each pupil. In a few moments our mouths met.

It was cold outside when we left the cave. Not a sound could be heard, not even the swishing of the wind. Behind us was the steep ascent jutting with trees stripped of leaves like skeletons of their flesh, with twisting branches like imploring hands. Before us rose the mountain devoid of all living matter, scorched everywhere, covered with black ash. The girl squeezed my hand and I understood: we were starting on the last decisive stage of our flight.

Panting heavily, hand in hand we climbed. Always up. Sheer desolation. Always up. The girl's hair shone in the scarlet light. Always up. Death or freedom. And then, as we passed a huge rock, the volcano appeared, spectacularly, dramatically. My heart beat fast as the dazzling scarlet splendor blinded me and the bitter dense smoke choked me. A few feet from us was the mouth of the crater, the sinister bubbling of the boiling lake, the threatening flames belching clouds of thick smoke. Fear seized me, but the girl pressed my hand and then pointed behind and in front of her. I understood. We kissed and then we went on.

AT THAT moment in my dream I woke up suddenly in my room. It was still dark. Why had my dream been interrupted? What had happened to the soldier and the Indian girl? I tried to fall asleep again. I tossed and tossed from one side to the other. But sleep did not come. I was as wide awake as if it were day. I looked at the clock. It was already five in the morning—Sunday morning.

Painfully I got out of bed and got dressed with great difficulty, although my wound did not hurt much. Suddenly I had a stroke of intuition. Why hadn't I thought of it before? If my dream referred so concretely to the life of a Spanish soldier in Costa Rica, why had it not occurred to me to search among old documents for some reference, some allusion which might provide a key to the mystery? Surely in the Indian Section of the City Archives there must be many a

reference to the period of the *Conquistadores*, their wanderings and adventures, which might throw some light on my dream.

By eight o'clock in the morning I could wait no longer, and I went to the home of Don Eusebio Arnaez, senior archivist of the city and the most learned historian in Costa Rica.

A half-asleep Don Eusebio greeted me sullenly. How I convinced him to take me at that hour on a Sunday to the Archives I hardly know now, but I remember that I invented every possible reason, I marshalled every argument, called upon our friendship, reminded him of past favors. In vain Don Eusebio tried to argue, to refuse, to put off complying with my request. But how could he argue with a man possessed? He *had* to take me to the Archives, to open the library and show me documents and books dealing with the beginnings of the Spanish occupation of Costa Rica. After a half hour of resistance, he put on his hat and, wearing a most dour expression, went out with me and clambered into my car.

Several hours later an exhausted, perspiring and furious Don Eusebio was brandishing the key to the archives before me and threatening to go right out and call the police if I did not leave. I had leafed through hundreds of documents concerning Spanish colonization—yellowed parchments, ancient scrolls, books bound in ivory, illustrated hymnals, thick moth-eaten bundles of papers, manuscripts gnawed by rats. All this had transpired under bleak, murky electric lights, with a swarm of insects whirring around our heads and sweat falling in thick drops from my forehead on to the dusty pages recording centuries of adventure and legend.

The silence of the room was all-pervasive. We had locked the doors and pulled the blinds so no one would see us from the outside. The heat was suffocating. The dust of the manuscripts sent Don Eusebio into fits of sneezing.

With mounting annoyance he had kept handing me books and papers which I glanced through and threw aside like a maniac. Every time I opened the covers of a book I could smell the bitter aroma of history; every time I turned a page and the

air moved, centuries sprang to life. Finally, overcome, soaked in perspiration, choking from the dust, I looked hopelessly at Don Eusebio who, red with heat and fury, started towards the door. But the curiosity he had built up through many years of bibliophilia and research—or perhaps he still felt some spark of friendliness for me—overcame his discomfort and indignation.

"There's only one more possibility," he said as we reached the door. "We have a box of manuscripts written by some Spanish soldiers and *encomenderos*."

Grabbing his arm, I almost dragged him back into the room. From a bottom shelf of one of the book compartments, Don Eusebio pulled out a musty box as we heard the muffled noise of mice scurrying away. Under the light of a lamp on one of the tables, we opened the box and took out a bunch of manuscripts bound in parchment.

CAREFULLY we looked them over—reports of land-owners, wills, commissions, accounts, breviaries, all written by hand on yellow paper as brittle as pressed roses. When I finally opened one manuscript and read on the first page: "This is a personal account of Don Fernando de Mendoza, Infantry Captain in the service of His Most Illustrious Majesty Felipe III, which the said Don Fernando de Mendoza leaves to His Sovereign and to his own relatives, if some Christian be good enough to bear it to them."

The manuscript was dated 1567, and I knew I had come to the end of my search.

I embraced Don Eusebio and fervently promised to return the manuscript to him in the morning. What should logically have been the straw to break the camel's back, simply mollified my old friend completely. The human being has a limitless capacity for love and for hate, for joy and for anger. Don Eusebio's irritation had reached the saturation point and my last infraction of the rules which had ordered his life and work for twenty years was so serious that he simply could not muster up enough anger to cope with it. Besides, he had probably decided it was quite useless to argue with a madman.

