



# Luna Benamor

*Vicente Blasco Ibáñez*

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## **Luna Benamor** Vicente Blasco Ibáñez

LUIS AGUIRRE had been living in Gibraltar for about a month. He had arrived with the intention of sailing at once upon a vessel bound for Oceanica, where he was to assume his post as a consul to Australia. It was the first important voyage of his diplomatic career. Up to that time he had served in Madrid, in the offices of the Ministry, or in various consulates of southern France, elegant summery places where for half the year life was a continuous holiday. The son of a family that had been dedicated to diplomacy by tradition, he enjoyed the protection of influential persons. His parents were dead, but he was helped by his relatives and the prestige of a name that for a century had figured in the archives of the nation. Consul at the age of twenty-five, he was about to set sail with the illusions of a student who goes out into the world for the first time, feeling that all previous trips have been insignificant. Gibraltar, incongruous and exotic, a mixture of races and languages, was to him the first sign of the far-off world in quest of which he was journeying. He doubted, in his first surprise, if this rocky land jutting into the open sea and under a foreign flag, could be a part of his native peninsula. When he gazed out from the sides of the cliff across the vast blue bay with its rose-colored mountains dotted by the bright settlements of La Línea, San Roque and Algeciras,—the cheery whiteness of Andalusian towns,—he felt convinced that he was still in Spain. But great difference distinguished the human groups camped upon the edge of this horseshoe of earth that embraced the bay. From the headland of Tarifa to the gates of Gibraltar, a monotonous unity of race; the happy warbling of the Andalusian dialect; the broad-brimmed hat; the mantilla about the women's bosoms and the glistening hair adorned with flowers. On the huge mountain topped by the British flag and enclosing the oriental part of the bay, a seething cauldron of races, a confusion of tongues, a carnival of costume: Hindus, Mussulmen, English, Hebrews, Spanish smugglers, soldiers in red coats, sailors from every nation, living within the narrow limits of the fortifications, subjected to military discipline, beholding the gates of the cosmopolitan sheepfold open with the signal at sunrise and close at the booming of the sunset gun. And as the frame of this picture, vibrant with its mingling of color and movement, a range of peaks, the highlands of Africa, the Moroccan mountains, stretched across the distant horizon, on the opposite shore of the strait; here is the most crowded of the great marine boulevards, over whose blue highway travel incessantly the heavily laden ships of all nationalities and of all flags; black transatlantic steamers that plow the main in search of the seaports of the poetical Orient, or cut through the Suez Canal and are lost in the isle-dotted immensities of the Pacific. To Aguirre, Gibraltar was a fragment of the distant Orient coming forward to meet him; an Asiatic port wrenched from its continent and dragged through the waves to run aground on the coast of Europe, as a sample of life in remote countries. He was stopping at a hotel on Royal Street, a thoroughfare that winds about the mountain,—that vertebral column of the city to which lead, like thin threads, the smaller streets in ascending or descending slope. Every morning he was startled from his sleep by the noise of the sunrise gun,—a dry, harsh discharge from a modern piece, without the reverberating echo of the old cannon.

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