

## CHAPTER II.

Pepita and the others, Manuel with them, ended their gala-day with still another festivity. They dined together at a little café, and heard the bull-fight fought over again by those around them. At a table near them sat three chulos, who talked together in voices loud enough to be heard throughout their meal. And it was of Sebastiano they spoke, giving dramatic recitals of his daring deeds, telling each other of what he had done, of what he could do, and that Madrid had never seen his rival or peer. And then his conquests. It was true that noble ladies--beautiful and noble--had sent him messages and tokens. Gonsalvo, who was his intimate friend, could tell many things if he chose. Sebastiano had brilliant triumphs. Once he had even been in great danger because the woman who loved and sought him was of such rank that her relatives would have resorted to the stiletto rather than allow her infatuation to continue.

"But it is said truly that he had no love for her--that he has little for any of them," said one. "They run after him too much, these women."

"But there was one to-day--" began one of the others. "I heard it of Alfonso--he saw her at the bull-fight--Sebastiano--and tried to find out--"

He made a movement at this moment which brought Pepita directly within his view. She had been hidden from him before by the figure of Jovita.

He stopped with his wine untasted and stared at her. A moment later he bent forward and spoke in a lower tone to his companions, who turned to look also. Alfonso had pointed her out to him as she left the Plaza de Toros, and he had recognized her again.

"The little one is there," was what he said, "behind you. He asked if any of us had seen her before; if we knew her name."

Pepita did not hear him, and did not know that from that hour they would all know her, or that at least there would be few of them who did not. For Sebastiano to show an interest in a woman, to even go so far as to ask her name, was such a new thing that it must be spoken of and attract attention to her. And that she was not a fine lady, but only a pretty unknown girl with a rose in her hair, made the matter all the more exciting. When she fell asleep, tired and happy, that night, already she was on the road to fame. Sebastiano, who was the adored of his order, who in spite of his adventures sought no woman, had asked her name, had made efforts to discover it, and had learned that among those who had had the good fortune to see and speak to her she was known as "the pretty sister of José." A week from this time José came home one evening bringing Manuel with him. Manuel was often with him--in fact he had many friends; almost every day some gay or grave young fellow managed to attach himself to him, and somehow the acquaintance always shared itself soon afterward with Pepita. But Manuel appeared oftener than the rest, having a timid obstinacy, and seeming only puzzled and not discouraged by the indifference which sometimes ignored his very existence. On this

particular evening he was moved from his usual calm, and so was José. They had seen Sebastiano; they had spoken to him; in the presence of a circle of his friends and admirers he had drunk wine with them. "We were passing the wine-shop and we saw him," explained Manuel, "and we went in to look on a little and hear him talk. One of the chulos who stood near spoke to him quickly when he saw us--as if he knew us--and presently the same chulo came and spoke to José, and soon Sebastiano came and spoke too. The one who approached us first was one of the three who drank at the table near us on the evening after the bull-fight. Once, in his boyhood, Sebastiano lived near the village you left; he knew Padre Alejandro and some others; he was pleased to see José and speak of them--it was as if they were friends at once."

"He has a good heart," put in José; "they all say that of him. He remembered everything--even old Juan, who lived to be a hundred and was bent double. He asked if he lived yet. It seems strange that he was once so near us, and was a little lad, ill-used and poor. He is not too proud to remember it. He would be a good friend to one in trouble--Sebastiano--though he is rich and spoken of by the whole world."

So great a celebrity José was convinced must be known to the entire universe. That night, as Pepita made ready for her bed, old Jovita, who had already retired, lay and looked at her.

The girl stood in the flood of brilliant white moonlight which bathed

part of the bare room; her round dimpled arms were lifted as she unwound the soft dusky coils of her hair, to which there yet clung a few stars of jasmine. There was the shadow of a smile on her lips, and she was humming a tune.

"What does he want with José--this Sebastiano?" said Jovita, grumbly.

"Who knows?" said Pepita.

"He wants something," Jovita went on. "They don't make friends with those beneath them for nothing, these fine ones. They all talk of you, these foolish fellows, and he has heard, and makes friends so that he can see you."

