

bright sunlight of a walled garden. The girl dropped her eyes, cast a quick glance around her, and said:

"Not here; to the *arroyo*;" and half leading, half dragging him, made her way through a copse of *manzanita* and alder until they heard the faint tinkling of water. "Dost thou remember," said the girl, "it was here," pointing to an embayed pool in the dark current, "that I baptized thee, when Father Pedro first brought thee here, when we both played at being monks? They were dear old days, for Father Pedro would trust no one with thee but me, and always kept us near him."

"Aye, and he said I would be profaned by the touch of any other, and so himself always washed and dressed me, and made my bed near his."

"And took thee away again, and I saw thee not till thou camest with Antonio, over a year ago, to the cattle branding. And now, my Pancho, I may never see thee again." She buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud.

The little acolyte tried to comfort her, but with such abstraction of manner and inadequacy of warmth that she hastily removed his caressing hand.

"But why? What has happened?" he asked eagerly.

The girl's manner had changed. Her eyes flashed, and she put her brown fist on her waist and began to rock from side to side.

"But I'll not go," she said, viciously.

"Go where?" asked the boy.

"Oh, where?" she echoed, impatiently. "Hear me, Francisco. Thou knowest I am, like thee, an orphan; but I have not, like thee, a parent in the Holy Church. For, alas," she added, bitterly, "I am not a boy, and have not a lovely voice borrowed from the angels. I was, like thee, a foundling, kept by the charity of the reverend fathers, until Don Juan, a childless widower, adopted me.

I was happy, not knowing and caring who were the parents who had abandoned me, happy only in the love of him who became my adopted father. And now" — She paused.

"And now?" echoed Francisco, eagerly.

"And now they say it is discovered who are my parents."

"And they live?"

"Mother of God! no," said the girl, with scarcely filial piety. "There is some one, a thing, a mere Don Fulano, who knows it all, it seems, who is to be my guardian."

"But how? Tell me all, dear Juanita," said the boy with a feverish interest, that contrasted so strongly with his previous abstraction that Juanita bit her lips with vexation.

"Ah! How? Santa Barbara! An extravaganza for children. A necklace of lies. I am lost from a ship of which my father — Heaven rest him! — is General, and I am picked up among the weeds on the sea-shore, like Moses in the bulrushes. A pretty story, indeed."

"O how beautiful!" exclaimed Francisco enthusiastically. "Ah, Juanita, would it had been me!"

"Thee!" said the girl bitterly, — "thee! No! — it was a girl wanted. Enough, it was me."

"And when does the guardian come?" persisted the boy, with sparkling eyes.

"He is here even now, with that pompous fool the American alcalde from Monterey, a wretch who knows nothing of the country or the people, but who helped the other American to claim me. I tell thee, Francisco, like as not it is all a folly, some senseless blunder of those Americanos that imposes upon Don Juan's simplicity and love for them."

"How looks he, this Americano who seeks thee?" asked Francisco.

"What care I how he looks," said Juanita, "or what he is? He may have the four S's, for all I care. Yet," she added with a slight touch of coquetry, "he is not bad to look upon, now I recall him."

"Had he a long mustache and a sad, sweet smile, and a voice so gentle and yet so strong that you felt he ordered you to do things without saying it? And did his eye read your thoughts?—that very thought that you must obey him?"

"Saints preserve thee, Pancho! Of whom dost thou speak?"

"Listen, Juanita. It was a year ago, the eve of Natividad; he was in the church when I sang. Look where I would, I always met his eye. When the canticle was sung and I was slipping into the sacristy, he was beside me. He spoke kindly, but I understood him not. He put into my hand gold for an *aguinaldo*. I pretended I understood not that also, and put it into the box for the poor. He smiled and went away. Often have I seen him since; and last night, when I left the Mission, he was there again with Father Pedro."

"And Father Pedro, what said he of him?" asked Juanita.

"Nothing." The boy hesitated. "Perhaps—because I said nothing of the stranger."

