VII.

THE STORMING OF CHAPULTEPEC.

WHEN Pem, a few days later, had recovered his composure sufficiently to give Rose a circumstantial account of the Churubusco battle, that very hopeful young person took her usual cheerful view of what some people might have considered a desperate situation.

"It couldn't have been better if we'd planned it all in advance," she said. "Even Van's interruption was just what was wanted, and I shall tell the poor boy that I am sorry I scolded him so for it; I will, indeed.

"Don't you see," she went on—for Pem certainly did not look much like a person who saw anything of an encouraging nature anywhere—"don't you see what a fix she's got herself into by saying a great deal more

than she meant to? It's all as plain as possible. She made up her mind some time ago, just as I told you, that she would fight you off, because she was afraid she would fall in love with you; which meant that she really had begun to fall in love with you and didn't know it—or that she knew it and wouldn't tell herself about it. You can't understand that, I suppose; but any woman can. And then you succeeded in getting her off that way, and began to say things to her; and she got worried, and scared, and lost her wits a little, and hit ever so much harder than she really meant to. She never would have brought up the war again, I'm sure, if she hadn't felt herself to be in a corner and quite desperate. When you suddenly twisted things round on her that way, her first thought, of course, was to tell you that she didn't hate you at all. And then she saw that wouldn't do, for it would give you a chance to go right ahead and ask her if she loved you. And then she thought things over and came to the conclusion—you must

always remember what a horrid time she had with that dreadful old husband, and how firmly she has made up her mind never to marry again—and then, I say, she came to the conclusion that the only thing to do was to break things off short, and have done with it. So she said that she hated you."

"Well, that is only another way of telling all that I have told you, Mrs. Brown."

"It is not what you told at all; for you told it as though you thought that she meant it, and I know that she didn't. She only meant to mean it, that's all."

"Aren't we dropping into metaphysics a little?" Pem asked, drearily. "I don't see that much comfort is to be had from such a finely drawn distinction as that is. Meaning a thing, and meaning to mean a thing, strike me as convertible terms. Don't they you?"

"If a man used them, I suppose they would not have much difference; but when a woman uses them, they have all the difference in the world. When a woman really means a thing she means it—that is, of course, for the time

being. Naturally, things happen sometimes to make her change her mind. But when she only means to mean a thing, she does not really, in the depths of her heart, mean it at all. She only thinks that she ought to, you know. And in the case of Cármen," Rose went on, becoming practical, much to Pem's relief—for his masculine mind very imperfectly grasped this line of highly abstract feminine reasoning—"it is perfectly clear that she only said she hated you because she has this foolish notion in her head about not getting married, and was ready to say anything at the moment that would stop you from finding out that she really loves you. For she does love you now, Mr. Smith; and, what is more, she knows it herself."

"But if she won't admit that she loves me, and if she continues to hold me off in this way, I don't see that any good can come of it. It has been very kind of you, Mrs. Brown, to help me as you have done, and to be so sympathetic and good to me, and I am as grateful to you as I can be. But I think that I'll

give up now. It isn't fair, you know, to trouble her any more when it is so clear that she wants me to keep away from her. So I think that to-morrow I'll go up to Guanajuato—it was there that I first saw her, you know—and I—I should like to go once more to the Presa, where we had our first walk together. And then I'll go on north. I'd be rather poor company, so I don't mind leaving the party. And I think that I will take a long journey somewhere. I've been wanting for some time to go into Central Africa: it must be a very interesting country, from what I've read about it. And if I should happen to die of the coast-fever, or get bowled over in a fight, or something of that sort, you know, it might be just as well. And some time or other you will see her again, very likely; and then you'll tell her that I really did think a good deal of her, won't you? And if she——"

"Mr. Smith," said Rose, with severity, "you will please stop right there. What you are to do to-morrow is not to go to Guanajuato, and from there to a grave in Central Africa. You are going with the rest of us to Chapultepec—and you are going to try again!"

"But what chance will I have to try again? You don't suppose for a moment, do you, that Cármen will be of the party? She will know that I will be with the rest of you, or, at least, she will expect me to be, and of course she will stay at home."

