

**AZORA, THE DAUGHTER
OF MONTEZUMA: AN
OPERA IN THREE ACTS**

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Azora, the Daughter of Montezuma: An Opera in Three Acts by David Stevens

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DAVID STEVENS

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ARGUMENT

Xalca, a Prince of Tlascala, having been overcome in battle by *Montezuma*, is now residing in the latter's capital, a nominal prisoner of war. Actually he stands high in the Emperor's favor as a military leader; having submitted to *Montezuma's* rule, he has been given an important command.

The true reason for *Xalca's* devotion to *Montezuma's* interests lies in his love for *Azora*, the Emperor's daughter, who is destined by her father to be the wife of *Ramatzin*, titular chief of *Montezuma's* army. She, however, has given her love unreservedly to *Xalca* and regards *Ramatzin's* pretensions with disdain.

Owing to *Xalca's* anomalous position, his betrothal to *Azora* has been kept secret in the hope that an impending war with Tarascan will afford him an opportunity to so distinguish himself that his claim to equal standing with all will be recognized. *Ramatzin*, however, already resentful and angry at *Xalca's* success and popularity, is further enraged by the suspicion that *Azora* loves the Tlascalan, and all the energies of his bitter and unscrupulous nature are employed to defeat the hopes and aspirations of his rival.

Such is the situation when the action of the story begins.

It is the morning of the Feast of Totec, a ceremony requiring the sacrifice of many lives to the Sun-god, not only for his nourishment and subsistence, but to secure his favor in the impending war with Tarascan. Before the Feast begins, *Ramatzin* imparts his suspicions concerning *Azora* and *Xalca* to *Canek*, the fanatical High Priest of the Sun, who, knowing *Montezuma's* fierce pride in his race, foresees great trouble should *Azora* disregard her father's wishes with respect to *Ramatzin*. Accordingly, with the hope of dissuading *Xalca* from so dangerous a purpose, he charges him with aspiring to win the hand of the Emperor's daughter, an ambition beyond the hope of all save the noblest of her own race. *Xalca* admits his love for *Azora* and proudly refuses to surrender her.

Canek bids him beware of the consequences of his rashness, and withdraws, declaring that he will beseech the gods to intervene.

Azora then appears, in a passionate scene with *Xalca* their mutual love and devotion are reasserted.

The ceremonies of the Feast now begin with a general assembling of *Montezuma's* people, together with the Emperor and his sister, *Papantzin*, *Canek*, the Fire-Priests, Dancing Girls and Soldiers. The Sacrificial Victims are brought forth and all are about to proceed to the scene of the sacrifice, when *Montezuma*, observing that his daughter is not present, inquires the reason. *Papan* declares that she dissuaded *Azora* from presenting herself at the ceremony, believing the sacrificial rites to be wicked and unhallowed. Though *Montezuma* rebukes her for her apostacy, she relates a vision in which she beheld and heard a messenger from the true God, who proclaimed the coming of Christ's warriors and the victory of the Cross over blindness and superstition.

Montezuma is momentarily affected by her recital, but at that moment *Ramatzin* appears with the news that the approach of the Tarascan has been signalled from the mountains, and all is forgotten except the sacrifice to the Sun-god and immediate preparations for battle. *Xalca* is summoned and *Montezuma* entrusts him with the campaign against the enemy, promising him whatever he may demand if he return victorious.

Xalca eagerly undertakes the task, seeing therein his chance to win *Azora* unopposed. He departs forthwith, and, despite the earnest protests of *Papan*, the sacrificial ceremony proceeds.

A month has elapsed without news from *Xalca*; *Azora* seeks the Temple of Totec at sunset, and before the Sacred Fire prays for her lover's safe and victorious return.

Her devotions are interrupted by *Canek*, who tries to convince her that *Xalca* is defeated and dead. He further declares that *Montezuma*, angry at the apparent failure of *Xalca's* army, has determined on a second expedition under *Ramatzin's* command and that a swift runner has been despatched with a message to *Xalca* that if he be alive and beaten, he may remain away. *Canek*, however, interprets *Xalca's* silence as certain proof of his defeat and death, and leaves *Azora* all but hopeless.

Ramatzin now presents himself and urges his claim for her hand. He pleads humbly enough until it becomes obvious that *Azora* holds him in contempt, when his passion and anger lead him to affront her by his brutality. *Canek* appears in response to her cries and intervenes, although he pleads *Ramatzin's* cause until she dismisses them both peremptorily.