Juanita laughed. "So thou canst keep a secret from the good father when thou carest. But why dost thou think this stranger is my new guardian?"

"Dost thou not see, little sister? He was even then seeking thee," said the boy with joyous excitement. "Doubtless he knew we were friends and playmates—maybe the good father has told him thy secret. For it is no idle tale of the *alcalde*, believe me. I see it all! It is true!"

"Then thou wilt let him take me away," exclaimed the

girl bitterly, withdrawing the little hand he had clasped in his excitement.

"Alas, Juanita, what avails it now? I am sent to San José, charged with a letter to the Father Superior, who will give me further orders. What they are, or how long I must stay, I know not. But I know this: the good Father Pedro's eyes were troubled when he gave me his blessing, and he held me long in his embrace. Pray Heaven I have committed no fault. Still it may be that the reputation of my gift hath reached the Father Superior, and he would advance me;" and Francisco's eyes lit up with youthful pride at the thought.

Not so Juanita. Her black eyes snapped suddenly with suspicion, she drew in her breath, and closed her little mouth firmly. Then she began a *crescendo*.

Mother of God! was that all? Was he a child, to be sent away for such time or for such purpose as best pleased the fathers? Was he to know no more than that? With such gifts as God had given him, was he not at least to have some word in disposing of them? Ah! *she* would not stand it.

The boy gazed admiringly at the piquant energy of the little figure before him, and envied her courage. "It is the *mestizo* blood," he murmured to himself. Then aloud, "Thou shouldst have been a man, 'Nita."

"And thou a woman."

"Or a priest. Eh, what is that?"

They had both risen, Juanita defiantly, her black braids flying as she wheeled and suddenly faced the thicket, Francisco clinging to her with trembling hands and whitened lips. A stone, loosened from the hillside, had rolled to their feet; there was a crackling in the alders on the slope above them.

"Is it a bear, or a brigand?" whispered Francisco, hurriedly, sounding the uttermost depths of his terror in the two words.

"It is an eavesdropper," said Juanita, impetuously; "and who and why, I intend to know," and she started towards the thicket.

"Do not leave me, good Juanita;" said the young acolyte, grasping the girl's skirt.

"Nay; run to the hacienda quickly, and leave me to search the thicket. Run!"

The boy did not wait for a second injunction, but scuttled away, his long coat catching in the brambles, while Juanita darted like a kitten into the bushes. Her search was fruitless, however, and she was returning impatiently, when her quick eye fell upon a letter lying amid the dried grass where she and Francisco had been seated the moment before. It had evidently fallen from his breast when he had risen suddenly, and been overlooked in his alarm. It was Father Pedro's letter to the Father Superior of San José.

In an instant she had pounced upon it as viciously as if it had been the interloper she was seeking. She knew that she held in her fingers the secret of Francisco's sudden banishment. She felt instinctively that this yellowish envelope, with its red string and its blotch of red seal, was his sentence and her own. The little *mestiza* had not been brought up to respect the integrity of either locks or seals, both being unknown in the patriarchal life of the hacienda. Yet with a certain feminine instinct she looked furtively around her, and even managed to dislodge the clumsy wax without marring the pretty effigy of the crossed keys impressed upon it. Then she opened the letter and read.

Suddenly she stopped and put back her hair from her brown temples. Then a succession of burning blushes followed each other in waves from her neck up, and died in drops of moisture in her eyes. This continued until she was fairly crying, dropping the letter from her hands

and rocking to and fro. In the midst of this she quickly stopped again; the clouds broke, a sunshine of laughter started from her eyes, she laughed shyly, she laughed loudly, she laughed hysterically. Then she stopped again as suddenly, knitted her brows, swooped down once more upon the letter, and turned to fly. But at the same moment the letter was quietly but firmly taken from her hand, and Mr. Jack Cranch stood beside her.

Juanita was crimson, but unconquered. She mechanically held out her hand for the letter; the American took her little fingers, kissed them, and said:

"How are you again?"

