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AT A BALL IN NICARAGUA.

The question uppermost in my mind was, what should I wear? I had with me a new dress suit, a hunting outfit and a tennis costume of dazzling brilliancy. It was almost a forlorn conclusion that I would paralyze the Castilians with a swallow-tailed coat, when my friend entered and insisted on my going dressed, or rather undressed, as I was. He had never seen anything in Castillo that would take so well as those silk pajamas, and I am forced to admit they did speak for themselves. The ladies, he informed me, would wear little more, and as for the men—well, they dressed as the fancy struck them. Despite his earnest entreaties, I compromised on a flannel shirt, a pair of white duck trousers and a blazer in which all the colors of the spectrum blended harmoniously. Thus rigged for the fandango, my friend and I, preceded by a few ragged soldiers, and followed by a noisy crowd of naked children, sauntered through the single street of the village.

The hall—an old bar-room, the floor of which had been neatly swept and sanded, was moored on four piles over the river, where the cooling trade wind might temper the heat of the dance. No one had yet arrived, so we stood at the counter drinking tafia as the soldiers fixed their bayonets.

"You see, we never enjoy a feast in Castillo without the military," said the commandante, who had joined us, as his men began to group themselves about the room. "It would not be safe," he continued, "for the Costa Ricans might attack us at any moment; and then when either the men or women get too full of tafia, nothing but a bayonet can bring them to their senses."

With this cheering prospect in view for an evening's entertainment, I stood near an open window and watched the crowd "Adios, Señor Comandante; adios, caballero," was the musical greeting softly whispered from lips that needed no rouge to make them blush the traditional hue of the peach. The women were in their pajamas, in black, yellow and brown; and their costumes, if such they might be called, were marvels of brilliant colors.

A low-cut bodice or chemise, made out of a kind of mosquito net cloth, through which glinted their dark skins, a loose fitting skirt of some conspicuous hue, a red sash, and a few scarlet passion flowers completed their ball attire. Their men seemed to care less about their personal appearance, if the fact that the wore less is any criterion. Some sauntered in with shoes, some without. The all wore the native uniform, however—towel around the head. Now and then a pair of modern check trousers almost made me feel the black winds that I knew must be sweeping up the Bowery.

As the hall gradually filled up, the guests aimlessly meandered from one end to the other, the counter forming a nucleus around which gathered the elite of Castillo. Three unseen musicians now began to make the night hideous, their instruments of torture being a bass drum, a fife and a wire-strung guitar, from which issued sounds like a chorus of mosquitoes. Each glibly seized a female, without saying a word as they went.

They anted up benches across the floor. Some volumes of smoke mingled with clouds of sand, soon filled the air. The voices grew louder, and tinkling glasses almost drowned the strains of the dance. Still the revelry continued, for the night was yet young. The dancers seemed to tire. Not so the musicians. They were paid to play, and play they must. At the end of fifteen minutes I became restless. A half hour passed, an hour, and still the music neither ceased nor changed. As soon as my friend had left the room, with the batle of the hall on his arm, the commandante followed, with another equally pretty young girl. Whenever it looked as though the whole affair was going to degenerate into a free fight, the soldiers soon brought the unruly dancers to order by striking the butts of their muskets on the floor.

"Mind of the opportunity to be alone, I wandered over to a window near the river. As I stood there and contrasted the strange scene before me with the last Charity Ball at the Metropolitan Opera House, a rum inflated Indian walked up and affectionately put his arm through mine. "Very dear and respected friend," he began, "why no dance? I have pretty sister here, and she want you dance with her. Give me four medion, (twenty cents) and she is your lady."

I promptly declined this generous offer and moved across the room. The fellow still followed, however, insisting on my taking a drink of tafia with him to show there was no hard feeling. Finding himself again refused, he went away. It was getting late, but the musicians were still earning their money. The band had ceased only once during the evening, and then just long enough to gather strength for a fresh attack and obtain an ample fee. The drum virtuoso could hardly stand in that, found it difficult

to see the head of his instrument. The dancers became more excited, likewise the musicians. Wild and fantastic strains echoed throughout the hall. But the climax was reached when the manipulator of the bass drum missed his aim and struck the life player a vicious blow on the head that almost stunned him. Now the music ceased and a free fight ensued, the friends of each championing their man.

Discretion taught me that it was time to retire; but just as I reached the door, the drunken fellow who had previously annoyed me stood there with a savage glare in his dark eyes. Glancing at my blazer, he said, in an insulting tone, "Very dear and respected friend, I like much your fancy coat. What you will sell to me for?"

I informed that my coat was not for sale, and started to move away. He was determined to get into a fight, however, and with this end in view he grabbed at my right arm, tearing away part of the sleeve. For the first since my arrival in Nicaragua I was without a revolver, and at a time when I most needed one. There was nothing within sight but a small stool, which I quickly caught by the feet and swung aloft. As soon as the Indian saw this he reached down and drew from his sash a pair of machetes. Before he could raise his arm, however, my friend and the Comandante, who had just entered, seized the fellow and turned him over to the soldiers.

Thus ended a memorable fandango that shall ever be recalled as I hear the San Juan breaking over the rapids, and look upon the green hills of Castillo, peaceful home of the simple-minded Indians.—W. Nephew King, Jr., in Harper's Weekly.

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