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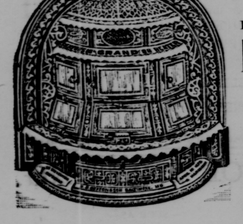

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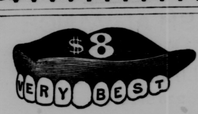

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TERESA

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CHAPTER VIII.

With spring came news of the cessation of Indian hostilities. The last band of Navajoes had surrendered and been gathered to the reservation on the Rio Pecos. There being no further use for the camp at Los Valles Grandes, Lieutenant Raymer, the first week in June, received orders to return to Santa Fe and resume duty at Fort Marcy. Accordingly one evening of that month the company marched into the parade and took up its old quarters. Raymer was greeted cordially by his friends and congratulated upon his success as an Indian campaigner. He returned to his former employment, falling rapidly into the military and social life of the territorial capital.

Not long after his return he was detailed as officer of the day and found himself again standing by the sundial, awaiting the details for guard duty. Presently the inspiring notes of the band burst upon his ear, and he turned to witness its approach and handsome bearing and precision of movement. As he did so his glance fell upon the window at which he had first seen Dona Teresa. No one stood there now.

Following the movement of the band, he gradually turned his back upon the palace and stood witnessing the arrival and alignment of the detachments. A light tapping attracted him, and turning again to the window he saw the object of his thoughts, her eyes beaming with joyful recognition. He could no more than bow ere the officer whom he was to relieve summoned him to the reviewing point.

The ceremony ended and the old guard relieved, Raymer started for his quarters. In the center of the parade he met the Mexican boy, Ramon Vaca.

"Ah, Ramon, here you are and well as ever!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Senor Teniente, I am as well as before I was shot, thanks to Senor Mason. I am on my way to the hospital to see him."

"He has had a piece of good fortune since returning to the fort and is now hospital steward," said Raymer.

"I heard of his appointment yesterday, and he told me he means to be a doctor some day."

"Yes, a medical college will have him on its roll when his enlistment is out. But what brings you to Santa Fe, Ramon?"

"I am at the San Miguel school. Senor Valencia says I am to be his boy, and that I must have an education."

"For your brave conduct in the valley?"

"He is pleased to say so."

"Where are the Valencias, Ramon?"

"Here in Santa Fe."

"Have they been long in the city?"

"A fortnight. But they go tomorrow, and as my school is out I go too."

The lieutenant perceived an opportunity which must not be missed. He felt sure of aid from the boy and determined to avail himself of it.

"Call at my room, Ramon, when you return—first door on the left of right hallway."

"Yes; I will be back soon."

The boy went on, and the officer entered his quarters, determined to seek an interview with Teresa. A few moments later he had prepared the following note:

"I have just met the Chevalier Ramon, and he tells me that you are to leave in the morning. Is it not possible for you to meet me this evening? You know I have heard nothing from you since January! I intend this afternoon to make a formal call at the palace, and if I do not find you in the parlors shall ask permission to see you. If refused, I trust you will be able to manage it. I regret being obliged to counsel this, but there may be no other way."

The ink had scarcely dried when the boy returned.

"Now, Ramon," began the lieutenant, "I want you to take this letter to Dona Teresa. Are you willing?"

"Yes, sir, I will take it," was the unhesitating response.

"Thank you, Ramon. I expected you would, and, remember, deliver it to no one but Dona Teresa. I shall be about the garrison or plaza all day, so if there is any reply you can easily find me."

"Yes, sir; I will report to you whether there is a reply or not."

Ramon departed, and the young officer passed the day until midafternoon somewhat anxiously. At 3 o'clock he went to the palace and sent his card to the ladies. A servant showed him into the parlors, and presently the governor's wife and Senora Valencia entered, greeting him kindly. The latter paid him many compliments and thanked him for the aid he had rendered her daughter on several recent occasions. Evidently she was grateful and desired him to know it.

Emboldened by her kindness, Raymer asked if he might see his former guest. The mother regretted that it would be impossible. Teresa was busy with dressmakers and milliners, preparing for her marriage, which was soon to take place. As they purposed leaving Santa Fe on the morrow, the time could not be spared, and she begged he would excuse her.