"What do they say of me?" asked

Pepita, without deigning to look up.

"Men are all fools," grumbled Jovita; "and they think girls are fools too. They say you have a pretty face; and he thinks he can make a fool of you if you are not one."

"Does he?" said Pepita, with a dimpling cruel little smile. "Let him come to-morrow--to-night. Let him begin."

"He will begin soon enough," Jovita answered. "You will see. Be sure he does not play the old game with you as he did with Sarita."

Pepita shook the small stray blossoms out of her hair and began to retwist the coil, breaking into singing in a clear voice:

    "White, white is the jasmine flower;  
Let its stars light thee  
Here to my casement,  
Where I await thee.

    White, white is the jasmine flower,  
Sweet, sweet is the heart of the rose,  
Sweet my mouth's blossom--"

She stopped short and dropped her arms.

"See," she said, "let him want what he will, let him come a thousand times, and I will never speak to him."

In the gardens the next Sunday they met him. Pepita was talking to a young girl whose name was Isabella, and whose brother. Juan was following in the footsteps of Manuel and the rest. It was Isabella who first saw the matador, and uttered an exclamation.

"Your brother is coming," she cried, "with--yes, with Sebastiano."

José's simple face was on fire with delight, but Sebastiano looked less gay, and his step was less carelessly buoyant than it had been in the bull-ring. As he approached the group he looked only at Pepita. But Pepita looked only at José, her eyes laughing.

"Jovita is cross," she said; "she has been asking for you. She wishes to go home."

Sebastiano's eyes were fastened upon her face, upon her red lips, as she spoke. He had heard that she was like this; that she gave her glances to no man; that she was prettier than the rose in bloom, and as cruel as a young hawk, and his heart beat as he found himself near to her. Since the hour he had seen her he had thought only of how he might see her again, of how he might find her. He had made one bold plan after another, and had been forced to abandon each of them, and then mere chance had thrown José in his path. And now the instant he approached her she was about to elude him.

He spoke a few hurried words to José. It was too early to go away; the pleasure of the day was scarcely at its height; he wished to entertain them; they must not go.

"I will go and speak to Jovita," said José, and he went, leaving the four together.

The two simpler ones were somewhat abashed by the splendor of the dashing figure; they gazed at it with mingled curiosity and joy. To be so near it was enough, without effort at conversation. Sebastiano moved to Pepita's side. A Spanish lover loses little time.

"I saw you," he said, "at the bull-fight."

Pepita looked over his shoulder and smiled at a passing woman who had greeted her. Her face dimpled, and she showed her small white teeth. It was as if she did not see the matador at all.

"It was at the bull-fight," he persisted. "Two weeks ago. You had a red flower in your hair, as you have to-day. Ever since--"

"It was not true," Pepita said gayly, to Isabella, "what I said of Jovita. She is always cross, but she does not wish to go home. She met an old woman she knew in her young days, and is enjoying herself very much."

"Why did you say it?" asked Isabella, with simple wonder.

"Because I wished to go home myself."

"Truly!" said Isabella. "Why is that?"

"I am not entertained so much to-day," answered Pepita.

"We will make it more amusing," said Sebastiano, eagerly. "It shall be more amusing--"

"There is Jovita with her old woman now," interrupted Pepita. "I will go and speak to them."

She was gone the next instant--her movement was like the flight of a bird. Sebastiano stood and stared after her in silence until Juan addressed him respectfully.

"She is very wonderful," he said. "She changes her mind before one knows. Just before you came she said she was amused, and wished to remain."

"Perhaps," began Sebastiano, much discomforted--"perhaps it was I--"

"Ah, senor," said Juan, with great politeness, "never. It is said that she always does what she chooses, and she chooses to do a thousand things."

"That is because she is so pretty," said Isabella. "She is so much prettier than all the others, and she does not care."

"A woman who is so pretty as that," remarked Juan, sententiously, "need



not care."

"She says," put in Isabella, "that if she does not care, others will; but if she should care, the others--" She stopped, meeting Sebastiano's eyes and becoming a little confused.

"What would happen then," he said, "if she should care?"

"I do not know," said Isabella; "but she never will--never."

