

and the Lord has punished me. He has given me a child. I ask once more at your hands a boon. Will you take this child of mine and bring it up as a child of yours, or of mine, ought to be brought up?"

The tears were rolling down the Senora Ortogna's cheeks. The Lord had indeed punished her in more ways than Angus Phail knew. Her childlessness, bitter as that had been, was the least of them. Speechless, she rose and stretched out her arms for the child. He placed it in them. Still the child slept on, undisturbed.

"I do not know if I will be permitted," she said falteringly; "my husband—"

"Father Salvierderra will command it. I have seen him," replied Angus.

The Senora's face brightened. "If that be so, I hope it can be as you wish," she said. Then a strange embarrassment came upon her, and looking down upon the infant, she said in quiringly, "But the child's mother?"

Angus's face turned swarthy red. Perhaps, face to face with this gentle and still lovely woman he had once so loved, he first realized to the full how wickedly he had thrown away his life. With a quick wave of his hand, which spoke volumes, he said: "That is nothing. She has other children, of her own blood. That is mine, my only one, my daughter. I wish her to be yours; otherwise, she will be taken by the Church."

With each second that she felt the little warm body's tender weight in her arms, Ramona Ortogna's heart had more and more yearned toward the infant. At these words she bent her face down and kissed its cheek. "Oh no! not to the Church! I will love it as my own," she said.

Angus Phail's face quivered. Feelings long dead within him stirred in their graves. He gazed at the sad and altered face, once so beautiful, so dear. "I should hardly have known you, Senora!" burst from him involuntarily.

She smiled piteously, with no resentment. "That is not strange. I hardly know myself," she whispered. "Life has dealt very hardly with me. I should not have known you either—Angus." She pronounced his name hesitatingly, half appealingly. At the sound of the familiar syllables, so long unheard, the man's heart broke down. He buried his face in his hands, and sobbed out: "Oh, Ramona, forgive me; I brought the child here, not wholly in love; partly in vengeance. But I am melted now. Are you sure you wish to keep her? I will take her away if you are not."

"Never, so long as I live, Angus," replied Senora Ortogna. "Already I feel that she is a mercy from the Lord. If my husband sees no offence in her presence she will be a joy in my life. Has she been christened?"

Angus cast his eyes down. A sudden fear smote him. "Before I had thought of bringing her to you," he stammered, "at first I had only the thought of giving her to the Church. I had had her christened by"—the words refused to leave his lips—"the name— Can you not guess, Senora, what name she bears?"

The Senora knew. "My own?" she said.

Angus bowed his head. "The only woman's name that my lips ever spoke with love," he said, reassuringly, "was the name my daughter should bear."

"It is well," replied the Senora. Then a great silence fell between them. Each studied the other's face, tenderly, bewilderedly. Then, by a simultaneous impulse they drew nearer. Angus stretched out both his arms with a gesture of infinite love and despair, bent down and kissed the hands which lovingly held his sleeping child.

"God bless you, Ramona! Farewell! You will never see me more," he cried, and was gone.

In a moment more he reappeared on the threshold of the door, but only to

say in a low tone, "There is no need to be alarmed if the child does not wake for some hours yet. She has had a safe sleeping potion given her. It will not harm her."

One more long lingering look into the other's faces, and the two lovers, so strangely parted, still more strangely met, had parted again for ever. The quarter of a century which had lain between them had been bridged in both their hearts as if it were but a day. In the heart of the man it was the old passionate love reawakening; a resurrection of the buried dead to full life, with lineaments unchanged. In the woman it was not that; there was no buried love to come to such resurrection in her heart, for she had never loved Angus Phail. But, long unloved, ill-treated, heart-broken, she woke at that moment to the realization of what manner of love it had been which she had thrown away in her youth; her whole being yearned for it now, and Angus was avenged.

When Francis Ortogna, late that night, reeled half tipsy into his wife's room, he was suddenly sobored by the sight which met his eyes—his wife kneeling by the side of a cradle, in which lay, smiling in its sleep, a beautiful infant.

"What in the devil's name," he began; then recollecting, he muttered. "Oh, the Indian brat! I see! I wish you joy, Senora Ortogna, of your first child!" and with a mock bow and cruel sneer he staggered by, giving the cradle an angry thrust with his foot as he passed.

The brutal taunt did not much wound the Senora. The time has long since passed when unkind words from her husband could give her keen pain. But it was a warning not lost upon her newborn mother instinct, and from that day the little Ramona was carefully kept and tended in apartments where there was no danger of her being seen by the man to whom the sight of her baby face was only a signal for anger and indecency.

Hitherto Ramona Ortogna had, so far as was possible, carefully concealed from her family the unhappiness of her married life. Ortogna's character was indeed well known; his neglect of his wife, his shameful dissipations of all sorts, were notorious in every part in the country. But from the wife herself no one had ever heard so much as a syllable of complaint. She was a Gonzaga, and she knew how to suffer in silence. But now she saw a reason for taking her sister into her confidence. It was plain to her that she had not many years to live; and what then would become of the child? Left to the tender mercies of Ortogna, it was only too certain what would become of her. Long sad hours of perplexity the lonely woman passed, with the little laughing babe in her arms, vainly endeavouring to forecast her future. The near chance of her own death had not occurred to her mind when she accepted the trust.

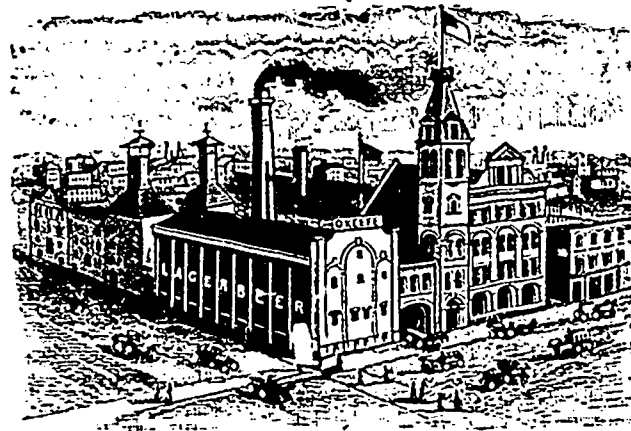
Before the little Ramona was a year old, Angus Phail died. An Indian messenger from San Gabriel brought the news to Senora Ortogna. He brought her also a box and a letter, given to him by Angus the day before his death. The box contained jewels of value, of fashions a quarter of a century old. They were the jewels which Angus had bought for his bride. These alone remained of all his fortune. Even in the lowest depths of his degradation a certain sentiment had restrained him from parting with them. The letter contained only these words: "I send you all I have to leave my daughter. I meant to bring them myself this year. I wished to kiss your hands and hers once more. But I am dying. Farewell."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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