Raymer thought he discovered under this reserve a genuine sympathy for him which it was difficult for la senora to hold in check. Still he did not feel encouraged to plead his cause, and at the close of a general discussion of commonplaces left, much disheartened.

Arrived at the post, he found Ramon sitting on the veranda, with a note for him. Requesting the boy to wait, he entered his sitting room, broke the seal and read as follows:

AT THE PALACE.

DEAR PHILIP—I will meet you at 9 in the representatives' chamber. You will find Ramon awaiting you on the portal at the outer entrance. TERESA.

The lieutenant rejoined the boy on the veranda and asked him if he understood the arrangement for this evening.

"Yes, sir, in the hall of the representatives, at 9 o'clock," was the reply.

"Then please tell your mistress that, being officer of the day, I must visit the guard at that hour and cannot come until a little later."

"I will tell her, sir, and I will be waiting for you."

The boy went away, leaving Raymer to read and reread Teresa's note and long for the slow hours to pass away.

Promptly upon the close of his duties at tattoo Raymer repaired to the entrance mentioned in Teresa's note and found Ramon awaiting him. The two hastened to the legislative chamber, and the lieutenant passed in. By the dim light of a candle he saw his beloved dimly revealed in the darkness beyond. It was a fond meeting, and for some time the conversation dwelt upon their strange adventures and life in the valley and that sweet moment when he lifted her from her dying horse and told his love, but it finally reached present interests.

"Is it possible you have consented to marry Ortega?" Raymer asked.

"I have never consented at any time before or since I met you, Philip. You have no idea of the pressure brought to bear upon me by my relatives. I am forced to appear to consent."

"When is the marriage appointed to take place?"

"In two months, and I fear it will take place unless"——

"Unless you marry me sooner," interrupted Philip. "And you will marry me, Teresa, if I can make the opportunity?"

"How is it possible?" asked the girl.

"Of course, dearest, you know I would not advise such a step if it were possible to do otherwise, but it seems that if we do not marry without your parents' consent we shall not marry at all. Leaving me altogether out of the question, even supposing you had never met me, it is not possible that marriage with that—that"——

"Call him Ortega," sadly laughed Teresa.

"Very well. The name is synonymous with many unmanly traits in my mind. It is not possible that marriage with Ortega can bring happiness. Your mother should be able to see that he possesses no qualities to inspire an educated and accomplished woman's love. Wealth is his only recommendation. But you asked how is our marriage possible. That is a serious question. If we were in the states, it would be possible in several ways. Any clergyman not of your church would perform the ceremony if we could satisfy him we were of age, or, a clergyman lacking, a justice could always be found. But here all the clergy are of the Latin church, and not one of them, knowing you to be a Valencia, could be induced at any price to unite us without the consent of your parents. Nor is my hope of securing the services of an alcalde strong."

"And I go tomorrow, Philip."

"Yes, dear one, there seems to be no present way to oppose the fates. Even were you to consent it would be impossible for me to leave my duty and elope, after the good old way of desperate lovers, for there is no convenient Gretna Green in the territory. Do you think Albuquerque would afford better opportunities?"

"Can you go there?" asked Teresa eagerly.

"The chief quartermaster asked me today if I would like to go to Albuquerque to temporarily relieve a lieutenant who must come to Santa Fe for a short time—exchange duties, you know. The detail can be secured if I desire it."

"Then go," said Teresa. "If you are there, something may happen to prevent this union mamma is so set upon, and which will be so unfortunate for me. Of course, Philip, I consent to unusual means only in case all others fail. I loathe the thought of deceiving dear mamma, but to be Ignacio's wife will be an unbearable misfortune."

"And your father?"

"I do not understand papa. He never says a word in favor of Ignacio, and he frequently speaks in praise of you—more often than mamma thinks prudent. I believe he will welcome you cordially if you succeed. You are a hero in his eyes. But papa will do nothing harsh. I would enter a convent before I would become Ignacio's wife."

There came a knock at the door, and Teresa went to open it.

"They are inquiring for you, Dona Teresa. You must go," said Ramon from the hallway.

"Goodby, then, Philip, until we meet in Albuquerque."

"Goodby, darling. 'Where there is a will there is a way,' and where there are two wills there must be a prompt way. Let us hope it will be soon."

