

still and gazed at the Senora with her mouth wide open.

"What are you staring at, girl?" asked the Senora, so sharply that Margarita jumped.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, Senora! And the Senorita will she come to supper? Shall I call her?" she said.

The Senora eyed her. Had she seen? Could she have seen? The Senora Moreno was herself again. So long as Ramona was under her roof, no matter what she herself might do or say to the girl, no servant should treat her with disrespect or know that aught was wrong.

"The Senorita is not well, she said, coldly. "She is in her room. I myself will take her some supper later if she wishes it. Do not disturb her." And the Senora returned to Felipe.

Margarita chuckled inwardly, and proceeded to clear the table she had spread with such malicious punctuality two short hours before. In those two short hours how much had happened!

"Small appetite for supper will our Senora have, I reckon," said the bitter Margarita, "and the Senor Alessandro also! I'm curious to see how he will carry himself."

But her curiosity was not gratified. Alessandro came not to the kitchen. The last of the herdsmen had eaten and gone; it was past nine o'clock, and no Alessandro. Slyly Margarita ran out and searched in some of the places where she knew he was in the habit of going; but Alessandro was not to be found. Once she brushed so near his hiding-place that he thought he was discovered, and was on the point of speaking, but luckily held his peace, and she passed on. Alessandro was hid behind the geranium clump at the chapel door; sitting on the ground, with his knees drawn up to his chin, watching Ramona's window. He intended to stay there all night. He felt that he might be needed; if Ramona wanted him she would either open her window and call, or would come out and go down through the garden-walk to the willows. In either case he would see her from the hiding-place he had chosen. He was racked by his emotions; mad with joy one minute, sick at heart with misgiving the next. Ramona loved him. She had told him so. She had said she would go away with him and be his wife. The words had just passed her lips at that dreadful moment when the Senora appeared in their presence. As he lived the scene over again he re-experienced the joy and the terror equally.

What was not that terrible Senora capable of doing? Why did she look at him and at Ramona with such loathing scorn? Since she knew that the Senorita was half Indian, why should she think it so dreadful a thing for her to marry an Indian man? It did not once enter into Alessandro's mind that the Senora could have had any other thought, seeing them as she did, in each other's arms. And again, what had he to give to Ramona? Could she live in a house such as he must live in—live as the Temecula woman lived? No! for her sake he must leave his people; must go to some town, must do—he knew not what—something to earn more money. Anguish seized him as he pictured to himself Ramona suffering deprivations. The more he thought of the future in this light, the more his joy faded, and his fear grew. He had never had sufficient hope that she could be his, to look forward thus to the practical details of life; he had only gone on loving, and in a vague way dreaming and hoping; and now—now, in a moment, all had been changed; in a moment he had spoken and she had spoken, and such words once spoken there was no going back; and he had put his arms around her, and felt her head on his shoulder, and kissed her! Yes, he, Alessandro, had kissed the Senorita Ramona, and she had been glad of it, and had kissed him on the lips, as no maiden kisses a

man unless she will wed with him—him, Alessandro! Oh, no wonder the man's brain whirled, as he sat there in the silent darkness, wondering, afraid, helpless; his love wrenched from him in the very instant of their first kiss—wrenched from him, and he himself ordered, by one who had the right to order him, to begone! What could an Indian do against a Moreno?

Would Felipe help him? Ay, there was Felipe! That Felipe was his friend Alessandro know with a knowledge as sure as the wild partridge's instinct for the shelter of her brood; but could Felipe move the Senora? Oh, that terrible Senora! What would become of them?

As in the instant of drowning, men are said to review in a second the whole course of their lives, so in this supreme moment of Alessandro's love there flashed through his mind vivid pictures of every word and act of Ramona's since he first knew her. He recollected the tone in which she had said, and the surprise with which he heard her say it, at the time of Felipe's fall, "You are Alessandro, are you not?" He heard again her soft-whispered prayers the first night Felipe slept on the veranda. He recalled her tender distress because the shears had had no dinner; the evident terribleness to her of a person going one whole day without food. "O God! will she always have food each day if she comes with me?" he said. And at the bare thought he was ready to flee away from her for ever. Then he recalled her look and her words only a few hours ago, when he first told her he loved her; and his heart took courage. She had said, "I know you love me, Alessandro, and I am glad of it, and had lifted her eyes to his, with all the love that a woman's eyes can carry; and when he threw his arms around her she had of her own accord come closer, and laid one hand on his shoulder, and turned her face to his. Ah! what else mattered! There was the whole world; if she loved him like this, nothing could make them wretched; his love would be enough for her—and for him hers was an empire.

It was indeed true, though neither the Senorita nor Margarita would have believed it, but this had been the first word of love ever spoken between Alessandro and Ramona, the first caress ever given, the first moment of unreserve. It had come about, as lovers' first words, first caresses, are so apt to do, unexpectedly, with no more premonition at the instant than there is of the instant of the opening of a flower. Alessandro had been speaking to Ramona of the conversation Felipe had with him in regard to remaining on the place, and asked her if she knew of the plan.

"Yes," she said; "I heard the Senora talking about it with Felipe some days ago."

"Was she against my staying?" asked Alessandro, quickly.

"I think not," said Ramona, "but I am not sure. It is not easy to be sure what the Senora wishes till afterward. It was Felipe that proposed it."

This somewhat enigmatical statement as to the difficulty of knowing the Senora's wishes was like Greek to Alessandro's mind.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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