But if she changed often toward others, Sebastiano found no change in her mood toward him. They did not leave the gardens until late in the day. Jovita was enjoying too greatly the comradeship of her old woman, and was ready to enjoy any pleasure offered to her. Sebastiano had a full purse, and perhaps understood old women of Jovita's class. He made himself very agreeable to these two, finding them the most comfortable seats and supplying them with things good to eat and drink, over which they gossiped together, leaving the young ones to amuse themselves as they pleased. They were very gay, the younger ones; even Manuel, elated by the presence and hospitalities of Sebastiano, made little jokes. But none of them were gayer than Pepita. She was the centre figure of the party; they all looked at her, listened to her, were led by her slightest caprice. They went here and there, did this or that, because she wished it. It was Sebastiano who was the host of the hour, but by instinct each knew it was Pepita who was the chief guest--who must be pleased.

"Is she pleased?" the matador asked José once in a low-toned aside.

"Does she not entertain herself?"

"Does she not say so?" answered José, with some slight secret misgiving.

"I do not know," said Sebastiano, looking down. "She does not speak to me."

José pushed his hat aside and rubbed his forehead. His respect for Pepita's whims had begun early in life and was founded on experience.

"She is young," he faltered--"she is very young. When she enjoys herself she--"

He paused with an uneasy movement of his shoulders. It was quite terrible to him that she should treat with such caprice and disdain so splendid and heroic a person; but he knew there was nothing to be done.

"She admires you," he said, with courageous mendacity. "She saw you at the bullfight."

"She will be there again? You will take her--the next time?" said Sebastiano.

"Yes," answered José. "She has asked that I will. It was the greatest

pleasure of her life."

But it was true that during all the afternoon she had never once spoken to Sebastian. She had been as gay as a young bird, and the spirit of the party, her laughter, her pretty mockeries and sauciness, had carried all before them. Manuel had been reduced to hopeless slavery. Isabella had looked on in secret reverential wonder. Jovita's old woman had glanced aside again and again, nodding her head, and saying, sagely: "Yes, she will always have it her own way--the little one. You are lucky in having such a grandchild. She will never be a load." But throughout it all Pepita had managed it that not one of her words had fallen directly to Sebastiano. If he spoke to her, she gave her answer to the one nearest to him. If he did not put an actual question to her, she replied merely with a laugh or a piquant grimace or gesture, which included all the rest. It was worse than coldness. To the others it was perhaps not perceptible at all; only he who searched for her eyes, who yearned and strove to meet them, knew that they never rested upon him for an instant.

And then when he so daringly arranged that José should invite him to return home with them, to what did it all come? He was lured to old Jovita's side by the fact that at the beginning of the walk Pepita kept near her, and no sooner had the old woman involved him in tiresome talk, from which he could not escape, than the small figure flitted away and ended the journey homeward under the wing of José, and accompanied by Manuel and a certain gay little Carlos, who joked and laughed like a

child.

And when after they arrived, and the moon rose, and they sat under the vines, though there was gayety and laughter, he knew, as before, that in some mysterious manner he was excluded from it, though he seemed the honored and distinguished guest. Carlos, who sat near some shrubs in bloom, made a little wreath of white flowers, and as she played and sang to her guitar, Pepita wore it on her head. Then Manuel, not to be outdone, wove a garland of pink oleander, and she threw it about her throat and sang on. Sebastiano forgot at last to speak, and could only sit and look at her. He could see and hear nothing else. It was almost the same thing with the rest, for that matter. She was somehow the centre figure round which they all seemed to have gathered, as she sat there playing, a night breeze sometimes stirring the soft ruffled hair on her forehead, which was like black floss silk; and whatsoever she sang, however passionate and tender the wild little song, however passionate and tender her voice, her young eyes had mockery in them--mocked at the words, the tenderness of her own voice, and at those who were moved by it; and most of all Sebastiano knew that she mocked at himself.

But he could not go away. Some strange thing had happened to him, it seemed; it was as if a spell had fallen upon him.

Better to be mocked than to go away. He stayed so late that Jovita fell asleep and nodded under the shadow of the grape-vines. And at last

Pepita put down her guitar and rose. She stood upright in the moonlight, and extended her pretty arms and stretched them, laughing.