A lingering embrace, a half dozen kisses, and she was gone. Raymer waited until he learned from Ramon that Dona Teresa had reached the parlors, and that no suspicion had been aroused by her absence. Then he passed quickly into the street.

It was 10 o'clock. The chief quartermaster would be at his room playing whist with the paymaster, the surgeon and the surveyor general. Raymer went around and told him he would accept the detail to Albuquerque. Being assured that the order would be issued in the morning, and that he could leave for that town in a few days, he returned to the post. Next morning at guard mounting he contrived to meet Ramon and sent a note to Teresa informing her that he would be in Albuquerque within six days.

The end of the week found Raymer settled in the office of the depot quartermaster at Albuquerque, with a prospect of remaining a month at least. He took an early opportunity to call upon Senor Valencia, by whom he was cordially welcomed and promptly invited to dinner. No ladies were at the table.

A week passed, during which time Raymer saw nothing of Dona Teresa or her mother. Inquiry for Ramon Vaca, whom he hoped to make available as messenger, elicited the information that the day after the lieutenant called upon Senor Valencia the boy had been sent to a distant rancho of the family's. Evidently la senora intended he should have no friends in town to assist him in communicating with her daughter.

Philip spent hours in contriving methods for obtaining an interview with Teresa, only to abandon them as impracticable. On the Sunday after his arrival he lingered near the church and saw the family go to and from morning service, but no sign of recognition came to him. Monday evening he strolled into a hotel and stood looking over a game of cards in which Senor Valencia appeared to be interested. As Raymer watched the varying fortunes of the play a sudden plan occurred to him. He approached the Mexican gentleman and said:

"Senor Valencia, can I make use of your library this evening to look up a reference?"

"Certainly, Mr. Raymer. Here is the key. Let yourself in and stay as long as you please."

The lieutenant started at once for the Valencia residence that stood on the eastern outskirts of the town. It was built in the usual style of Mexican dwellings—a one story adobe house, with an interior court, open to the sky and surrounded by a continuous veranda. The outside was plain and gloomy, with few windows, and with one large entrance, through which a coach could be driven into the court. This court was planted with trees, vines and flowers about a central pool, and the doors and windows opening upon it disclosed beautiful interiors.

The library, however, formed no part of the original building. It was a separate edifice, built against its southern wall at the left of the entrance and somewhat retired from the line of the house front, no door connecting it with the main building. A veranda and a well grassed lawn, inclosed by paling, stretched along its front.

Raymer opened the gate, crossed the lawn and stopped an instant to survey the dark walls before him, then stepped upon the veranda, unlocked the door and entered. He was not unacquainted with the room, having been there with Senor Valencia several times during his previous visits to Albuquerque. He therefore encountered no difficulty in obtaining and lighting a lamp. The room was about 25 feet square and well lined with bookshelves. Several choice paintings adorned the walls. A bust of Apollo, a small statue of Psyche, a couple of bronzes, a few specimens of Pueblo pottery were gracefully disposed here and there. A stepladder, lounges, chairs, tables and a desk, resting upon a fine carpet, made a handsomely furnished library.

On the side next the residence, about four feet above the floor, Raymer noticed a square aperture, now closed by a panel. Above the casing was a rod, upon which hung, by heavy gilt rings, two blue silk curtains. A large skylight in the flat roof lighted the apartment. The ample shelves were loaded with books in many languages, chiefly Spanish and English. Some of them were rare and old, quaint and rich in binding.

Raymer selected a volume and sat down at a table, pretending to read. His thoughts, however, were not confined to the page. They were dwelling upon the all absorbing subject that had occupied them since Christmas at Los Valles Grandes. He was again planning means for accomplishing the purpose which had brought him to this town. During the past few days he had cultivated the acquaintance of the half dozen alcaldes in the place, with the hope that one among them might be induced to perform the marriage service for himself and Teresa.

While reviewing his experience with the alcaldes Raymer heard the voices of women on the other side of the panel. He could not distinguish their words, but he recognized the tones of Mrs. Valencia and her daughter. The latter seemed to be tearfully pleading and the other earnestly persuading. Silence followed, to be succeeded by a rush of preliminary notes over the keys of a fine piano, which settled into a nocturne of Chopin, which in turn ran into a plaintive and sobbing Spanish melody. The music ceased, and all was still.

