

CHAPTER III.

By the time Pepita had reached home her mood had changed--her anger was gone, or at least the signs of it were. She sang as she prepared the supper, and chatted gayly with José. It appeared that, after all, she had enjoyed the bull-fight; it had even been better than the others; she had had great pleasure. She made delightful little jests about everything; she recounted the names of the people she had seen and known; she described to him the dresses of the girls, the airs and graces of the men. She laughed, and obliged José to laugh also, and all the time she looked so pretty, with the queer light in her eyes, the gleam of her little wicked white teeth, and the brilliant spot of color on her cheeks, that she was enough to turn one's head.

The moon was at its brightest that night. All the earth was bathed in pure, magic whiteness--the whiteness which somehow seems to bring perfume and stillness and mysterious tenderness with it. Such a night! One breathed roses and orange blossoms and jasmine. Pepita sat under the roses and sang and talked, and José smoked and was happy, but still in a state of bewilderment, though the stillness and beauty of the night soothed him and made him content to ruminate without words.

Jovita fell asleep. She always fell asleep out-of-doors on the warm summer nights, and in-doors by the fire when it was winter. Pepita ceased to talk, and sang one little song after another; then she even ceased to sing, and only touched her guitar softly now and then. After a

while José, who had stretched himself upon a bench, fell asleep also.

Pepita ceased to touch her guitar. She looked out at the flowers sleeping in the moonlight, and for a few minutes was very still; then she laid the guitar down and stepped out into the brightness.

In the light of the moon one cannot see the color in a face. Perhaps this was why hers seemed to be gone. She looked quite pale, and her lovely little brows were drawn together until they made a black line across her forehead. She clasped her hands behind her head, and with her face a little thrown back, so that the light fell full upon it, wandered out among the trees and fragrant flowering things. She liked the jasmine best, and over one part of the low, rough wall there climbed one which blossomed with a myriad stars. So she went and stood by it, and looked now at it, now up and down the road, which the moon had made into a path of snow.

And as she stood there, suddenly there started up on the other side of the wall the figure she knew so well, and the next moment it had vaulted over and was close to her. Sebastiano!

She stood still, her hands still clasped behind her head, her face still upturned, and looked at him.

He folded his arms and looked at her. As for him, whether the moonlight

was to blame or not, he was as pale as death.

"Yes," he said, "you are always the same. You do not change. One may come at any hour. But listen to me. You think I have come to reproach you. Why should I? I have fought bulls, but that does not teach men how to deal with women. I thought that, if a man gave you his soul and his life and the breath of his body, you would listen some day and let him think of you. You are a woman, and you are made to be loved; but there is something hard in your heart. You are proud of having mocked a man who was honest and loved you. But hear me: it is better, after all, to be less pretty and more a woman."

He stopped an instant. She had changed her position, and stood by the jasmine, stripping the blossoms from it one by one. She began to smile and sing softly, as if to herself:

"Oh, bird at my window,
Sing but one song to me,
My lover who is light and gay."

"And more a woman," said Sebastiano. "It is women men want."

Pepita looked up and laughed; then she sang again:

"Who stirs the blossoms in the night,
Who breaks the orange flower."

Sebastiano made a swift movement and caught her wrists, his eyes flashing fire.

"That is nothing," he said. "You are woman enough. The time will come. It will not be always like this. You can be made to love. Yes, you are one of those who must be made. Then you will suffer too, and it will be good for you. You will speak then."

He paused a moment, and held her arms a little apart, looking at her with a sudden change to mournfulness.

"How pretty you are!" he said. "How little and how pretty! If you were good and gentle, and one might touch your cheek softly or stroke your hair, how one would love and serve you! No, you cannot move. I have not fought bulls for nothing. If I let you move you will struggle and hurt yourself. Listen. I am going away. I will trouble you no more now. I will wait. If one waits long enough, pain ceases and one forgets. It is so with a wound, why not with what one feels for a woman? I said you could be made to love; but let that be left for another man to do. I want no love like that. I want a woman. Some day you will not cast the *devisa* under your feet. You will take it and hide it in your breast. It will not be mine, but some other man's who loves you less. I loved you, I was mad for you; but it shall cease. It is better to think only of the bulls than to play the fool for a woman who has no love in her heart. You are pretty, but that is not everything. You can work spells,

but a man can break through them. There! Go!"