"No," said Rose, decidedly; "she will not stay at home. During the past few days she has been thinking things over and has been very miserable. Violet saw her yesterday, and said that she looked wretchedly. And she said that Cármen talked to her for nearly two hours about the way we live at home and about Violet's own life, and said things about the impossibility of Mexicans and Americans marrying, seemingly to give Violet a chance to say how happy her marriage with Mr. Mauve had been. And she asked if it wasn't true that all the Americans wanted to make war again on Mexico, and if

they were not talking about it all the time and getting ready for it, and seemed very much astonished when Violet told her that the majority of Americans knew very little more about Mexico than that there was such a country in existence, and that they had no more notion of making war against it than of making war against the moon. And what she knows now about the happy life that Violet has led after being married to an American, together with what she herself had been thinking about the probability that her own dismal marriage wasn't a fair sample of married life at all, I'm sure has put her mind into a very unsettled state all around. What you must do now is to finish unsettling it, and then settle it for her once and for all. She certainly will give you the chance. I think that I have not told you yet that she told Violet that she was going to Chapultepec?"

"Oh, Mrs. Brown! How could you keep that back until the very last?"

"So, will you go to Chapultepec too, Mr.

Smith; or do you still insist upon Central Africa and a lonely grave?"

The expedition to Chapultepec was in the nature of a farewell, for on the ensuing day the Americans were to leave the City of Mexico for their visit to the Carmine *hacienda* on Lake Cuitzeo. If they returned to the capital it would be only for a night on their way northward; and there was a possibility that they might take the train for the north at Celaya, and so not return to the capital at all. They were pretty dismal over the prospect of home-going, for a very warm love of Mexico had taken possession of all their hearts. Even Mrs. Gamboge, while firmly of the opinion that there was something radically wrong in a country that countenanced hard pillows and employed men as chambermaids, admitted that this journey into Mexico was the pleasantest journey that she had ever made.

And they all were very grateful to the Mexican friends who had done so much to

make their stay in the capital delightful. The several interpreters of the party were kept busy that afternoon, as they walked in the beautiful park of Chapultepec, in rendering into Spanish hearty words of thanks, and into English courteous disclaimers of obligation conferred. The pleasure had been all on their side, said their Mexican friends. Nor was this interchange of international amenities ended when they passed out from beneath the long, slanting shadows of the great *ahuehuetes*—the moss-draped trees which were old four centuries ago, before ever the Spaniards came into the land—and slowly walked up the winding way to the height on which the castle stands.

Pem had been shocked when he first saw Cármen's face that afternoon. The lines were drawn as though with illness, and she seemed older by a full year than when he last had seen her. He saw, too, that the spring had gone out of her step, and an air of languor hung over her that she made no effort to throw off. She did not seek to evade

him, but as they walked together she managed always to keep near her aunt; and her talk, conforming to her actions, was languid and dull. The only sign of good hope that he could perceive was that gradually a little color came into her face and a little brightness into her eyes.

As they went up the terraced road to the castle, catching lovely glimpses of the valley out between the trees, Pem walked slowly, that they might drop behind the rest and be alone. Once or twice he stopped, calling her attention to the view. His tactics were not successful; for as soon as the space between themselves and the others became appreciable she hastened her steps, and the chance that he thought he had secured was lost. Yet he marked a little hesitancy in her manner each time this manœuvre was executed that seemed to imply a disposition on her part, possibly all the stronger because it was thus checked, to grant him the opportunity to speak that he desired. Once, or twice even, she herself lingered in the way and seemed about to speak;

and then moved quickly forward, holding her peace.

Pem would have been glad of the chance to take counsel of Rose at this juncture, for he was at a loss to determine whether these curious signs promised good or boded ill. This young gentleman from Philadelphia was not very wise in the ways of women; but even had he been far wiser than he was, Cármen's curious conduct very well might have puzzled him.

As they came out upon the eastern terrace the glorious sunset view, a reflected splendor in the east, burst upon them—one of the great sunset views of the world.

Below them, at the foot of the sharp, craggy descent, and surrounded by the trees of the eastern park, lay the tiny lake that Carlotta caused to be made while she played for a little space her part of empress here in the castle. To the right lay Tacubaya, a cluster of low, square houses embowered in trees, on a long, sloping hill-side; and beyond Tacubaya rose the blue encircling wall of mountains,

culminating in the great solemn mass of Ajusco, that shuts in the valley on the south. To the left lay the city, with its tall church towers rising high above the houses, and its many domes, covered with glazed tiles, flashing in the last rays of the sun; and, farther on, the church of Guadalupe stood out against the hazy lines of the mountains of Teypeyac, and on Lake Tezcuco shimmered a soft light. Right in front, the trees of the park merged into other trees beyond its limits; and the great valley, dotted with gray houses, and gray church towers, and green remnants of ancient forests, and broad green meadows, stretched away for miles and miles eastward; and in the midst of it the waters of Lake Chalco shone as though on fire. And beyond all, against the limit of the eastern sky, towered the two great volcanoes—masses of gold and crimson clouds above them, and a rich rosy light resting upon their crest-coverings of eternal snow.