The lieutenant bowed his head upon the book before him and dropped into a gloomy reverie over the almost hopeless outlook. He was aroused and brought back to the present by a click at the gate. A step came up the walk, the door opened, and Senor Valencia entered. He greeted the young officer cordially, and the two were soon engaged in earnest conversation, which lasted until a late hour.

The following night about the same routine was repeated. On the two succeeding nights the merchant came much later, but on Saturday night he proposed accompanying the lieutenant. They walked slowly across the plaza and up the street leading to the Valencia home, engrossed in a discussion of an archaeological dispute as to the route pursued by Cabeza de Vaca in his journey across the plains from the gulf coast in 1535-6 to Compostella on the Pacific.

Senor Valencia had recently received a treatise from an eastern scholar who made a claim for a more southern route than the one usually accepted.

As the gentlemen neared the house Raymer noticed a ray of light piercing the darkness from the keyhole of the library door and was presently surprised to see his companion open the door without first using his key, precisely as though he expected to find it unfastened. Throwing the door open, he stepped aside to allow his guest to precede him. The lieutenant crossed the threshold and was astonished to find Teresa sitting at a table with a book before her. She raised her eyes, and seeing who had come in rose and came forward with extended hand. The whole occurrence was so out of the recognized order of New Mexican usage, so much like what might occur at his own home, that the lieutenant had to exercise some personal restraint in order to exhibit no surprise.

"I have brought Mr Raymer, my dear, to show him the book you are examining," said Senor Valencia.

"I have just been comparing it with our other authorities," observed Teresa. "I am not ready to believe that Vaca passed into Mexico through northern Texas. There is no evidence that a traveled route ever led in that direction, while the generally accepted northern one had existed for centuries and is still used, a natural highway."

"Yes, and there are many other slight but excellent evidences that the argument is faulty. Vaca mentions eating a flour made of pine nuts. I will find his journal, Mr. Raymer. Take a seat by the table."

Raymer seated himself beside Teresa, and her father went to a farther corner for the journal.

"Tell me, Teresa," he said in a whisper, "what does this mean?"

"I do not know, Philip. Mamma went to the rancho yesterday to be gone until tomorrow, and papa asked me to meet him here this evening to examine this book."

Senor Valencia returned with a parchment covered volume and opened to a page from which he read:

"'There are in that country small pine trees, and the seeds of them are like small eggs. While green they are beaten and made into balls, and thus eaten. If dry, they are pounded and consumed in the form of flour.' As the pinon does not grow in Texas, I feel convinced that Vaca passed through New Mexico."

This subject, requiring repeated references to the library shelves, formed the chief topic of conversation throughout the evening and was the means of showing Philip the strong bond of sympathy existing between father and daughter and something of the literary accomplishments of the beautiful girl. After a pleasant evening he left for his quarters, convinced that the Mexican father did not entertain the same objections to his suit as did the Mexican mother.

The following evening Raymer again went to the library, this time alone. Senora Valencia had returned, and her voice and Teresa's could be heard through the panel in the adjoining room. After a time the conversation ceased, and the piano struck up a soft prelude that soon dropped into an accompaniment to a crooning voice. At the close of the song he heard a grating at the aperture in the wall, and looking in that direction saw two dainty hands separate the curtains, disclosing the face of Teresa between.

"Hush!" said she. "I have but a few moments. Papa, mamma, Aunt Brigida and Father Gonzales are playing malilla in the sala. I knew you came here evenings from the first, for papa told me."

"Your father told you? Do you know, dear, I'm inclined since last night to believe he is hoping I'll carry you off? He knows now that I am in the library, and that you are in your music room, with only a movable panel between."

"I cannot understand it, Philip. He did not tell me not to tell mamma of our meeting last night, but I know he could not have expected me to, and he has said nothing himself."

"It is certainly odd," said Raymer. "He has drawn off the domestic and ecclesiastic cats tonight and left the mouse to her own devices."

"Have you any plans, Philip?"

"Plans! Little else but plans. The difficulty is to carry them out. Can you leave the house Tuesday evening?"

"Yes; I can come into the library through this window."