The hour of prayer having now arrived, *Montezuma* and his people enter the Temple and appeal to *Totec* for aid. *Ramatzin*, being commanded to lead his men to the scene of war, declares his readiness to depart, but demands that *Azora* be formally betrothed to him before he goes forth. The Emperor accedes without hesitation, and *Azora* is bidden to take the required vows. She refuses, and *Ramatzin* is driven by his fury to charge her with loving the *Tlascalan*. She proudly admits the charge and passionately asserts that she will wed no other. *Montezuma* sternly commands submission, and refuses to hear her final appeal; she defies him and reasserts her determination to wed *Xalca* if he be alive. *Montezuma*, enraged, swears that if *Xalca* appears before him with such bold pretensions, his fate shall be certain and swift death.

At this instant a distant trumpet is heard; the assembly stands in silent and breathless expectation, and the runner who was sent to seek out *Xalca's* army staggers up the steps of the Temple to announce the approach of *Xalca* victorious.

The trumpets sound again, and amid the triumphant songs and acclamations of his soldiers, *Xalca* appears in the entrance to the Temple. He proclaims victory and gives thanks to *Totec*, asking that on the morrow a sacrifice be made to the god.

Montezuma, speaking for the first time since *Xalca's* appearance, grimly assures him that a sacrifice shall be made. *Xalca*, now observing the ominous silence that pervades the assembly, but ignorant of its meaning, lays his sword at the Emperor's feet and claims his reward—the hand of *Azora*. *Montezuma*, in an outburst of fury, denounces him as an alien slave; and when *Azora* also demands that her father keep his pledged word, he declares that they shall indeed be made one—and by the hand of Death! The lovers are made prisoners and condemned to die at sunrise on the Altar of Sacrifice. The scene closes amid the jubilant shouts of *Xalca's* soldiers, without the Temple and unaware of their leader's fate.

In the hour preceding dawn on the following morning, *Azora* and *Papantzin* are seen in the Cavern of Sacrifice, the latter seeking to administer the consolations of faith in the true religion of Christ as revealed in her vision. *Azora* is not unresponsive, but is unable wholly to comprehend the significance of *Papan's* belief. *Canek* presently appears with news that *Montezuma* has determined to spare his daughter's life if she will accept *Ramatzin*. The latter is now admitted, together with *Xalca*, who, being acquainted with the Emperor's proposal, joins the others in begging her to yield, that he alone may pay the penalty of their ill-starred attachment. *Azora* refuses her father's clemency and declares her readiness for death with her lover.

Montezuma and his people now appear and *Azora's* determination is made known to him, whereupon he harshly directs *Canek* to perform his office. The prisoners are placed upon the Altar of Sacrifice. *Canek* prepares to despatch them by his own hand as soon as the shaft of sunlight admitted by a cleft in the wall shall rest upon the victims, this being regarded as a mystic signal from the Sun-god.

The moment is at hand; the High Priest, armed with the keen flint weapon of his office, has raised his arm to strike, when strange voices are heard singing the noble theme that has expressed *Papan's* faith in the true God. Awe-stricken silence falls upon the assembly; *Canek's* arm is involuntarily stayed; the voices draw nearer and the music grows more exalted. Suddenly there appears in the entrance the figure of *Cortés* mounted on a white charger and accompanied by his warriors and a band of Priests bearing white banners emblazoned with the symbol of the Christian religion and led by one holding aloft a great white Cross.

The people of *Montezuma* are filled with apprehension and dismay while, amid the chanting of the Spanish Priests, the bearer of the Cross makes his way unopposed to the Altar. As he reaches the prisoners, a shaft of sunlight falls directly upon the white Cross; *Canek's* nerveless hand releases his weapon and he falls senseless before the holy symbol. *Montezuma* and his people call frantically on their god *Totec* to protect them, but the overpowering manifestation of Christian faith is invincible and the scene closes with the triumphant strains of *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*.