Cármen and Pem had stopped a little behind the others; and when Don Antonio sug-

gested a slight change of position, she took a step or two and then stood still. The others moved a little to the left. Pem moved a little to the right; and Cármen, following him, seated herself upon a low wall. The little color that had come into her cheeks in the park had left them now; but her eyes had brightened curiously. Presently they heard Don Antonio advise a move to the roof of the castle: this hospitable Mexican seemed to regard the sunset as an entertainment that he himself had provided for the pleasure of his American friends, and wished to make sure that they got the full benefit of it. Pem looked inquiringly at Cármen; but her gaze was fixed upon the distant mountains, and she made no sign of moving. Then the sound of footsteps and voices died away; and so, at last, they were alone.

Cármen had leaned her head back against the stone wall—just as she had sat that day at Churubusco—and was looking out dreamily across the valley. For the time being she appeared to be quite unconscious of the fact

of Mr. Pemberton Logan Smith's existence. Although the situation was precisely that which for two hours past he had been seeking to accomplish, Pem found it, now that it was secured, a trifle embarrassing. Cármen's manner did not at all invite the utterance of the words which he so earnestly desired to speak; but the longer that the silence continued the more he found his nerves going wrong. It was rather at random that he spoke at last.

"The great mountain to the left is called the White Woman, I am told, Señorita. It is a dismal fancy, this of a dead woman lying enshrouded in the snow."

Cármen gave a little sigh as she roused herself. "The Señor does not know the story," she answered, absently. "The White Woman is not dead. Far down beneath the snow-covering the fires of her life burn hotly. She sleeps; and the great mountain beside her is her lover, who wakens her with his kiss. This is the foolish story that the common people tell. The Mexicans are very silly, very

superstitious, very stupid — as the Señor knows."

Cármen uttered her comments upon the legend and upon her fellow-countrymen hastily and nervously, as though seeking to divert attention from the folk-story itself — a story that she had known, of course, all her life, and that she had told in sheer absence of mind.

"Is it not possible, Señorita," Pem replied, ignoring that portion of her speech that she had added precisely for the purpose of diverting him from what she perceived to be a dangerous line of investigation, "that this is not a foolish story, but a wise allegory? May it not sometimes happen that real women seek to hide with snow the warm love that is in their hearts? I am not speaking lightly, Señorita. I should be very glad to believe that this story has a deep meaning within it; that it is not a mere foolish fancy, but a beautiful and eternal truth." And then he added, speaking very gently, "Will not the Señorita tell me that this may be true?"

Cármen was silent for a moment, and when she spoke there was a grave, solemn tone in her voice that struck a chill into Pem's heart.

"Yes, Señor," she said; "it *is* true. It is true now and it has been true always. Since the world began there must always have been some women whose fate it was that their love thus should be chilled upon its surface and so hidden; and believe me, Señor"—and a certain wistfulness of expression came into Cármen's face as she spoke—"such hidden love as this perhaps may be stronger than the love that is felt and known."

Cármen was silent for a moment, but there was something in her manner that made Pem refrain from speech. Then, still speaking in the same chill, solemn tone, and very slowly, she went on:

"I know what you mean, Señor. I am not a young girl. I have been in the world, and I understand. You do me the honor to love me, and to want my love in return. But this may not be — not, that is, in the way that you

desire. I cannot tell you the story of my life. There are some things in it that I have not told even to the good father to whom I confess. Perhaps this has been a sin; but sometimes I think that this rule of our Church which commands us to lay bare our hearts to men, though the men are God's ministers, is not a good rule. It is a great presumption for me to cherish such a thought, but I cannot help it. I have told my sorrows to the God who made me, and who in his wisdom has made my life sad; not to his mother, nor to his saints, you understand, but to him.

"And what I have told only to God I cannot tell even to you. But you may know at least that my life has been very, very bitter since the time that—that I was sold. I really was sold, Señor; and I had not even the poor consolation which is given to some unhappy, lost women—but less unhappy and less hopelessly lost than I am—of selling myself. It was as though I had been put in a marketplace like a horse or a cow, and for my poor

beauty's sake I was bought! Of the time that came afterward I cannot speak, I cannot bear even to think"—Cármen shuddered as she spoke and her face flushed with shame and anger—"but yet I cannot drive the horror of it from my thoughts. And then, at last—to others it seemed very soon, but not to me—the God who had brought this bitter sorrow upon me gave me a little help, for my owner died. It had been better far that I had died too, for I was dead to peace, to hope; my life was ended at a time when for most women life has just begun."