"Take good care of it and be sure to bring

it back tomorrow morning," he said weakly as I was already running towards the door.

BACK home, I did not even bother locking the door behind me, went straight to my study and sat down with the manuscript clutched in my hands. The twenty-odd pages, yellowed and moth-eaten, exuded an odor that reminded me of leaves that had soaked and decomposed in a stagnant pool. The ink was now just a pale vestige of the original color. A card typewritten by the librarian, repeated the title and date of the document and added: "This manuscript was picked up in the mountains by a Spanish soldier several weeks after the disappearance of Captain Fernando de Mendoza. The manuscript was found in one of the metal tubes used during the days of the Conquest to hold documents. It was written with a quill and ink which men of arms who were also interested in letters used to carry among their stores during the Spanish domination. The manuscript was handed over to the relatives of the vanished chronicler, and they handed it down from generation to generation; it was finally deposited with the Archives when the first municipality was organized in Costa Rica. Its authenticity is beyond question, since what it relates coincides with all the reports made by the former comrades-in-arms of said Captain Mendoza."

As I pored over the pages, my eyes first widened with stupor, and then turned bleary from the effort of deciphering the pale scribbling which danced over the pages and which seemed to fall apart like dust under my nervous fingers. Across time and space a voice was speaking directly to me in the solitude and silence of my study. That voice was repeating my dreams. It was telling me that three hundred years before there had occurred the very same adventure of flight, blood, and love that I had been living through these last nights in my dreams.

The revelation was too horrible: a wave of nausea overcame me and a cold sweat broke out all over my body. I dropped the manuscript on the table and staggered to the bathroom. There I undressed with great difficulty, got into the bathtub and turned on the hot water.

I don't know how long I remained in

this semi-conscious state. Several times I tried to get up, but I couldn't. I remember turning the cold water on. I must have spent hours in the lukewarm mixture before I felt strong enough to go back to my study.

But the most staggering shock of all was still to come, for when I reached the point where my last dream had ended, the manuscript ended too. Someone had torn out the last page!

I STARED blankly at the ragged edge that was all that was left of the last page. What had happened? Who had tampered with the manuscript? Why? Had the page been torn out three hundred years before, when the manuscript was found by the soldier? Had it been ripped out by one of the many hands through which it had passed before getting to me? I recalled that when Don Eusebio opened the box, he mentioned that many of the manuscripts had pages missing that had been torn out, or eaten up by moths and mice. But why *this* page? It struck me that it might have been torn out because the fate of Captain Mendoza had been so terrible that his descendants wanted no one to know about it. My teeth began to chatter.

Had the action been motivated by the pious desire to bury the horror of his death in mystery?

My hand was reaching for the telephone to call Don Eusebio and elicit his help when I stopped abruptly. For it suddenly dawned on me that it was better to know nothing more. Let the next—the definitive—dream come enveloped in the same mystery as the others. If I was doomed, it was better not to know it beforehand.

A couple of soft knocks on my door startled me. Before I could get up, there was Yolanda, dressed in the cherry-colored frock I loved, her eyes filled with anxiety.

I clasped her tightly as if she were the only solid, real thing I could hold on to. Then we sat down on the sofa, and overwhelmed each other with questions. Worried about me, she had returned earlier than she had planned, and too troubled to care about conventions, she had come directly to my house.

"Fernando, what is it?" she asked me.

I NO longer had the right or the desire to keep silent or try to disguise the truth. I had to warn her that she might be marrying a madman.

"Yolanda," I said, "what I am going to tell you may frighten you so that you run away and never lay eyes on me again. But I have to tell you everything. After I finish, you can decide for yourself whether you still want to marry me—that is, if I am still alive and in possession of my reason."

As I listened to myself speak, my story sounded so outrageously absurd that I myself doubted it. Yolanda did not ask me a single question, did not move, did not even blink. Only her hands held mine tightly and her face slowly turned as pale as the keys of an old clavichord.

"This manuscript," I said, pointing to the yellowed sheets on the table, "is the story of the Captain Mendoza who, three centuries ago, actually experienced the dreams I have had the past few nights.

"Captain Mendoza, the manuscript reveals, served under Don Miguel de Ojeda, Commander of the Spanish forces that first explored Costa Rica. It seems that when they invaded a village near Cartago, they seized some rich booty which they intended to divide up among the leaders of the expedition. Captain Mendoza swore that he didn't know how it happened, but a purse full of emeralds and other precious stones which they took from the chieftain of the tribe, disappeared and was found empty in his doublet. The other leaders had him tortured to get him to confess where he had hidden the precious stones, and finally threw him into a cave, intending to kill him in the morning. That night, an Indian girl crept up to him as the others slept, cut his bonds, and pointed to the path going up a mountain. The Captain fled and the Indian girl followed him closely, providing him with fruit while he slept, covering with branches the entrance to the caves where he sought refuge, and erasing his footsteps along the path. You know the rest: Captain Mendoza simply relates what I have lived through in my dreams.