AZORA

The Daughter of Montezuma

CHARACTERS

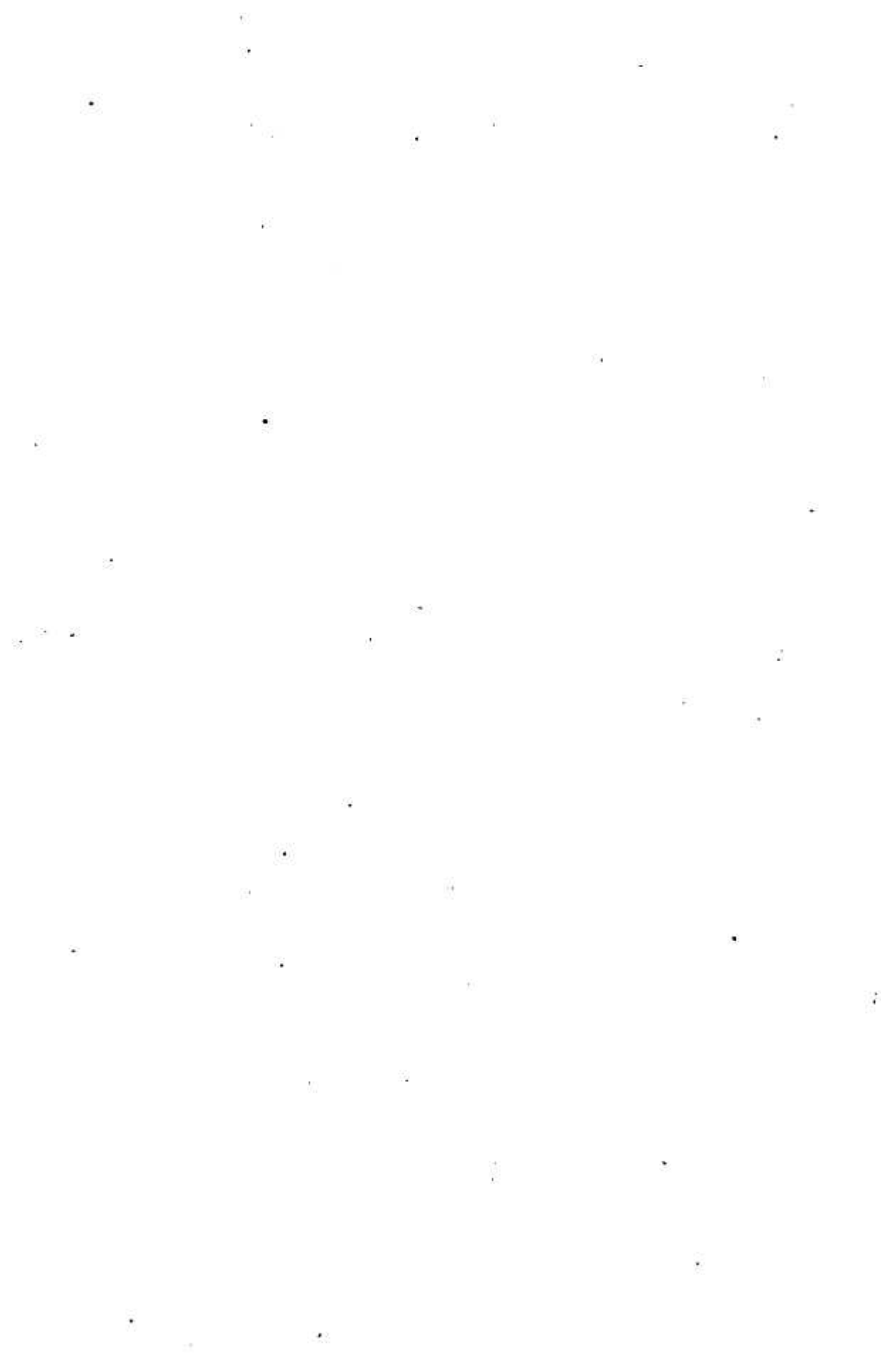
MONTEZUMA II,—Emperor of Mexico
XALCA,—A Tlascalcan Prince
CANEK,—High Priest of the Sun
RAMATEIN,—General of Montezuma's Army
PIQUI-CHAQUI (Flea-footed),—a Runner
HERNANDO CORTÉS,—Conqueror of Mexico
A SPANISH PRIEST
AZORA,—Montezuma's Daughter
PAPANTZIN,—Sister to Montezuma

Soldiers of Cortés; Warriors of Montezuma's Army;
Spanish Priests; Priests of the Sacred Fire; Montezuma's People, Slaves, Dancing Girls and Sacrificial Victims.

SCENES

ACT I. A Courtyard before the House of the Eagles.
ACT II. Interior of the Temple of Toteac.
ACT III. The Cavern of Sacrifice.

PERIOD: 1519



ACT THE FIRST

A Courtyard before the House of the Eagles