"Then at 9 o'clock Tuesday evening we will meet here and go to the house of Mateo Vicentio, an alcalde. He has promised to perform the marriage service for us. I could not make an appointment for Monday. He is to be away."

"Does he know who is to be the—the"——

"Bride, dearest? No; I have not told him. Dress plainly and wear a veil. Perhaps it will not be necessary to give your name until the rite is completed."

"Sh h-h! Somebody is calling," and the panel slid back.

Philip Raymer closed the curtains, resumed his seat and listened. Hearing no further sounds, he passed out, locked the door and repaired to his quarters.

Sunday the lieutenant saw the Alcalde Vicentio and secured a positive promise that he would perform the marriage ceremony between him and a Mexicana for a liberal fee and ask no questions. He said it would be necessary to know the girl's name in order to register and give a certificate, but that it need not be given until the end of the ceremony. Raymer assured him that the name would be given in full at the proper time. Satisfied that the alcalde would not fail him, he returned to the plaza, spending the evening with friends at the fonda.

Monday evening Philip reported what he had done to Teresa. It was arranged that they should meet in the library at half past 8 the following evening, go to the alcalde's, and after the marriage return home. Afterward, when pressed to set a day for the union with Ignacio, she was to declare herself the wife of Philip and show the certificate as evidence.

Tuesday came at last, and the young officer managed to worry through the day's duties until evening. After supper he walked along the barren, cactus bordered highway beyond the town, endeavoring to shorten the hours until the time appointed. Turning to retrace his steps, he had walked but a short distance when he heard the rapid galloping of a horse behind him, and presently the silver bespangled Ortega dashed past, evidently on his way to the Valencia mansion. "Bueno noche!" shouted the Mexican and disappeared around a turn.

Ten minutes before the time appointed Raymer entered the library. The moment which was to give him the treasure he had coveted for the past two years he felt was near at hand. The manner of securing it was not what he would have preferred, but there had been no other way. Teresa had said in their last interview that her happiness and his being at stake and being of lawful age, she would not hesitate to take the step he urged; that it was herself and not her dear mother who was chiefly interested in the bestowal of her hand.

Half past 8 arrived and went by, and the silken curtains had not opened. Raymer began to fear the arrival of Ortega had confused his plans, and that Teresa would find it impossible to keep her appointment. He held his watch in his hand and saw the time creep slowly along to three-quarters past 8. He began walking nervously back and forward, gradually yielding to a feeling of despondency.

Within the house, in the sala, Teresa and Ortega were standing in a curtained recess before a window which looked into the placita. The young man was urging with all the eloquence of love and passion an early day for their union. Teresa responded by saying that she could not give him a promise that evening or name the day. Senora Valencia, Aunt Brigida and Senor Valencia looked on from other parts of the room, the two first impatiently and the last indifferently.

Teresa glanced at a clock on the mantel and picked a flower to pieces as she answered the pleading lover's arguments chiefly in monosyllables. At last she said decisively:

"No, Ignacio, I cannot answer you otherwise tonight. Come tomorrow evening, and I will reply. Give me one more day to consider your request. I will give you a definite answer tomorrow."

"Yes, carida, I will wait if you desire it."

Teresa thanked him and walked across the room to her father, who sat by the grate looking into the fire. Stooping beside him and placing an arm about his shoulders, she whispered, "Papa, dear."

"Yes, darling."

"I have met Philip Raymer in the library at other times besides the evening when you were present."

"I suspected it, dona mia."

"Oh, you dear papa," leaning forward to look into his eyes and kissing him rapturously. "And I am going to meet him there now."

"Yes, dear."

"You will not allow any one to think I am not in my room?"

"You shall not be disturbed, but do not stay too long. I will tell Ignacio to call on Father Gonzales as he rides through town and send him up for a game of malilla."

Teresa was half inclined to tell her father all, but refrained, and kissing him again she left the room.

In the library a half desperate young officer was crushing his hat upon his head, with a gesture of despair, when the panel moved aside and Teresa, wrapped in a black reboso, appeared between the curtains. Raymer lifted her to the floor and held her in his arms while she explained the cause of her delay. But she said nothing of her father's knowledge of her visits to the library.