Again Cármen was silent for a little space, and then she said: "Now you will understand, Señor, why it is that I tell you that the story of the White Woman yonder is true; for I myself, a living woman, know that whatever there may be of warm love in my heart must remain forever buried deep beneath the snow."

Pem's eyes had tears in them as Cármen ceased to speak. Once or twice he had put out his hand to her, but she had motioned it

away. When she had made an end he spoke eagerly; and while his voice was husky and uncertain, its tone was firm.

"Cármen, Carmencita," he said, "your sorrows have been very heavy and hard to bear, but may not the time have come, at last, when in place of sorrow you shall have happiness? Is it too much for me to offer you this hope? But in my love—my love is very strong, Carmencita; far stronger now that I know how grievous your life has been—I do not dare too greatly when I promise you shelter and great tenderness; and so may come to you peace and rest. And remember," he went on quickly, checking her rising speech, "that my happiness for all my life rests now upon your answer. Love is a very selfish passion, otherwise I would not think, after what you have told me, of my own happiness at all. But I do think of it, though less than of yours. I know that without you my life will be hopeless and worthless. I believe that with me, away from all those things which will not permit you to forget—

in a new life that will make forgetfulness easy, and that will give you the breadth and the freedom that I know you need and wish—happiness is in store for you. Think, think of all this before you tell me that you will live on despairingly, and that into my life also you will bring despair."

Cármen sat motionless. Through her half-closed eyes she looked out upon the fading sunset. The golden gleams no longer were in the sky now, and the crimson had faded into a soft rose-color. On the snow-peaks rested a deep violet tint, and the White Woman shone ghost-like through a purple haze.

"Señor," she said at last, "it may not be. What you have told me of the life that I could live with you I know in my heart is truth. I know that among your people I should find what I long for, and what I cannot find among my own. I have longed with all my heart's strength for the life that you offer me; and I have longed for it far more since I have known you. And I do love

you——" Pem started forward, but Cármen restrained him by a motion of her hand. "I love you so well that I cannot consent to accept my happiness at such a cost to you. After the shame that has been put upon me I feel that I am not fit to be your—your wife; I am not fit to be the wife of any honest man. Could you but know!"

Cármen shuddered again, and her voice dropped low. Then, in a moment, she went on: "This is an old, old world, Señor, and it seems to me that some day it must of itself fall to pieces, so heavy is the load of sorrow and suffering and shame that it carries. But we who are of it must bear with it, and must bear our own part in it, stayed by such hope of another and a better world as God in his goodness may put into our hearts. Sometimes I think that the talk about God's goodness is only a fond delusion, invented by men to save themselves wholly from despair. But I fight against this thought, for if it once fairly possessed my soul I know that I should go mad. And what matters when all is sor-

row, one sorrow more or less? I have borne much and of my suffering no good has come. What I bear now in refusing the life that you offer me I can bear gladly, for I know that I am bringing good to you. So this is the end.

"See, the dark shadows are falling upon the White Woman. The fire is there, but it is, it must be, covered with eternal snow. Hark! Don Antonio is calling us. We must go to him."

"Cármen," said Pem, speaking resolutely and quickly, "I will not take this answer. I command you not to wreck both of our lives when for both of us happiness is within easy reach. I love you, and so I am your servant; but you own your love for me, and so I am your master. By the right that this love gives me I lay on you my command—accept my love, and with it the life that I offer you!"

"Señor—I—I—how can I answer? At least—let me think. Give me a little time."

Voices and footsteps were near at hand. Pem had only a moment left. "You shall

have time to think. To-morrow we go to the *hacienda*. We shall be there a week; longer, perhaps. Very well, I give you till my return to think. But remember, my order has been given, and it must be obeyed!"

"It was much finer, the view from the tower of the castle, Señor; why did you linger here?" Don Antonio asked, politely, but in the slightly injured tone of one who, having provided a feast, feels that a guest is not doing justice to it.

"You must forgive me, Don Antonio, but the Señorita, your niece, as we turned to follow you, had a narrow escape from a fall here at this broken space in the parapet. It was a great danger, and the shock unnerved her. See, she still is pale. But she is recovering now, and we were about to go in search of you when we heard you call."

Cármen, no doubt, was grateful to Pem for this somewhat stirring flight of fancy; but it involved them both subsequently in a rather trying exercise of their respective imaginations, for the entire party insisted upon

hearing the minutest details of the adventure told. Only Rose refrained from questioning. She had not much faith in the parapet story, but she did have her own ideas, and reserved her questions accordingly. But what really had happened, beyond the bare fact that that afternoon on the heights of Chapultepec had marked a turning-point in the campaign, Rose never knew.