

shameless creature is costing us too dear. She must leave the house."

Felipe's heart gave a bound; Ramona had not been mistaken, then. A bitter shame seized him at his mother's cruelty. But her tears made him tender; and it was in a gentle, even pleading voice that he replied: "I do not see, mother, why you call Ramona shameless. There is nothing wrong in her loving Alessandro."

"I found her in his arms!" exclaimed the Senora.

"I know," said Felipe; "Alessandro told me that he had just at that instant told her he loved her, and she had said she loved him, and would marry him, just as you came up."

"Humph!" retorted the Senora; "do you think that Indian would have dared to speak a word of love to the Senorita Ramona Ortega if she had not conducted herself shamelessly? I wonder that he concerned himself to speak about marriage to her at all."

"Oh, mother! mother!" was all that Felipe could say to this. He was aghast. He saw now, in a flash, the whole picture as it lay in his mother's mind, and his heart sank within him. "Mother!" he repeated, in a tone which spoke volumes.

"Ay," she continued, "that is what I say. I see no reason why he hesitated to take her, as he would take any Indian squaw, with small ceremony of marrying."

"Alessandro would not take any woman that way any quicker than I would, mother," said Felipe courageously; "you do him injustice." He longed to add, "And Ramona too," but he feared to make bad matters worse by pleading for her at present.

"No, I do not," said the Senora; "I do Alessandro full justice. I think very few men would have behaved as well as he has under the same temptation. I do not hold him in the least responsible for all that has happened. It is all Ramona's fault."

Felipe's patience gave way. He had not known, till now, how very closely this pure and gentle girl, whom he had loved as a sister in his boyhood, and had come near loving as a lover in his manhood, had twined herself around his heart. He could not remain silent another moment and hear her thus wickedly accused.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, in a tone which made the Senora look up at him in sudden astonishment. "Mother, I cannot help it if I make you very angry; I must speak; I can't bear to hear you say such things of Ramona. I have seen for a long time that Alessandro loved the very ground under her feet; and Ramona would not have been a woman if she had not seen it too! She has seen it, and has felt it, and has come to love him with all her soul, just as I hope some woman will love me one of these days. If I am ever loved as well as she loves Alessandro I shall be lucky. I think they ought to be married; and I think we ought to take Alessandro on to the estate, so that they can live here. I don't see anything disgraceful in it, nor anything wrong, nor anything but what was perfectly natural. You know, mother, it isn't as if Ramona really belonged to our family; you know she is half Indian." A scornful ejaculation from his mother interrupted him here; but Felipe hurried on, partly that he dreaded to stop, because if he did, his mother would speak; and already he felt a terror of what her next words might be. "I have often thought about Ramona's future, mother. You know a great many men would not want to marry her just because she is half Indian. You yourself would never have given your consent to my marrying her if I had wanted to." Again an exclamation from the Senora, this time more of horror than of scorn. But Felipe pressed on. "No, of course you would not, I always knew that; except for that, I might have loved her myself, for a sweeter girl never drew breath in this God's

earth." Felipe was reckless now; having entered on this war, he would wage it with every weapon that lay within his reach; if one did not tell, another might. "You have never loved her. I don't know that you have ever even liked her; I don't think you have. I know, as a little boy, I always used to see how much kinder you were to me than to her, and I never could understand it. And you are unjust to her now. I've been watching her all summer; I've seen her and Alessandro together continually. You know yourself, mother, he has been with us on the veranda, day after day, just as if he were one of the family. I've watched them by the hour, when I lay there so sick; I thought you must have seen it too. I don't believe Alessandro has ever looked or said or done a thing I wouldn't have done in his place; and I don't believe Ramona has ever looked, said, or done a thing I would not be willing to have my own sister do!" Here Felipe paused. He had made his charge; like a young impetuous general, massing all his forces at the onset; he had no reserves. It is not the way to take Gibaltars.

When he paused, literally breathless, he had spoken so fast—and even yet Felipe was not quite strong, so sadly had the fever undermined his constitution—the Senora looked at him interrogatively, and said in a now composed tone: "You do not believe that Ramona has done anything that you would not be willing to have your own sister do? Would you be willing that your own sister should marry Alessandro?"

Clever Senora Moreno! During the few moments that Felipe had been speaking she had perceived certain things which it would be impolitic to try to do. Nothing could possibly compensate her for antagonising Felipe. Nothing could so deeply wound her as to have him in a resentful mood towards her, or so weaken her real control of him as to have him feel that she arbitrarily overruled his preference or his purpose. In presence of her imperious will, even her wrath capitulated and surrendered. There would be no hot words between her and her son. He should believe that he determined the policy of the Moreno house, even in this desperate crisis.

Felipe did not answer. A better thrust was never seen on any field than the Senora's question. She repeated it, still more deliberately, in her wonted gentle voice. The Senora was herself again, as she had not been for a moment since she came upon Alessandro and Ramona at the brook. How just and reasonable the question sounded, as she repeated it slowly, with an expression in her eyes of poising and weighing matters. "Would you be willing that your own sister should marry Alessandro?"

Felipe was embarrassed. He saw whither he was being led. He could give but one answer to this question. "No, mother," he said, I should not; but—" (TO BE CONTINUED.)

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