"Good-night," she said. "Jovita will amuse you. Already there have been too many hours in this day."

She ran into the house with no other adieu than a wave of her hand, and the next minute they could hear her singing in her room, and knew she was going to bed.

Sebastiano rose slowly.

"Good-night," he said to José.

Manuel and Carlos said good-night also, and went out together, walking side by side down the white moonlit road; but Sebastiano moved away from the shadowing vines with a lingering step, and José went with him a short distance. Something in his hero's air of gravity and abstraction somewhat overawed him.

"She has not been entertained," said Sebastiano at last.

"Yes, yes," said José. "She has had pleasure all the day. And she is fond of pleasure."

"She said there had been too many hours in the day."

José rubbed his head a little reflectively for a moment, and then his countenance somewhat brightened.

"She wished to lie a little for amusement," he said, affectionately.

"There is no wrong in her--Pepita--but sometimes, to be amused, she will tell a little lie without sin in it, because she knows we understand her. She does not expect us to believe. We who are used to her know her better. You will also understand in time."

"Then I may come again?" asked Sebastiano.

The heavy body of José almost trembled with simple pleasure.

"It is all yours, senor," he said, with a gesture including the little house and all the grape-vines and orange blossoms and oleanders. "It is poor and small, but it is yours--and we--"

Sebastiano's dark eyes rested for an instant on a little window under the eaves where a jasmine vine wreathed a thick tangle of green, starred with white flowers. And as he looked a voice broke through the fragrant barrier singing a careless, broken bit of song--

"White, white is the jasmine flower;  
Let its stars light thee."

"It is Pepita," said José. "She always sings when she is pleased. It is always a good sign."

If her singing was a sign of pleasure, then she must have been enjoying her life greatly in the days that came afterward, for she was singing continually. As she went about her work there was always the shadow of a smile on her lips and in her eyes, as if her thoughts amused her. And she was in such gay spirits that José was enchanted. He had only one vague source of trouble: all the rest had turned out so well! It had all occurred just as he had dreamed, but scarcely dared to hope, in those by-gone days when he had been hard-worked and ill-fed and ill-clad. He had a good place, and what seemed by comparison incredibly good wages. He had the nice little house, and Pepita had holiday garments as gay and pretty as any other girl, and looked, when dressed in them, gayer and ten times prettier than all the rest.

That was what he had looked forward to most of all, and his end was attained. And when he walked out with her, all the young fellows who were allowed to come near--and many who were not--fell in love. Yes, it was true; he saw it himself and heard it on every side. It would take the fingers of both hands to count those who were frankly enamoured, beginning with Carlos and Manuel. But it was at this point that the vague trouble came in. And it was Pepita herself who caused it, by her treatment of her adorers. To say that she dealt out scorn to them would be to say too much; she simply dealt out nothing--and less. They might come and go; they might follow and gaze and sigh--she did not even

deign to seem to know they did so, unless by chance one became too pertinacious, and then she merely transfixed him with a soft, cruelly smiling eye. "She will not marry any of them," said José to Jovita in bewilderment.

"That will come soon enough," said Jovita. "She is pretty, and it makes her a little fool--all girls are like that; but one of these days you may look out--it will be all over. She is just the one to blaze up all at once."

"I do not think she is a fool like other girls," said José, with gravity. "But she does not seem to care about love; she does not seem to know. She is not even sorry for them when they are miserable." He did not consider himself when he thought of her marriage; in truth he put himself in the background, for if some other man filled her life and her heart his vocation would be gone, and there would be some dull hours for him before he could become used to it. But he had an innocent feeling that without this love, of which all men talked so much, the life he wished to be bright would not be quite complete. She was too pretty and too good never to be married--never to have a home of her own and some fine fellow to love the dust she walked on. He himself was only José, and a brother was, after all, a poor substitute for a lover who could talk and sing and make jokes, and wear such a dashing air that she would be proud of him.

"That is it," he said, sagely, to himself. "A woman must have some one



to be proud of, and she could never be proud of me. If I were Sebastiano now, it would be different."