"Keep up your courage, darling," said Philip as he turned to lock the door after they had passed out. "Everything will turn out as we desire."

"It must, Philip, or I can never forgive myself for so deceiving mamma, but the alternative awaiting our failure to marry emboldens me to take this step. Are you sure you esteem me as much for doing this?"

"If it were possible, I esteem you the more, dearest, for I know what it is costing you."

"I am sure papa will forgive us. He has recently developed an extraordinary taste for mamma's favorite game, malilla, and is playing tonight with the others, as if purposely affording us this opportunity."

"Perhaps he is. Let us hope to be soon forgiven by both your father and mother."

The young couple hurried through the unlighted streets which bordered the plaza, for they feared to cross it lest they should be recognized by some of the numerous passers. They had nearly skirted the square when a huge dog sprang from a narrow alley and seized the skirt of Dona Teresa's dress. A vigorous cut and thrust from a foil like iron cane in the hands of the lieutenant sent the beast howling with pain to his kennel.

"Has he bitten you, dearest?" asked Philip as he sustained the trembling girl with his left arm.

"No. Only frightened me and torn my gown," was the reply.

"What a contrast between the nature of that useless monster and the gentle and intelligent Victoriana."

"They are excellent representatives of extreme types in canine life certainly."

"I wonder why I have not mentioned Vic before," continued Teresa. "I did not mention her when I met you in Santa Fe, nor since you came here until now."

"It is singular certainly, for you as well as I have good reason to remember her with gratitude. We would not be here but for the service she rendered us."

"I do not forget it. I often think of her and that Roca Grande experience. I sometimes dream of it, living through various desperate and cruel struggles with the Indians, but always, when all hope has fled and death seems inevitable, dear little Vic appears with the soldiers and rescues me. Why did you not bring her to Albuquerque?"

"She was absent with a hunting party," replied Raymer. "I received a letter from Mr. Reed two days ago saying he would send her down by Judge Benedict, who is soon to hold court here."

The lovers had now turned the second corner of the plaza, and threading a series of crooked and narrow streets on the side opposite the Valencia mansion reached the house of the alcalde. The lieutenant knocked, steps were heard within, the door opened, and Mateo Vicentio, light in hand, stood before them.

"Enter, Senor Teniente," said the alcalde, and Philip and his companion passed into the house. As they entered the brighter light of the interior Mateo looked with perplexed brows at the closely veiled lady. Something in her bearing, the texture and fit of her plain garments, awakened a suspicion that she was no ordinary person. He moved about, trying to obtain a plainer view of her features, until Raymer grew impatient.

"Well, we are here, Senor Alcalde," said he. "Where are your witnesses?"

"In the next room," was the reply.

"Then call them and go on with the marriage."

"I must first see the face of the lady."

"But you assured me that it would not be necessary until after the ceremony."

"Si, senor, if the senorita be a common person, but something in her manner convinces me that I ought to see her. I do not wish to get into trouble with Los Ricos."

"Marry us as you promised, and I will double the fee offered you."

"Ah, senor, you double my fears that something is wrong."

"You shall have three times the amount if you will only proceed at once."

"Si, senor, I will proceed, but I must first see the face of the lady."

Before Raymer could interpose or say anything further Teresa dropped the reboso upon her shoulders and pulled the veil from her face.

"Dona Teresa Inez Valencia!" exclaimed the astonished alcalde. "Valgame Dios, what an escape! No, Senor Teniente, I can have nothing to do with this."

The lieutenant attempted no remonstrance, but taking Teresa's hand he hurried her into the street.

"Let us try another justice, darling. It will do no harm, if no good, and we must hasten"—looking backward—"for Vicentio has started on a run in the direction of your home."

"It will be of no use, Philip. The alcaldes are all alike," replied the girl in a hopeless tone. "But I will go."

They moved quickly away, hand in hand, and soon came to the house of a second alcalde. He had gone to bed, and no amount of knocking could elicit any other response than: "Go away! Go away! Come again in the morning."

Again the unhappy lovers hastened along the dark and narrow streets and rapped at the door of a justice of the peace in a remote part of the town. A woman's voice responded that he was out and would not be back before morning. And so the last hope had fled.

With arms wound about each other's waists, as if in protest against the com-

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