

CHAPTER XV.

A DISCLOSURE AND A SURPRISE.

ANTONIA found but little in the cave to interest her. There was not a book, to her knowledge, about the place, but there were flowers and rare plants growing in profusion upon the side of the mountains, and often, accompanied by the little Bianca, they made voyages of discovery, and these were often protracted for several hours, returning sometimes in the cool of the evening, laden with fine specimens of the mountain flora. It is needless to say that she looked forward to the return of a certain Don with more of pleasure than she had ever experienced before. One delightful evening, during one of her rambles, she had taken a seat upon a rock, which overlooked a deep ravine, where she was soon enjoying that most gorgeous of all earthly sights—a Spanish sunset. What a vast panorama was exhibited around! The western sky was like an ocean of golden flame; high overhead the deep azure seemed like the worthy home of cherubim, and too æthereal, too pure to belong to earth—deepening into a soft purple to the northward, where a few cloud-like summits from the Province of New Castile reared their craggy heads above the horizon. Beneath the faintly-outlined mountain range to the westward the deep burnt umber shades were growing more dense, reaching past many a glittering view of the bending course of the river, until it was lost in the middle distance in a rich olive green, glazed to the very base of the mountains in the foreground by the crimson sunbeams which were thrown obliquely upon it, through a valley in the distant mountain range. Then above their heads the high rocky towers gradually put off their gilding, and slowly were stealing their grayish shadows, whilst the southern vine rustled lazily in the evening breeze. With a sigh Antonia arose from contemplating the captivating prospect before her, and calling the gypsy child bent her steps caveward.

She had not proceeded far when, to her surprise, she saw a haggardly-appearing man standing before her, who completely blockaded the pathway. She was very much astonished at this strange appearance, as she had seen no one save her cave associates for several weeks. She was likewise much frightened, and probably she would have fled had a good opportunity been presented, but the man was watching her closely and was actually advancing toward her. Antonia, affecting to not notice him, began to arrange some flowers and mosses, at the same time trying, if possible, to escape from the path into the brambles, which here grew plenteously on either hand, where she fancied she might be able to conceal herself, if not to successfully elude pursuit, in case he should follow. To a certain extent the stratagem was successful. No sooner was the man concealed from her view by the first clump of bushes, than she seized the gypsy girl's hand, and breathing a quick prayer for protection she glided deeply into the wood. Suddenly she heard a cracking of bushes around her, and looking up,

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