

MAYAPAN

A NOVELIZED HISTORY OF THE CORTÉS CONQUEST

by

ARGENTINA DIAZ LOZANO

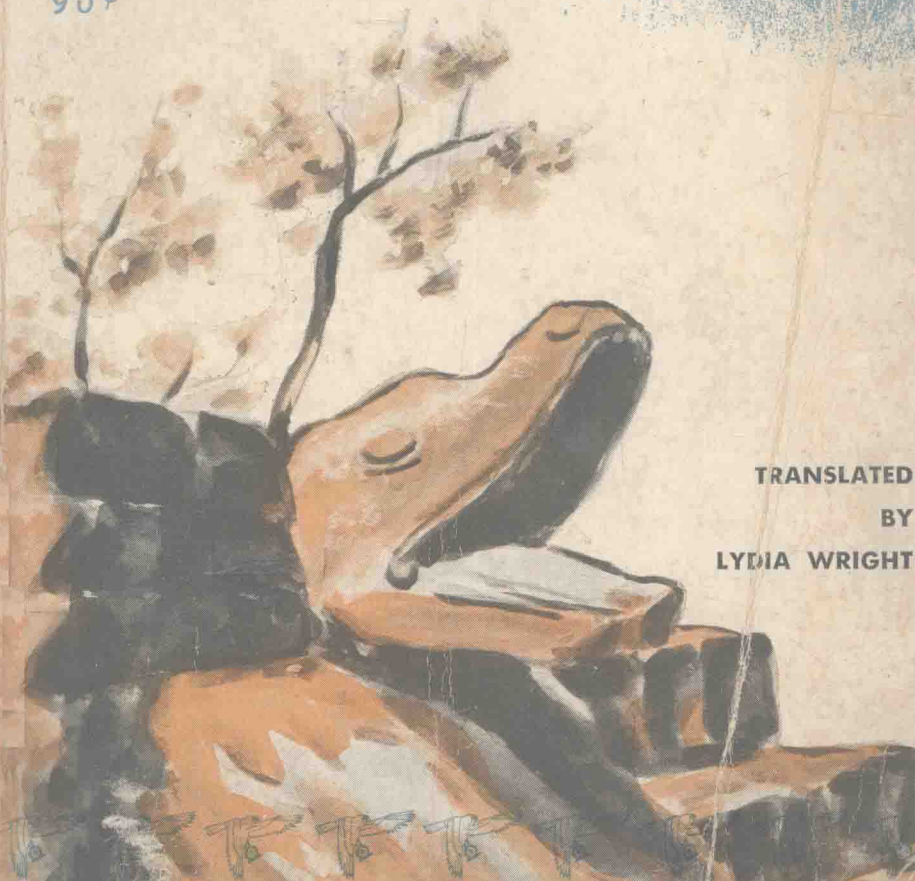


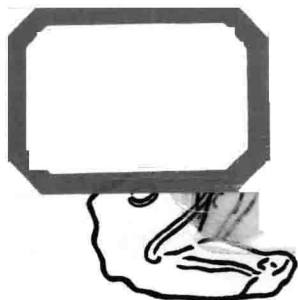
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TRANSLATED

BY

LYDIA WRIGHT





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To Porfirio Díaz Lozano
My greatest critic, my greatest friend
and
The Instituto de Antropología e Historia
de Guatemala
which strives so diligently to disseminate
the knowledge of Mayan Culture

THE PRIMITIVE

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I.

THE SEA'S OBSCURE green color was broken by the white foam of enormous waves which curled up and then began a mad race down giant swells. One afternoon in the year 1511, the sailing vessel advanced, balanced gracefully on the waves, all its sails unfurled to the wind. The intense heat which caused the sailors to sweat copiously, the lowering atmosphere, and the gray clouds which here and there stained the tropical blue sky, all warned of a coming storm.

"God save us! We shall have a wracking storm, my brave men."

The man who had spoken looked more like a

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pirate than a Spanish conquistador. His face was browned by the strong sun which shone down on the uncharted sea; his outstanding features were his steel-blue eyes, whose penetrating glance resembled that of an eagle, and his long mustache whose points turned upward aggressively. His hair was held down by a red handkerchief knotted at the back of the neck like the ones the other members of the crew wore.

The sailing vessel began to dip more rapidly; the atmosphere became heavier and more stifling. The wind, now stronger, brought with it waves of heat, and whirled the sea into choppy and short-lived foamy peaks.