He stopped suddenly and rubbed his head, as his habit was when he was startled or confused, and his face became rather red. Perhaps this was because he remembered that among all the rest, the magnificent, the illustrious, the beautiful Sebastiano was the one to whom she showed least grace. In fact it was almost mysterious, her manner toward him. They had seen him often--he had come in many evenings to sit under the vines; when they went out for pleasure it somehow happened that they nearly always met him; but when he joined them Pepita became at once possessed of some strange wilful spirit. Upon reflection José found that he had never yet heard her speak to him: it appeared to him as he thought it over that she always by some device avoided answering directly what he said to her.

"That is a strange thing," said José, deeply mystified, as he suddenly realized this, "when one remembers how he can slay a bull. There is no one else who can slay a bull as he can. It is enough to make one weep for joy. And yet she can treat him ill."

But he did not know how ill; only Sebastiano knew that. Since the day he had stood in the arena and had seen all in a moment, as if a star had suddenly started into the sky, the small black head and rose of a face, he had lived in a fevered dream--a dream in which he pursued always something which seemed within his grasp and yet forever eluded him. What

had he cared for all the rest of the women? Nothing. It had confused and angered him when they had thrown themselves in his way or sent him offerings, and when he had been told of this or that beauty who was in love with his proud, bearing and dashing courage. Women! What were women? He had only cared for the bulls, for the clamor of the people, and the wild excitement of the arena. All he had wished for was to learn the best stroke, the finest leap. But this girl, who had never opened her scornful little mouth to deign him a word--who had never once allowed him to look in her eyes--somehow this one drove him half mad. He could think of nothing else; he forgot even the bulls; he spent all the day and sometimes all the night in devising plans to entrap her into speaking, to force her to look at him. How obstinate she was! How she could elude him, as if by some magic!

What had he not done that he might be near her? He had followed her everywhere. José did not know that she scarcely ever went out without his following and speaking to her. He used to spring up by her side as if he had risen out of the earth, but after the first two or three times he never succeeded in making her start or show any feeling whatever.

But that first time, and even the second, she had started. The first time she had gone to the old well for water, and as she stood resting in the shade a moment he appeared With a bouquet of beautiful strange flowers in his hand.

"God be with you!" he said, and laid the flowers down a moment and drew

the water for her.

She watched him draw it, smiling just a little.

"It will be a fine day for the bull-fight," he said, when her jar was filled.

She put her hand up and shaded her working eyes as she looked at the blue sky, but she said nothing.

"Do you go to-day to the Plaza de Toros?" he asked. "You shall have good places--the best. They are good bulls to-day, black Andalusians, fierce and hard to manage. There will be fine sport. You will go?"

She leaned against the side of the well and looked down into the water, where she could see her face reflected in the cool, dark depths. The next moment Sebastiano's was reflected also. He held the flowers in his hand.

"These!" he said. "It was one of the gardeners of the king who gave them to me. They are such as the queen sometimes wears. I brought them that you might wear them at the bull-fight."

She saw their beauty reflected in the water. She would not look at them directly. They were very beautiful. She had never seen such flowers. And

the queen herself had worn others like them. If any one else had brought them--but it was Sebastiano. And she remembered Sarita. Perhaps he had at some time given some to Sarita, knowing that to a country girl who knew nothing they would seem very grand. Sarita would have been sure to take them.

A wicked little look came into her face. She turned as if to take up her water jar. But Sebastiano laid his hand upon it.

"You will not speak," he said passionately. "No; nor even look at the flowers I bring you. You shall tell me at least what I have done. Come, now. Am I a devil? What is it?"

She put her hands behind her back and fixed her great eyes upon him for a moment. He could not say now that she had not looked at him. He thought he could keep her, did he, when she did not choose to stay? She, Pepita! She stood there staring at him for a moment, and then turned about and walked off, leaving him with her water jar. Let him stand and watch over it all day if he would.

She went back to the house and called Jovita.

"If you want your water now," she said, "you will have to go to the well for it. It is drawn, and Senor Sebastiano is taking care of it."

"Mother of God!" said Jovita, staring, "she is mad with her Senor

Sebastiano."