"Everything that happened to him has happened to me these last few nights. When he slept during the day, he too had strange

dreams which he relates vaguely in his manuscript. He saw himself in strange clothing, living in the San Jose of today, dealing with strange people, and in love with a woman whom he describes. You are that woman, Yolanda.

"What finally happened must have been related on the last page which was torn from the manuscript. Captain Mendoza and the Indian girl loved each other and I have told you frankly about the nights he spent—that I spent in my dreams—with the passionate Indian girl. The story comes to an abrupt stop on this page.

"What happened later? What did the last page say? Was it written before they started on the last lap of their journey, and is it a farewell to life? Or were those lines scribbled after they found the path and crossed it safely? I don't know. I don't think I really want to know, because as soon as I shut my eyes I shall live out the climax to my dreams.

"If you think I am mad, I set you free right now. I love you, Yolanda, I want you to know that. But I want you to know also that I want to live my dream to the end. I am afraid to fall asleep, and yet I want more than anything to dream again."

Yolanda's voice was as firm as the pressure of her hand on mine.

"Fernando," she said, "I love you and believe in you. We are going to be married immediately. Get together everything you need, right now. I'll go to my house and get what I need, and we'll never be separated a moment again. We'll fight one madness with another. We'll go to the hermitage in the mountain. The priest there will marry us. You won't be afraid to fall asleep then, because you'll sleep with me in your arms."

I did not argue with her; it did not even occur to me to refuse. We did exactly what she said.

WE ARRIVED at the hermitage in the late afternoon. The little stone house on top of a hill is surrounded by underbrush and silence. Even the bells ring in the blue with muted tones.

The hermit is an old man with sky-blue eyes; his beard falls to his waist and he wears a cassock and rope. He is surprised by nothing and married us as simply as he

says his own prayers. I slipped my family ring on Yolanda's finger as a Virgin, cut of wood, smiled down at us from the altar. The candles flickered, and the hermit's prayer followed us as we walked out of the church.

The farm-house to which we went directly after the wedding belongs to a couple who have known Yolanda since childhood and love her too much to question anything she might do. With tears in their eyes, they gave us the upper floor, crowded with heavy furniture and huge mirrors. The smell of soap and lye is everywhere. Everything is solid, clean, peaceful. The silence is divine.

Alone in our room, I sat down at a table to write this story, while Yolanda talked with our hosts downstairs. Yolanda's purse was on the table and as I pushed it to a corner, it fell on to the floor and the metal clasp opened. Keys, lipstick, mirror, everything spilled over. Carefully I placed everything back. The last thing I picked up was a yellowed piece of paper folded over many times: *the last page from Mendoza's manuscript.*

As I stared dazedly at the paper in my hand, Yolanda walked in. She came over and put her hands on my shoulders. Her eyes were full of compassion.

"Fernando, my darling, I've got to explain. I ran to your house in alarm, I found the door open and went in. You were in the bathroom. In your study the manuscript caught my eye. I quickly scanned through it, but when I got to the last page I stopped. I didn't want to know the end and I didn't want you to know either. So I tore the page out and left the room. I waited outside your door and returned only when I heard you going back to your study. I intended to tell you later that I had the page and to ask you if you wanted to look at it."

"But, Yolanda, how did you know the manuscript was so important to me? How did you sense that this was happening to me?"

"I didn't sense it; I knew."

"You knew?"

"Yes. My dreams started the same night

as yours. That is why I was so upset the first time you told me. Since then I have not had to question you. I knew that we were both dreaming the same thing. Your horrible nights were mine. When finally I felt so disturbed that I was afraid I couldn't hide it from you any longer, I thought up some excuse to go to Puerto Limon for a few days. But my dreams still continued there."

"Then you knew what was happening to me in those dreams?"

"Yes, for I was—I am—the Indian girl who saved you, the girl to whom you made love on the floor of the cave. That is why I read the manuscript when I realized what it was. That is why I wanted us to get married before the climax comes. Your fate is mine."

Taking the glove off her right hand—the glove she had worn all afternoon and which, in my half-dazed condition I had not even noticed—she showed me a wide pink scar. It was the wound she had received from an arrow the very same day I was wounded in the shoulder.

"I, too," Yolanda whispered, "got up one day with this wound."

I clasped her in my arms. Way down deep I felt she already knew the outcome, that she had read the last page of the manuscript, but I said nothing.

"Fernando, go on with your writing," she said.

As I write these lines, Yolanda is sitting next to me. Outside the night has descended from the mountains upon the valley. The moon—the same moon that witnessed our flight and love centuries ago—is a silver disk over the peaceful land. As soon as I finish these lines we shall put out the candle and we shall lie down on the wide peasant bed with its starched white sheets that smell of soap and apples. We shall fall asleep and together go through the last stage of our flight. And whatever happens, we are just as certain that we shall continue loving each other, as we are that the moon will shine forever and the goodness of God flow eternally over us.