

RAMONA.

A Story.

By HELEN JACKSON.

CHAPTER XVI.—(CONTINUED.)

At last he asked her. To his utterable surprise, Ramona cried: "Felipe! The saints be praised! I should never have told you. I did not think that you could wish to leave this estate. But my most beautiful dream of Ramona would be that she should grow up in Mexico."

And as she spoke, Felipe understood by a lightning intuition, and wondered that he had not foreknown it, that she would spare her daughter the burden she had gladly, heroically borne herself, in the bond of race.

The question was settled. With gladness of heart almost more than he could have believed possible, Felipe at once communicated with some rich American proprietors who had desired to buy the Moreno estate. Land in the valley had so greatly advanced in value, that the sum he received for it was larger than he had dared to hope; was ample for the realisation of all his plans for the new life in Mexico. From the hour that this was determined, and the time for their sailing fixed, a new expression came into Ramona's face. Her imagination was kindled. An untried future beckoned—a future which she would embrace and conquer for her daughter. Felipe saw the look, felt the change, and for the first time hoped. It would be a new world, a new life; why not a new love? She could not always be blind to his devotion; and when she saw it, could she refuse to reward it? He would be very patient, and wait long, he thought. Surely, since he had been patient so long without hope, he could be still more patient now that hope had dawned! But patience is not hope's province in breasts of lovers. From the day when Felipe first thought to himself, "She will yet be mine," it grew harder, and not easier, for him to refrain from pouring out his love in words. Her tender sisterliness, which had been such balm and comfort to him, grew at times intolerable; and again and again her gentle spirit was deeply disquieted with the fear that she had displeased him, so strangely did he conduct himself.

He had resolved that nothing should tempt him to disclose to her his passion and its dreams till they had reached their new home. But there came a moment that mastered him, and he spoke.

It was in Monterey. They were to sail on the morrow, and had been on board the ship to complete the last arrangements. They were rowed back to shore in a little boat. A full moon shone. Ramona sat bareheaded in the end of the boat, and the silver radiance from the water seemed to float up around her, and invest her as with a myriad halos. Felipe gazed at her till his senses swam; and when, on stepping from the boat, she put her hand in his, and said, as she had said hundreds of times before, "Dear Felipe, how good you are!" he clasped her hands wildly, and cried, "Ramona, my love! Oh, can you not love me!"

The moonlight was bright as day. They were alone on the shore. Ramona gazed at him for one second, in surprise. Only for a second: then she knew all. "Felipe! My brother!" she cried, and stretched out her hands as if in warning.

"No! I am not your brother!" he cried. "I will not be your brother! I would rather die!"

"Felipe!" cried Ramona again. This time her voice recalled him to himself. It was a voice of terror and of pain.

"Forgive me, my sweet one!" he exclaimed. "I will never say it again."

But I have loved you so long—so long!"

Ramona's head had fallen forward on her breast, her eyes fixed on the shining sands; the waves rose and fell, rose and fell, at her feet gently as sighs. A great revelation had come to Ramona. In this supreme moment of Felipe's abandonment of all disguises, she saw his whole past life in a new light. Remorso smote her. "Dear Felipe," she said, clasping her hands, "I have been very selfish. I did not know—"

"Of course you did not, love," said Felipe. "How could you? But I have never loved any one else. I have always loved you. Can you not learn to love me? I did not mean to tell you for a long time yet. But now I have spoken; I cannot hide it any more."

Ramona drew nearer to him, still with her hands clasped. "I have always loved you," she said. "I love no other living man; but, Felipe,"—her voice sank to a solemn whisper—"do you not know, Felipe, that part of me is dead,—dead? can never live again? You could not want me for your wife, Felipe, when part of me is dead!"

Felipe threw his arms around her. He was beside himself with joy. "You would not say that if you did not think you could be my wife," he cried. "Only give yourself to me, my love, I care not whether you call yourself dead or alive!"

Ramona stood quietly in his arms. Ah, well for Felipe that he did not know, never could know, the Ramona that Alessandro had known. This gentle, faithful, grateful Ramona, asking herself fervently now if she would do her brother a wrong, yielding up to him what seemed to her only the broken fragment of a life; weighing his words, not in the light of passion, but of calmest, most unselfish affection—ah, how unlike was she to that Ramona who flung herself on Alessandro's breast, crying, "Take me with you! I would rather die than have you leave me!"

Ramona had spoken truth. Part of her was dead. But Ramona saw now, with infallible intuition, that even as she had loved Alessandro, so Felipe loved her. Could she refuse to give Felipe happiness, when he had saved her, saved her child? What else now remained for them, these words have been spoken? "I will be your wife, dear Felipe," she said, speaking solemnly, slowly, "if you are sure it will make you happy, and if you think it is right."

"Right!" ejaculated Felipe, mad with the joy unlooked for so soon. "Nothing else would be right! My Ramona, I will love you so, you will forget you ever said that part of you was dead!"

A strange look which startled Felipe swept across Ramona's face; it might have been a moonbeam. It passed. Felipe never saw it again.

General Moreno's name was still held in warm remembrance in the city of Mexico, and Felipe found himself at once among friends. On the day after their arrival he and Ramona were married in the cathedral, old Marda and Juan Can, with his crutches, kneeling in proud joy behind them. The story of the romance of their lives, being widely rumored, greatly enhanced the interest with which they were welcomed. The beautiful young Senora Moreno was the theme of the city; and Felipe's bosom thrilled with pride to see the gentle dignity of demeanor by which she was distinguished in all assemblages. It was indeed a new world, a new life. Ramona might well doubt her own identity. But undying memories stood like sentinels in her breast. When the notes of doves, calling to each other, fell on her ear, her eyes sought the sky, and she heard a voice saying, "Majella!" This was the only secret her loyal, loving heart had kept from Felipe. A

loyal, loving heart indeed it was,—loyal, loving, serene. Few husbands so blest as the Sonor Felipe Morono.

Sons and daughters came to bear his name. The daughters were all beautiful; but the most beautiful of them all, and, it was said, the most beloved by both father and mother, was the oldest one; the one who bore the mother's name, and was only step-daughter to the Sonor—Ramona—Ramona, daughter of Alessandro the Indian. THE END.

Bear with each others' faults, for you know that was the sign which Our Lord gave whereby He should know His true disciples.



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