"The letter," replied Juanita, with a strong disposition to stamp her foot.

"But," said Cranch, with business directness, "you've read enough to know it is n't for you."

"Nor for you either," responded Juanita.

"True. It is for the Reverend Father Superior of San José Mission. I'll give it to him."

Juanita was becoming alarmed, first at this prospect, second at the power the stranger seemed to be gaining over her. She recalled Francisco's description of him with something like superstitious awe.

"But it concerns Francisco. It contains a secret he should know."

"Then you can tell him it. Perhaps it would come easier from you."

Juanita blushed again. "Why?" she asked, half dreading his reply.

"Because," said the American, quietly, "you are old playmates; you are attached to each other."

Juanita bit her lips. "Why don't you read it yourself?" she asked bluntly.

"Because I don't read other people's letters, and if it concerns me you'll tell me."

"What if I don't?"

"Then the Father Superior will."

"I believe you know Francisco's secret already," said the girl, boldly.

"Perhaps."

"Then, Mother of God! Señor Crancho, what do you want?"

"I do not want to separate two such good friends as you and Francisco."

"Perhaps you'd like to claim us both," said the girl, with a sneer that was not devoid of coquetry.

"I should be delighted."

"Then here is your occasion, Señor, for here comes my adopted father, Don Juan, and your friend, Señor Br—r—own, the American alcalde."

Two men appeared in the garden path below them. The stiff, glazed, broad-brimmed black hat, surmounting a dark face of Quixotic gravity and romantic rectitude, indicated Don Juan Briones. His companion, lazy, specious, and red-faced, was Señor Brown, the American alcalde.

"Well, I reckon we kin about call the thing fixed," said Señor Brown, with a large wave of the hand, suggesting a sweeping away of all trivial details. "Ez I was saying to the Don yer, when two high-toned gents like you and him come together in a delicate matter of this kind, it ain't no hoss trade nor sharp practice. The Don is that lofty in principle that he's willin' to sacrifice his affections for the good of the gal; and you, on your hand, kalkilate to see all he's done for her, and go your whole pile better. You'll make the legal formalities good. I reckon that old Injin woman who can swear to the finding of the baby on the shore will set things all right yet. For the matter o' that, if you want anything in the way of a certificate, I'm on hand always."

"Juanita and myself are at your disposition, *caballeros*," said Don Juan, with a grave exaltation. "Never let it be said that the Mexican nation was outdone by the great Americanos in deeds of courtesy and affection. Let it rather stand that Juanita was a sacred trust put into my hands years ago by the goddess of American liberty, and nurtured in the Mexican eagle's nest. Is it not so, my soul?" he added, more humanly, to the girl, when he had quite recovered from the intoxication of his own speech. "We love thee, little one, but we keep our honor."

"There's nothing mean about the old man," said Brown, admiringly, with a slight dropping of his left eyelid; "his head is level, and he goes with his party."

"Thou takest my daughter, Señor Cranch," continued the old man, carried away by his emotion; "but the American nation gives me a son."

"You know not what you say, father," said the young girl, angrily, exasperated by a slight twinkle in the American's eye.

"Not so," said Cranch. "Perhaps one of the American nation may take him at his word."

"Then, *caballeros*, you will, for the moment at least, possess yourselves of the house and its poor hospitality," said Don Juan, with time-honored courtesy, producing the rustic key of the gate of the *patio*. "It is at your disposition, *caballeros*," he repeated, leading the way as his guests passed into the corridor.

Two hours passed. The hills were darkening on their eastern slopes; the shadows of the few poplars that sparsely dotted the dusty highway were falling in long black lines that looked like ditches on the dead level of the tawny fields; the shadows of slowly moving cattle were mingling with their own silhouettes, and becoming more and more grotesque. A keen wind rising in the hills was already creeping from the *cañada* as from the

mouth of a funnel, and sweeping the plains. Antonio had forgathered with the servants, had pinched the ears of the maids, had partaken of *aguardiente*, had saddled the mules, — Antonio was becoming impatient.