He gave her one long look, flung her hands aside, and had vaulted the wall and was gone himself one moment later.

Pepita stood still with clinched hands dropped at her side, staring with wide fierce eyes down the white moonlit road.

The next evening José came home from his work later than usual. He came down the road with a drooping head and a slow and heavy step. When he sat down to his food he ate but little, and as he bent over his soup he heard Jovita scolding.

"It is gone," she was saying. "You took it, and have thrown it away."

"Was it not mine?" said Pepita. "It was mine. I cared nothing for it, and have done what I chose with it."

José lifted his head and listened.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"She has thrown away the devisa, which I had saved," answered Jovita.

"I laid it away, and she has taken it. What harm did it do her that it should lie out of her sight in peace?"

"Did you do that?" José said to Pepita.

"Was it meant for her?" said Pepita. "I told you he ought to have thrown it to her and not to me."

José broke a piece of bread and crumbled it on the table mechanically.

"You need not have done that," he said. "I wish you had left it in its place. It did no hurt, and we shall not see him again. He is not coming any more. And soon he goes away; and who knows what may happen?"

Pepita walked out of the house without speaking. She did not come back for a long time, and they did not know where she had gone; but as that was her way when she was in a naughty humor, they were not anxious about her.

When she returned at last the moon was shining again, and Jovita was asleep in the shadow of the vines, and José sat on the bench outside the door, smoking.

Pepita sat down on the threshold and rested her head against the side of the door. She said nothing at all, and only looked out at the dew-laden flowers sparkling in the garden.

There was silence for several minutes, and then José turned uneasily and spoke.

"Yes," he said, "he will not come again; and soon he goes away. It is for the best. He is very strong and determined. Perhaps that comes of fighting bulls. He said he wanted you, but you did not want him, so he must forget about you. He must cease to think of you or hear of you. He asked me as a friend not to let him see me for a while, until it was over. To see me would remind him of you, and that would not do. He asked it as a friend--there was no unkind-ness--he is my friend, yes, though he is Sebastiano and I am only a poor fellow who works hard. It will all be as well as ever between us when it is all done with and we meet again. If you had wanted him we should have been brothers."

Pepita sat still. What strange thing had happened to her? She did not know. Something was the matter with her breathing. Something hurt her side--labored in it with heavy beatings like blows which suffocated her. She shut her hands and drove the nails into her palms. She could not have spoken for the world.

Before José could say more she rose with fierce suddenness, and passed him and was gone again.

The poor fellow looked after her small swift form mournfully.

"If she had wanted him," he said, "he would have made her a good

husband, and we should have been brothers. But she is not easy to please, and she would not give one a chance who did not please her at first. And there is no one who slays a bull as he does!"

Pepita flew like a bird until she reached the low wall where the jasmine grew, at the spot where she had stood the night before. There she stopped, panting. The breath of the jasmine filled all the air about her. She looked up the white road.

A strange new passion filled her. She did not know whether it was anger or not, but if it was anger it was of a new kind, with more pain in it than she was used to. He would not come again--not at all again! He would not appear at her side as if he had sprung from the earth; he would not follow her or plead with her, or look at her every moment he was near her; he would not try to make her speak. Only last night he was here in this very spot, and now he would never speak like that again. He would forget her, not care for her--forget her, Pepita.

She would not believe it. She knew he could not--they never did; they always loved her best and wanted no one else. And still the labored throbbing went on in her side and she panted for breath.

"Come back," she cried, looking up the white road. "I tell you to come back. You shall. Do you hear? I tell you--I--Pepita!"

But there was no answer, no sound of any footstep, no sign of any

advancing shadow. The road stretched out its white length in utter solitude, and a strange, wild look came into her beautiful little face.

"Do you not hear?" she persisted. "I will not speak to you if you do come; I will give you nothing; I will not look at you; but you shall come because I will it--because I am Pepita."

Still there was only silence and loneliness. Suddenly she flung out her hands and stamped her foot.

"I will kill you," she said. "If you do not come--I will kill you!"

Then almost immediately she put her clinched hand to her beating side and sank down upon the earth, burying her face in the dew-wet fragrant tangle of the jasmine.