The lookout cried out three times at short intervals, "Land to larboard!" On the bridge appeared a man of forceful aspect, wearing high leather boots; the sword in his belt shone against the lower part of his wine colored doublet. With hands on hips he glanced slowly over the turbulent surrounding water, then shifted his gaze to the sky where gray clouds were piling up threateningly. He knit his brow and cried in loud voice, "Guerreroo!"

"Yes, my Captain," replied the man with steel-blue eyes, smiling pleasantly and revealing his even white teeth. He came forward, rolling slowly in order to keep his balance, since the vessel now was not only dipping violently but was beginning to shudder.

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"Furl all sails! In these waters the storms come on with astounding suddenness. I fear that the one now approaching will buffet the ship about so we shall have real trouble."

"Aye, aye, sir!" shouted Guerrero in order to be heard above the elemental howling of the wind, "Be sure we shall have a good dance!"

The other answered, "Have Luzardo Díaz and another man help you at the helm."

The sea appeared to be a threatening wild beast, anxious to hurl itself on its victims. It roared and tossed into waves of unbelievable proportions. Water and sky blended into one immense whole in which the little sailing vessel seemed a miniature toy. Through enormous gray clouds the fiery flashes of lightning announced the arrival of the storm. The rain poured down torrentially as if the heavens had opened, accompanied by such wind that the fragile craft raced across the water. "The dance," as Guerrero had called it, began in rhythm with the maddened waves. Now the ship remained a few moments suspended on the top of a gigantic wave, now it rushed toward the depths. It seemed that the vessel was about to perish in the jaws of the monster, but then it gathered itself to continue the struggle, a struggle at the same time beautiful and terrifying.

The helm had been wrenched from Guerrero many times before Luzardo Díaz and another sailor arrived to help him. The three men gripped the deck

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firmly with their bare feet, the muscles in their arms so taut that they looked like wires; and their anguished expressions as they turned to the wind and the rain seemed the incarnation of human intelligence and courage pitted against the unleashed elements.

“Captain Valdivia!” Guerrero shouted, “I think we are coming to the shoals of the Víboras. The danger increases!”

“Are we not yet near Jamaica?”

“Yes, but that is our worst danger; the shoals in these waters are treacherous.”

The voices of the crew shouting orders and encouragement could hardly be heard, so great was the noise of the breaking sea, the thunder and the storm. The vessel, the rain from the sky, the water of the sea and the irate wind were blended together in mortal torment, in tragic embrace.

2.

THE FOLLOWING

morning the sun shone on a tranquil sea, immobile and unbelievably beautiful. Some twenty men, half-naked, drenched and drifting in a small boat without sails, were soaking up the welcome rays of the sun, and with them hope, which is so indestructible in the human heart.

One of them was standing, his hand shielding his eyes, surveying the limitless horizon.

“By the Devil’s horns!” he exclaimed. “No land. Nothing to eat. How much water do we have, Guerrero?”

“Two casks, which we will ration out at the rate of one cup daily apiece. We will do the same with

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the little food we have left. I will guard our provisions. We must have confidence in God's mercy. Those gulls we saw a while ago mean that land cannot be very far distant. Well, then, courage, my lads. How do you feel, Captain?"

Captain Valdivia was lying across a gunwale; a bandage stained with blood covered his head. His face was very pale. Nevertheless, he replied in a strong voice,

"Better. But I mourn the loss of my men."

"But Vasco Núñez de Balboa will feel worse about the loss of the ship and the twenty thousand ducats that went to the bottom of this greedy sea," remarked Guerrero.

Valdivia did not answer, but merely lifted himself up a bit to gaze at the sea which was now completely calm. Then he said in a low voice,

"The coast is not far off. I pray that we do not find savages there, for they are unfriendly in these lands and we are completely unarmed."

"Do you have any idea of where we are?"

"Not exactly," replied Valdivia. "I believe we are between Cuba and a land which they call Mexico—a land not yet conquered by us."

A gloomy silence settled over the men. All that was heard was the soft rhythmic sound of the oars as they parted the tranquil waters. The sun's rays burned like flames against the half-naked bodies which were slowly turning dark red in color. No

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more gulls appeared before the anxious eyes of the shipwrecked men; only the terrible jaws of the sharks were a manifestation of life in the solitude which enveloped them, bringing anguish to hearts already tormented by the uncertainty of their fate. With some rags, a piece of an oar, and a small plank they improvised an awning to shelter them somewhat from the cruel heat of the sun.

Night arrived, and with it complete dejection. How true it is that human beings feel more solitary and abandoned when darkness descends on the earth.