And then a singular commotion disturbed the peaceful monotony of the patriarchal household of Don Juan Briones. The stagnant courtyard was suddenly alive with *peons* and servants, running hither and thither. The alleys and gardens were filled with retainers. A confusion of questions, orders, and outcries rent the air, the plains shook with the galloping of a dozen horsemen. For the acolyte Francisco, of the Mission San Carmel, had disappeared and vanished, and from that day the hacienda of Don Juan Briones knew him no more.

III.

When Father Pedro saw the yellow mules vanish under the low branches of the oaks beside the little graveyard, caught the last glitter of the morning sun on Pinto's shining headstall, and heard the last tinkle of Antonio's spurs, something very like a mundane sigh escaped him. To the simple wonder of the majority of early worshipers — the half-breed converts who rigorously attended the spiritual ministrations of the Mission, and ate the temporal provisions of the reverend fathers — he deputed the functions of the first mass to a coadjutor, and, breviary in hand, sought the orchard of venerable pear trees. Whether there was any occult sympathy in his reflections with the contemplation of their gnarled, twisted, gouty, and knotty limbs, still bearing gracious and goodly fruit, I know not, but it was his private retreat, and under one of the most rheumatic and misshapen trunks there was a rude seat. Here Father Pedro sank, his face toward

the mountain wall between him and the invisible sea. The relentless, dry, practical Californian sunlight falling on his face grimly pointed out a night of vigil and suffering. The snuffy yellow of his eyes was injected yet burning, his temples were ridged and veined like a tobacco leaf; the odor of desiccation which his garments always exhaled was hot and feverish, as if the fire had suddenly awakened among the ashes.

Of what was Father Pedro thinking?

He was thinking of his youth, a youth spent under the shade of those pear trees, even then venerable as now. He was thinking of his youthful dreams of heathen conquest, emulating the sacrifices and labors of Junipero Serra; a dream cut short by the orders of the archbishop, that sent his companion, Brother Diego, north on a mission to strange lands, and condemned him to the isolation of San Carmel. He was thinking of that fierce struggle with envy of a fellow-creature's better fortune, that, conquered by prayer and penance, left him patient, submissive, and devoted to his humble work; how he raised up converts to the faith, even taking them from the breast of heretic mothers.

He recalled how once, with the zeal of propagandism quickening in the instincts of a childless man, he had dreamed of perpetuating his work through some sinless creation of his own; of dedicating some virgin soul, one over whom he could have complete control, restricted by no human paternal weakness, to the task he had begun. But how? Of all the boys eagerly offered to the Church by their parents there seemed none sufficiently pure and free from parental taint. He remembered how one night, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin herself, as he firmly then believed, this dream was fulfilled. An Indian woman brought him a *Waugee* child — a baby-girl that she had picked up on the sea-shore. There were no parents

to divide the responsibility, the child had no past to confront, except the memory of the ignorant Indian woman, who deemed her duty done, and whose interest ceased in giving it to the Padre. The austere conditions of his monkish life compelled him to the first step in his adoption of it — the concealment of its sex. This was easy enough, as he constituted himself from that moment its sole nurse and attendant, and boldly baptized it among the other children by the name of Francisco. No others knew its origin, nor cared to know. Father Pedro had taken a *muchacho* foundling for adoption; his jealous seclusion of it and his personal care was doubtless some sacerdotal formula at once high and necessary.

He remembered with darkening eyes and impeded breath how his close companionship and daily care of this helpless child had revealed to him the fascinations of that paternity denied to him; how he had deemed it his duty to struggle against the thrill of baby fingers laid upon his yellow cheeks, the pleading of inarticulate words, the eloquence of wonder-seeing and mutely questioning eyes; how he had succumbed again and again, and then struggled no more, seeing only in them the suggestion of childhood made incarnate in the Holy Babe. And yet, even as he thought, he drew from his gown a little shoe, and laid it beside his breviary. It was Francisco's baby slipper, a duplicate to those worn by the miniature waxen figure of the Holy Virgin herself in her niche in the transept.

