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## Coronado

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MAUDE DAVIS CROSNO

## CORONADO

(Mexico, Spring, 1542)

I want a light, Alonzo! Bring a candle,  
 Night's other star, and banish here these shadows;  
 For yonder yellow sun drops through the hills.  
 The west flames gold on lakes and cloudy trees  
 Then dies. The candle? Place it on the ledge  
 There; possibly I should make notes; my mind  
 Clouds. Oh, Alonzo Alvarez, that I  
 Were once again the man I was; I greet  
 Mendoza on the morrow, firm Mendoza,  
 Our Viceroy and my friend; this expedition—  
 His . . . mine . . . the King's—failed, stands at zero now.  
 God's will be done; this was my destiny.  
 A friend in Salamanca prophesied  
 I would be great in distant lands and die  
 There from a fall; that second winter at  
 Tiguex, to cheer our cheerless camp, I raced;  
 My sorrel steed outdistanced that of Don  
 Rodrigo Maldonado, but my saddle  
 Girth, rotted, broke. I fell. His horse's hoof  
 Struck, muddled this poor head; thus I return  
 Not dead, nor yet alive; Mendoza saw  
 Two stretched years back, three hundred mounted men  
 In silvery armor ride from Compostela  
 Where followed peoples dressed in motley brightness;  
 Mendoza rode with us two days and left.  
 At Culiacán, we played the Easter games,  
 Then on; Friar Marcos guided us;  
 He knew the trail, but not its cost, nor I!  
 Culiacán, the army's formal end, brought June,  
 The rainy season, and my dwindling forces.  
 We, I no horseman now, but litter-borne,  
 Recrossed those swollen streams, I've lost their count.

Their torrent took our time, a man, and that  
Great horse that moved in all magnificence;  
I see him yet—the golden chestnut Friar  
Jiménez gave me—all aquiver, swimming,  
Head high, caught, turned, and screaming, seaward swept.  
I, helpless, gently lifted, crossed. And was  
It there, Alonzo, going, we spent four days  
While each man, mounted, cradled gently, one  
By one, each sheep and, splashing, rode the river?  
How shall I say again there was no gold  
In that vast land where blues are gauge to distance  
And plums and purples wash the evening air?  
No gold, unless I count along the river  
The golden leaf of autumn's cottonwoods  
And brush the bloom of goldenrod up from  
The mesas? These no ballasts make for kings.  
At Tusayán, Don Pedro de Tovar  
Found seven mesa-mounted towns; we at  
Háwikuh, Cíbola, found corn; Hernando  
De Alvarado, first to glimpse the cow  
And journey to Cicúye and Tiguex,  
Saw none; the village, Alcanfor, became  
Our winter quarters; tragedies bemeaned  
Us there, and cold cut through our borrowed dress.  
But hope of gold, revived by tales the Turk  
Told, kept us sane; a golden-bracelet plot  
Involving Ysopete and Bigotes  
Brought grief, as did the Arenal defiance  
And fights; the burning at the stake against  
My patient plans dissolved all breath of peace.  
That spring, you know, we left to test the worth—  
The Turk's tales held and moved—what weary leagues!—  
Across those treeless, blowing plains of grass  
As markless as the running seas; tall grass  
That hid a man on horse would hold no print  
Of path or passage; men lost were reclaimed  
By trumpets, bells, and drums, or yellow fires.  
And there the mangy, woolly cows in drifting  
Herds carried human parasites; alarmed,  
These herds, like storms, rush heedlessly, and once,

Like boulders rolled in flood, they, falling, filled  
A sudden wash until they levelled with  
The bank and, running on, all bellowing,  
They crossed their noisy, dying bridge; three horses  
Among them fell, the riders somehow safe!  
King Charles and Viceroy Mendoza have  
A letter each from me sent from Tiguex  
Reporting on Quivira, all I saw,  
And that the country—distant, primitive—  
Had little recommending it to us:  
No gold, great distance from the oceans, cold  
Cold winters; I so plainly stated these  
That what I say tomorrow seems review.  
Yet, yet again there was no gold; it frets  
Me now, and had Cortéz joined us as was  
His wish, what more lay there for gain? I have  
The Viceroy (kind Mendoza), Church and King  
And wife, if comfort can be now; this head  
Is fuzzy like those woolly cows, but I  
Have much; my mind contains vast lands  
Plus places others brought to me; that one  
Proud Garcia López de Cárdenas  
Caught me in wonder with; he and his men  
Approached this canyon, earth cleft so deep  
A mighty river was a ribbon far  
Below, and men who dared to, walked its walls  
One-third down, finding rocks that seemed like men  
In height, but topping all the reaching towers  
Of glorious Seville. Alonzo, plots  
There may have been, but I return in hope  
And faith; so trusting friends and God, I wish  
My rest. Now take the candle; put it out.

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