Beneath a sky studded with stars which shone like magnificent diamonds the proud Spaniards still had spirit enough to joke.

"Captain, is anything known of the savages of this coast?"

"Very little," replied Valdivia. "I remember a letter which they say was written by Bartolomeo Colón, brother of Cristóbal Colón, in 1505, describing a canoe with an awning in which a native personage was traveling with twenty-five men. They told him by signs, since they spoke a strange tongue, that they came from some province or country which was called Mayapan or Yucatán. That land lies facing Cuba, and borders a great gulf. We are probably approaching its coast now. It is known that these people practice human sacrifices, are idolatrous and cannibalistic."

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“Bad, very bad, indeed,” commented Luzardo Díaz, glancing maliciously at one of his companions, an extremely thin individual, and adding, “You, Jerónimo de Aguilar, have nothing to fear. Your bones would do little to whet the appetite of any savage!”

Luzardo himself was a robust person, tending toward obesity. Thick black hair covered his chest and his muscular, powerful arms. Aguilar answered him peevishly.

“Now you see the advantages of being thin, because you, who are so appetizing, will make a tasty roast. They will cut off your buttocks while you are still alive, season them with chile, and you, yourself, will see how good they will be roasted.”

Jerónimo de Aguilar had received an excellent education and was greatly admired by his unlettered companions. It is true that his disposition was not particularly amiable, but they forgave him readily for they knew that at heart he was dependable and generous. His words evoked laughter from the exhausted men.

Daring adventurers, brave sailors they were. They did not have the most remote idea that they were the first Europeans to approach the land where there still existed the vestiges of a very ancient and powerful kingdom, which in its days of splendor had extended over all the territory lying between Mayapan or Yucatán and the kingdom of Guatemala.

3.

ONE DAY, TWO, THREE.

How many would the unfortunate shipwrecked men be forced to spend beneath the burning rays of the sun which beats on the Antilles? Thirteen, actually, but the men lost track of time in their misery. One of the men, driven out of his mind, threw himself into the sea and was devoured by sharks before the eyes of his companions, who almost unheedingly watched him die, so insensitive to feeling had they become due to their physical debilitation. Several survivors, weakened by their prolonged fast, also succumbed. Twenty had survived the shipwreck, but only ten reached the unknown coast alive. When

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they saw the flowering vegetation, they called upon the last reserves of energy in their wasted bodies, and tremblingly managed to rise to their feet clinging to one another. They made no attempt to restrain the tears which flowed down their haggard faces.

Valdivia was the first to be able to speak, saying, "At last— Oh, Almighty God! Look at the beautiful trees! Let us make one more effort, my friends. Draw the boat up on the sand and then—look for fresh water."

No one answered. The men were concentrating the small store of energy that was left them toward obeying the order of Valdivia. They stepped out on the beach and began to walk with uncertain steps, staggering drunkenly with the wild look of men who have suffered greatly, in their brains a vision of water—clear water from a spring, that they hoped would be somewhere in the midst of the green silent thickness whose silence was broken from time to time by the strident cry of a guacamayo or the furtive footsteps of an invisible animal. The little brook they stumbled on ran over a rocky bed, musical, clear and inviting. It was just as they had dreamed it would be. They threw themselves into the bubbling stream, faces plunged in the water like crazed beasts.

"Take care! It is dangerous to drink too much," cautioned Gonzalo Guerrero, who had to use force to pull two of the men who had not heard his warning from the water.

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The men rested a few moments, enjoying the shade of the great trees. Then one of them, with hope alight in his emaciated face, cried, "Now to fish, my friends. Around these coastal rocks we will find shellfish and in the quiet pools of water there will be plenty of fish. Let us start now. First we'll make an Indian trap. We'll cut sticks half an arm's length. Then we need some vines. There is enough to work with. Help me, and I assure you we will soon be eating broiled fish."

How strong is the desire to survive! So strong that under the most difficult and desperate circumstances the force of this instinct is incredible. Starving, half-naked, with matted hair and dirty beards, so thin they seemed unreal, the sailors had little resemblance to human beings. But in their sunken eyes, bright with fever, appeared a gleam—intelligence, and, with it, hope.

Several men began to search for stones and dry grass with which to start a fire. Another began to sharpen the knife which he had kept in his belt in order to scale and clean the fish. The rest searched for material with which to prepare the trap.

Only Jerónimo de Aguilar, too exhausted to do anything at all, collapsed under a shady tree and fell asleep.

Nightfall found them eating small sardines browned over the fire. Heartened by the food, they were discussing the manner in which they could