Had he felt during these years any qualms of conscience at this concealment of the child's sex? None. For to him the babe was sexless, as most befitted one who was to live and die at the foot of the altar. There was no attempt to deceive God; what mattered else? Nor was he withholding the child from the ministrations of the sacred sisters. There was no convent near the Mission,

and as each year passed, the difficulty of restoring her to the position and duties of her sex became greater and more dangerous. And then the acolyte's destiny was sealed by what again appeared to Father Pedro as a direct interposition of Providence. The child developed a voice of such exquisite sweetness and purity that an angel seemed to have strayed into the little choir, and kneeling worshipers below, transported, gazed upwards, half expectant of a heavenly light breaking through the gloom of the raftered ceiling. The fame of the little singer filled the valley of San Carmel; it was a miracle vouchsafed the Mission; Don José Peralta remembered, ah yes, to have heard in old Spain of boy choristers with such voices!

And was this sacred trust to be withdrawn from him? Was this life, which he had brought out of an unknown world of sin, unstained and pure, consecrated and dedicated to God, just in the dawn of power and promise for the glory of the Mother Church, to be taken from his side? And at the word of a self-convicted man of sin — a man whose tardy repentance was not yet absolved by the Holy Church? Never! never! Father Pedro dwelt upon the stranger's rejections of the ministrations of the Church with a pitiable satisfaction; had he accepted it, he would have had a sacred claim upon Father Pedro's sympathy and confidence. Yet he rose again, uneasily and with irregular steps returned to the corridor, passing the door of the familiar little cell beside his own. The window, the table, and even the scant toilette utensils were filled with the flowers of yesterday, some of them withered and dry; the white gown of the little chorister was hanging emptily against the wall. Father Pedro started and trembled; it seemed as if the spiritual life of the child had slipped away with its garments.

In that slight chill, which even in the hottest days in

California always invests any shadow cast in that white sunlight, Father Pedro shivered in the corridor. Passing again into the garden, he followed in fancy the wayfaring figure of Francisco, saw the child arrive at the rancho of Don Juan, and with the fateful blindness of all dreamers projected a picture most unlike the reality. He followed the pilgrims even to San José, and saw the child deliver the missive which gave the secret of her sex and condition to the Father Superior. That the authority at San José might dissent with the Padre of San Carmel, or decline to carry out his designs, did not occur to the one-idea'd priest. Like all solitary people, isolated from passing events, he made no allowance for occurrences outside of his routine. Yet at this moment a sudden thought whitened his yellow cheek. What if the Father Superior deemed it necessary to impart the secret to Francisco? Would the child recoil at the deception, and, perhaps, cease to love him? It was the first time, in his supreme selfishness, he had taken the acolyte's feelings into account. He had thought of him only as one owing implicit obedience to him as a temporal and spiritual guide.

"Reverend Father!"

He turned impatiently. It was his muleteer, José. Father Pedro's sunken eye brightened.

"Ah, José! Quickly, then; hast thou found Sanchicha?"

"Truly, your reverence! And I have brought her with me, just as she is; though if your reverence make more of her than to fill the six-foot hole and say a prayer over her, I'll give the mule that brought her here for food for the bull's horns. She neither hears nor speaks, but whether from weakness or sheer wantonness, I know not."

"Peace, then! and let thy tongue take example from

hers. Bring her with thee into the sacristy and attend without. Go!"

Father Pedro watched the disappearing figure of the muleteer and hurriedly swept his thin, dry hand, veined and ribbed like a brown November leaf, over his stony forehead, with a sound that seemed almost a rustle. Then he suddenly stiffened his fingers over his breviary, dropped his arms perpendicularly before him, and with a rigid step returned to the corridor and passed into the sacristy.

