

Storytellers' Favorites: Astonishing Events

Nude Ballet - The story of how Mexican bandits forced a travelling Paris ballet company—some say opera singers or actors - to perform in the nude if they wanted to escape with their lives. (Pages 233-234.)

The Beauty of Mexican Women - was a possible topic for conversation as Generals Ulysses Grant and Robert E. Lee waited to sign the Confederate surrender papers at Appomattox. They had served on the same side in the Mexican war in 1847-48, and Lee is quoted as saying, "I can conceive of nothing more beautiful." (Pages 243-244.) Also, French Colonel duBarail wrote an essay on the beauty of Mexican women.

Unloading Horses in a Hurricane - Hurricanes that travel north-to-south along the Mexican Gulf coast are known as "nortes." General Bazaine's fleet arrived at the height of such a storm, but managed to unload 700 horses on barges and other small craft without losing a single animal. (Pages 112-113.)

Clean Uniforms for Battle - One way that Maximilian's forces in Queretaro could tell that the Mexican Juarista forces might attack is that they all stood on a hillside and took off their dirty uniforms and put them on the ground, waiting naked for new uniforms. Then, they might or might not attack. (Page 310.)

1,500 Dead in a Cooking Accident - At the Mexican army base in Chalchicomula, women were lighting their cooking fires for the evening when some sparks blew into a barn where 23 tons of gunpowder were stored. A thousand soldiers were killed, and 500 others. The French had not yet fired a shot. (Pages 19-20.)

Causing the French to Panic - Secretary of State William Seward told the newly-arriving French ambassador that a Senator who advocates a US invasion of Mexico will be appointed as ambassador to the Juarez regime—not to Maximilian's government. (Page 273.) Gen. Phil Sheridan skips the US victory parade after the Civil War to run troop maneuvers along the Mexican border, as though preparing to attack. (Pages 252-253.) The French don't want to take on the U.S.; both situations cause panic in Paris and Mexico City.

Shootout in Austin - General Jo Shelby's troops—on their way to Mexico to start a new life—encounter a gang of bandits who are raiding the Texas State Capitol treasury vaults. One who filled his pantlegs with gold coins is shot dead on the spot. The governor offers Shelby the money, but he declines. (Pages 248-250.)