

If she is my wife my people will call her Majel, the Wood-Dove."

CHAPTER XI.

When the Senora bade Felipe good-night she did not go to bed. After closing her door she sat down to think what should be done about Ramona. It had been a hard task she had set herself, talking all the evening with Felipe without alluding to the topic uppermost in her mind. But Felipe was still nervous and irritable. She would not spoil his night's rest, she thought, by talking of disagreeable things. Moreover, she was not clear in her own mind what she wished to have done about Alessandro. If Ramona were to be sent away to the nuns, which was the only thing the Senora could think of as yet, there would be no reason for discharging Alessandro. And with him the Senora was by no means ready to part, though in her first anger she had been ready to dismiss him on the spot. As she pursued her reflections the whole situation cleared itself in her mind; so easily do affairs fall into line in the plottings and plannings of an arbitrary person, who makes in his formula no allowance for a human element which he cannot control.

Ramona should be sent in disgrace to the Sisters' School, to be a servant there for the rest of her life. The Senora would wash her hands of her for ever. Even Father Salvierderra himself could not expect her any longer to keep such a shameless creature under her roof. Her sister's written instructions had provided for the possibility of just such a contingency. Going to a secret closet in the wall, behind a life-size statue of Saint Catharine, the Senora took out an iron box, battered and rusty with age, and set it on the bed. The key turned with difficulty in the lock. It was many years since the Senora had opened this box. No one but herself knew of its existence. There had been many times in the history of the Moreno house when the price of the contents of that box would have averted loss and misfortune; but the Senora no more thought of touching the treasure than if it had been guarded by angels with fiery swords. There they lay, brilliant and shining even in the dim light of the one candle—rubies, emeralds, pearls, and yellow diamonds. The Senora's lip curled as she looked at them. "Fine dowry, truly, for a creature like this!" she said. "Well I knew in the beginning no good would come of it; base begotten, base born, she has but carried out the instincts of her nature. I suppose I may be grateful that my own son was too pure to be her prey!" "To be given to my adopted daughter, Ramona Ortega, on her wedding day,"—so the instructions ran—"if she weds worthily and with your approval. Should such a misfortune occur, which I do not anticipate, as that she should prove unworthy, then these jewels, and all I have left to her of value, shall be the property of the Church."

"No mention as to what I am to do with the girl herself if she proves unworthy," thought the Senora, bitterly; "but the Church is the place for her; no other keeping will save her from the lowest depths of disgrace. I recollect my sister said that Angus had at first intended to give the infant to the Church. Would to God he had done so, or left it with its Indian mother!" and the Senora rose and paced the floor. The paper of her dead sister's handwriting fell at her feet. As she walked, her long skirt swept it rustling to and fro. She stooped, picked it up, read it again, with increasing bitterness. No softness at the memory of her sister's love for the little child; no relenting. "Unworthy!" Yes, that was a mild word to apply to Ramona, now. It was all settled; and when the girl was once out of the house the Senora would breathe easier. She and Felipe would lead their lives together,

and Felipe would wed some day. Was there a woman fair enough, good enough, for Felipe to wed? But he must wed; and the place would be gay with children's voices, and Ramona would be forgotten.

The Senora did not know how late it was. "I will tell her to night," she said. "I will lose no time; and now she shall hear who her mother was!"

It was a strange freak of just impulse in the Senora's angry soul, which made her suddenly remember that Ramona had had no supper, and led her to go to the kitchen, get a jug of milk and some bread, and take them to the room. Turning the key cautiously, that Felipe might not hear, she opened the door and glided in. No voice greeted her; she held her candle high up; no Ramona in sight; the bed was empty. She glanced at the window. It was open. A terror seized the Senora; fresh anger also. "She has run off with Alessandro," she thought. "What horrible disgrace!" Standing motionless, she heard a faint, regular breathing from the other side of the bed. Hastily crossing the room, she saw a sight which had melted a heart that was only ice; but the Senora's was stone towards Ramona. There lay Ramona on the floor, her head on a pillow at the feet of the big Madonna which stood in the corner. Her left hand was under her cheek, her right arm flung tight around the base of the statue. She was sound asleep. Her face was wet with tears. Her whole attitude was full of significance. Even helpless in sleep, she was one who had taken refuge in sanctuary. This thought had been distinct in the girl's mind when she found herself, spite of all her woe and terror, growing sleepy. "She won't dare to hurt me at the Virgin's feet," she had said; "and the window is open. Felipe would hear if I called; and Alessandro will watch." And with a prayer on her lips she fell asleep.

It was Felipe's nearness more than the Madonna's which saved her from being roused to hear her doom. The Senora stood for some moments looking at her, and at the open window. With a hot rush of disgraceful suspicions, she noted what she had never before thought of, that Alessandro, through all his watching with Felipe, had had close access to Ramona's window. "Shameful creature!" she repeated to herself. "And she can sleep! It is well she prayed, if the Virgin will hear such?" and she turned away, first setting down the jug of milk and the bread on the table. Then, with a sudden and still more curious mingling of justness in her wrath, she returned, and lifting the coverlet from the bed, spread it over Ramona, covering her carefully from head to foot. Then she went out and again locked the door. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

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