For a moment in the half-darkness the room seemed to be empty. Tossed carelessly in the corner appeared some blankets topped by a few straggling black horse-tails, like an unstranded *riata*. A trembling agitated the mass as Father Pedro approached. He bent over the heap and distinguished in its midst the glowing black eyes of Sanchicha, the Indian centenarian of the Mission San Carmel. Only her eyes lived. Helpless, boneless, and jelly-like, old age had overtaken her with a mild form of deliquescence.

"Listen, Sanchicha," said the father, gravely. "It is important that thou shouldst refresh thy memory for a moment. Look back fourteen years, mother; it is but yesterday to thee. Thou dost remember the baby—a little *muchacha* thou broughtest me then—fourteen years ago?"

The old woman's eyes became intelligent, and turned with a quick look towards the open door of the church, and thence towards the choir.

The Padre made a motion of irritation. "No, no! Thou dost not understand; thou dost not attend me. Knowest thou of any mark of clothing, trinket, or amulet found upon the babe?"

The light of the old woman's eyes went out. She might have been dead. Father Pedro waited a moment, and then laid his hand impatiently on her shoulder.

"Dost thou mean there are none?"

A ray of light struggled back into her eyes.

"None."

"And thou hast kept back or put away no sign nor mark of her parentage? Tell me, on this crucifix."

The eyes caught the crucifix, and became as empty as the orbits of the carven Christ upon it.

Father Pedro waited patiently. A moment passed; only the sound of the muleteer's spurs was heard in the courtyard.

"It is well," he said at last, with a sigh of relief. "Pepita shall give thee some refreshment, and José will bring thee back again. I will summon him."

He passed out of the sacristy door, leaving it open. A ray of sunlight darted eagerly in, and fell upon the grotesque heap in the corner. Sanchicha's eyes lived again; more than that, a singular movement came over her face. The hideous caverns of her toothless mouth opened — she laughed. The step of José was heard in the corridor, and she became again inert.

The third day, which should have brought the return of Antonio, was nearly spent. Father Pedro was impatient but not alarmed. The good fathers at San José might naturally detain Antonio for the answer, which might require deliberation. If any mischance had occurred to Francisco, Antonio would have returned or sent a special messenger. At sunset he was in his accustomed seat in the orchard, his hands clasped over the breviary in his listless lap, his eyes fixed upon the mountain between him and that mysterious sea that had brought so much into his life. He was filled with a strange desire to see it, a vague curiosity hitherto unknown to his pre-occupied life; he wished to gaze upon that strand, perhaps the very spot where she had been found; he doubted not his questioning eyes would discover some forgotten

trace of her; under his persistent will and aided by the Holy Virgin, the sea would give up its secret. He looked at the fog creeping along the summit, and recalled the latest gossip of San Carmel; how that since the advent of the Americanos it was gradually encroaching on the Mission. The hated name vividly recalled to him the features of the stranger as he had stood before him three nights ago, in this very garden; so vividly that he sprang to his feet with an exclamation. It was no fancy, but Señor Cranch himself advancing from under the shadow of a pear tree.

"I reckoned I'd catch you here," said Mr. Cranch, with the same dry, practical business fashion, as if he were only resuming an interrupted conversation, "and I reckon I ain't going to keep you a minit longer than I did t' other day." He mutely referred to his watch, which he already held in his hand, and then put it back in his pocket. "Well! we found her!"

"Francisco," interrupted the priest with a single stride, laying his hand upon Cranch's arm, and staring into his eyes.

Mr. Cranch quietly removed Father Pedro's hand. "I reckon that was n't the name as I caught it," he returned dryly. "Had n't you better sit down?"

"Pardon me — pardon me, Señor," said the priest, hastily sinking back upon his bench, "I was thinking of other things. You — you — came upon me suddenly. I thought it was the acolyte. Go on, Señor! I am interested."

"I thought you'd be," said Cranch, quietly. "That's why I came. And then you might be of service too."

"True, true," said the priest, with rapid accents; "and this girl, Señor, this girl is" —

"Juanita, the *mestiza*, adopted daughter of Don Juan Briones, over on the Santa Clare Valley," replied Cranch,