But not another word could she gain, and before she could reach the well she met a boy carrying the water jar toward the house, and was told that he had been paid to bring it.

They went to the bull-fight; and, as Pepita sat among the rest, out-blooming the red flower in her hair, she heard it said that Sebastiano had never before been so magnificent, had never shown such daring and dexterity.

"He looks at Pepita," said Isabella to Carlos. "When he entered, his eyes found her before he saw anything else."

Yes, he saw Pepita, and Pepita sat and watched him with as cool an interest as if the peril with which he played meant nothing. Her lovely eyes glowed under their drooping lashes, but it was only with a momentary excitement caused by the fierce sport; the man was nothing.

So it seemed at least to Sebastiano. It was a bad bull he encountered, savage and treacherous, and maddened by his rage. Once there was a moment when a shadow of a misstep would have cost him his life. There was no time to look at Pepita then, but when the danger was passed and he glanced toward her, she was softly waving her fan and smiling up at Manuel as if she had not even seen.

"She has a bad heart," he said to himself, with fierce impatience. "It is not nature that a young girl should mock at everything, and be so cruel, and have neither feeling nor even a little fear. She has a bad heart, or none at all."

He would not look at her again; he swore it to himself. And for a short time he kept his vow; but there came a moment when something, some irresistible feeling, conquered him. It was as if he must look--as if some magic forced him, drew his eyes toward her in spite of himself. And when he had looked, a sharp shock thrilled him, for she herself was looking at him; her eyes were fixed upon him with a strange steadiness, as if perhaps they had been resting upon him for some minutes and she had forgotten herself. It was a little thing perhaps, but it was enough for his hot blood and swift-veering impulsive nature. He had just given the final stroke; he was panting, glowing. The people were shouting, rising in their seats, and repeating his name with caressing, applauding epithets attached to it. Chance had brought him near the seat in which she sat, with Jovita and José and the others near her. They were applauding with the rest, all but Pepita, who only sat and smiled. And in the midst of it Sebastiano made a swift movement, so swift that it was scarcely to be understood--a mere touch of the hand to the shoulder--and something bright, like a many-hued bird, flew over the barrier and fell upon Pepita's lap. It was the knot of gay, rich ribbon which a moment before the matador had worn.

"It is the devisa!" exclaimed Isabella, in an awestruck tone.

"It is his devisa," cried José--"his devisa, Pepita. He has thrown it to you yourself--Sebastiano."

The next moment he was struck dumb with amazement. Pepita sat upright and broke into a little laugh. She lightly waved her fan.

"Why did he not throw it to Jovita?" she said, and with a cruel, careless little movement she swept the devisa from her knee; it fell, and she set her foot upon it.

"She has trodden upon it," said old Jovita. "She has done it for pride, and to show herself above others. She is ready for the devil. Some one should beat her."

"It was the devisa," gasped José. "Sebastiano."

Pepita left her seat. It seemed as if something strange must have happened to her. The crimson had leaped to her cheeks, and her eyes were ablaze.

"What is it to me, his devisa?" she said. "I do not want it. I will not have it. Let him throw a thousand, and I will tread upon them all, one after the other. Let it lie in the dirt. Let him give it to those others, those women who want it--and him." She would go home at once; not to the pleasure-gardens, not anywhere but back to the cottage;

and José followed her meekly, struck dumb. He had seen her wilful, capricious, childishly passionate, a little hard to understand, many times before, but never like this. What had occurred to her? What had Sebastiano done?

Jovita had picked up the knot of gay ribbon and brushed the dust off it, and carried it home with her, grumbling fiercely. She was never averse to grumbling a little, and here, the saints knew, was cause.

"For pride," she kept repeating; "for pride, and to show that others are beneath her! Mother of God! the king himself is not good enough for her! Let him come and pray upon his knees that she will go to the palace and wear a crown, and he will see what she will say! It is these fools of men who spoil her, as if there had never been a pretty face before. Let them treat her as she treats them, and she will be humble enough. She was always one of the devil's children with her pride!"

But Pepita, who heard it all, said nothing, though once or twice she gave her little mocking laugh.