

sion of thoughts, vague yet intense. Put in words, they would have been found to be little more than ringing changes on this idea: "The Senorita Ramona has Indian blood in her veins. The Senorita Ramona is alone. The Senora loves her not. Indian blood! Indian blood!" These, or something like them, would have been the words; but Alessandro did not put them in words. He only worked away on the rough posts for Senor Felipe's bedstead, hammered, fitted, stretched the raw-hide and made it tight and firm, driving every nail, striking every blow, with a bounding sense of exultant strength, as if there were suddenly all around him a new heavens and a new earth.

Now, when he heard Ramona say suddenly in her girlish, eager tone. "It must be; I never thought it; I should like to try it," these vague confused thoughts of the day, and the day's bounding sense of exultant strength, combined in a quick vision before Alessandro's eyes—a vision of starry skies overhead, Ramona and himself together, looking up to them. But when he raised his head, all he said was, "There, Senorita! That is all firm now. If Senor Felipe will let me lay him on this bed he will sleep as he has not slept since he fell ill."

Ramona ran eagerly into Felipe's room. "The bed is all ready on the veranda," she exclaimed. "Shall Alessandro come in and carry you out?"

Felipe looked up startled. The Senora turned on Ramona that expression of gentle resigned displeasure which always hurt the girl's sensitive nature far worse than anger. "I had not spoken to Felipe yet of the change, Ramona," she said. "I supposed that Alessandro would have informed me when the bed was ready; I am sorry you came in so suddenly. Felipe is still very weak, you see."

"What is it? what is it!" exclaimed Felipe, impatiently.

As soon as it was explained to him, he was like a child in his haste to be moved.

"That's just what I needed!" he exclaimed. "This cursed bed racks every bone in my body, and I have longed for the sun more than ever a thirsty man longed for water. Bless you, Alessandro," he went on, seeing Alessandro in the doorway. "Come here, and take me up in those long arms of yours, and carry me quick. Already I feel myself better."

Alessandro lifted him as if he were a baby; indeed it was but a light burden now, Felipe's wasted body, for a man much less strong than Alessandro to lift.

Ramona, chilled and hurt, ran in advance, carrying pillows and blankets. As she began to arrange them on the couch the Senora took them from her hands, saying, "I will arrange them myself," and waved Ramona away.

It was a little thing. Ramona was well used to such. Ordinarily it would have given her pain she could not conceal. But the girl's nerves were not now in equilibrium. She had had hard work to keep back her tears at the first rebuff. This second was too much. She turned and walked swiftly away, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

Alessandro saw it; Felipe saw it.

To Felipe the sight was, though painful, not a surprise. He knew but too well how often his mother hurt Ramona. All he thought now, in his weakness, was, "Alas! what a pity my mother does not love Ramona!"

To Alessandro the sight was the one drop too much in the cup. As he stooped to lay Felipe on the bed he trembled so that Felipe looked up half afraid.

"Am I still so heavy, Alessandro?" he said, smiling.

"It is not your weight, Senor Felipe," answered Alessandro, off guard, still trembling, his eyes following Ramona.

Felipe saw. In a second the eyes of the two young men met. Alessandro's fell before Felipe's. Felipe gazed on, steadily, at Alessandro.

"Ah!" he said; and, as he said it, he closed his eyes, and let his head sink back into the pillow.

"Is that comfortable? Is that right?" asked the Senora, who had seen nothing.

"The first comfortable moment I have had, mother," said Felipe. "Stay Alessandro. I want to speak to you as soon as I am rested. This move has shaken me up a good deal. "Wait."

"Yes, Senor," replied Alessandro, and seated himself on the veranda steps.

"If you are to stay, Alessandro," said Senora, "I will go and look after some matters that need my attention. I feel always at ease about Senor Felipe when you are with him. You will stay till I come back?"

"Yes, Senora," said Alessandro, in a tone cold as the Senora's own had been to Ramona. He was no longer in heart the Senora Moreno's servant. In fact, he was at that very moment revolving confusedly in his mind whether there could be any possibility of his getting away before the expiration of the time for which he had agreed to stay.

It was a long time before Felipe opened his eyes. Alessandro thought he was asleep.

At last Felipe spoke. He had been watching Alessandro's face for some minutes. "Alessandro," he said.

Alessandro sprang to his feet, and walked swiftly to the bedside. He did not know what the next word might be. He felt that the Senor Felipe had seen straight into his heart in that one moment's look, and Alessandro was prepared for anything.

"Alessandro," said Felipe, "my mother has been speaking to me about you remaining with us permanently. Juan Can is now very old, and after this accident will go on crutches the rest of his days, poor soul! We are in great need of some man who understands sheep, and the care of the place generally."

As he spoke he watched Alessandro's face closely. Swift changing expressions passed over it. Surprise predominated. Felipe misunderstood the surprise. "I knew you would be surprised," he said. "I told my mother that you would not think of it; that you had stayed now only because we were in trouble."

Alessandro bowed his head gratefully. This recognition from Felipe gave him pleasure.

"Yes, Senor, he said, "that was it. I told Father Salvierderra it was not for the wages. But my father and I have need of all the money we can earn. Our people are very poor, Senor. I do not know whether my father would think I ought to take the place you offer me, or not, Senor. It would be as he said. I will ask him."

"Then you would be willing to take it?" asked Felipe.

"Yes, Senor, if my father wished me to take it," replied Alessandro, looking steadily and gravely at Felipe; adding, after a second's pause, "if you are sure that you desire it, Senor Felipe, it would be a pleasure to me to be of help to you."

And yet it was only a few moments ago that Alessandro had been turning over in his mind the possibility of leaving the Senor Moreno's service immediately. The change had not been a caprice, not been an impulse of passionate desire to remain near Ramona, it had come from a sudden consciousness that the Senor Felipe would be his friend. And Alessandro was not mistaken. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

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