But he did not come back. And yet every night she went and stood by the low wall, and looked up the white road and watched and waited. For a long time she did not know what she intended to do if he should appear. All was vague in her mind. At first it seemed only as if her whole being went out into the fierce demand that he should come, and the obstinate proud belief that it must be as she wished--that he could not resist and disobey her. Who had ever disobeyed her? Not José; not Jovita, for all her grumblings; not any of those others. And was it likely that he who had adored her more than all the rest, who had watched her with that hungry love in his eyes, could do what no other had ever done? She told

herself this over and over again; but he did not come. She began to feel a feverish eagerness when she dressed herself, a passionate desire to be pretty--to be prettier than ever before. She used to stand before her scrap of looking-glass to try on one bit of simple finery after another, twisting up the soft cloud of her hair afresh a dozen times a day, and putting a fresh flower in it. She went to the well again and again and filled her jar, and emptied and filled it again, and lingered, and tried not to look round when she heard a footstep; but the right one never came, though her heart's throbbing shook her many times in false alarm. She was only a child--a passionate Spanish child, ignorant and full of fierce young natural impulses--and she knew only childish, crude methods. So she made herself beautiful, and showed herself in the places where she thought he would see her and be unable to resist her will and her beauty; but though she made José take her here and there and everywhere, she never saw Sebastiano but once. It was in the Public Garden, where they had first met. They were sitting in the shade refreshing themselves with wine, and he came toward them, not at first seeing them. Pepita clutched her fan until she broke it, and a wild exultation sprang in her breast. She had seen before she left home that she had never before been so pretty.

There had come into her face a new look--a fire that had burned deeper every charm. He would see--he would see that she was Pepita still, and that he could not keep his word if she chose--if she chose.

He drew nearer and nearer, still not seeing them. He was talking to the

three companions who were with him. He was richly dressed, and looked stronger than ever, and more handsome and graceful. He came still nearer. No, she would not speak to him. No! He looked up and his eye fell upon them--upon José and Jovita and Pepita! He drew back a step and stood still; he made a low bow to them, a grand bow, such as he made when he was in the bull-ring and the people applauded. He turned away and passed on. Yes, without a word.

Jose sighed a deep and mournful sigh and rose to his feet.

"Come," he said. "We must go. It is best not to stay. He does not wish to see us, and he asked that I would keep away. It is a pity--but he asked it."

The breath was coming in sharp little puffs through Pepita's delicate nostrils. It was as if she had been struck a blow. She walked home as in a sort of delirium; she saw none of those who turned to look at her. She walked faster and faster. Jovita could not keep pace with her.

"What is the matter?" said the old woman. "You walk as if you had a devil in you. Your breath is all gone. Are you mad?"

At night, when they sat together, Pepita spoke of the next bull-fight. José must take her. She wished to go.

"It is better that we should not go there," said José. "You know why.

He will not like to see you. You saw how it was to-day. He is not angry, only he is determined not to be reminded. Soon he will go away, and then you shall go with me as often as you wish; but not now. After this week he will be far away--far away."

"I will go now," said Pepita. "I will go without you if you will not take me. Isabella and Juan and Manuel will be glad enough. Let him--let him look at his bulls."

She did not know that it was desperation that had seized upon her; she thought it was defiance. Yes, yes, she told herself, breathlessly, he should see her laugh and talk with Manuel and Carlos and Juan and the rest; and then he would be punished.

She would hear nothing that José said. She would go--she would go. No other bull-fight but this would please her.

She could scarcely live until the day arrived. She had made for herself a new gala dress; she had a new fan and a necklace she had bought out of her little savings.

There was a great crowd. It was known that Sebastiano was to go away, and many had come for that reason, wishing to see him for the last time in the season.

At first Pepita was gayer than her adorers had ever seen her. She

deigned to talk and smile and listen. She had the restlessness and color of some brilliant-winged bird. Isabella looked at her in wonder.

"She was never like this before," she whispered to Juan.

And then Sebastiano came, and for the time they saw only him.

When at last the bull lay an inert mass in the dust, and the people shouted and almost flung themselves from their places into the arena in their excitement, and the gay and superb actor bowed to them--bowed to them again and again--Pepita sat like a little image of stone. She was quite colorless, and her eyes were fixed. She seemed to hear and see nothing until some one spoke to her. Then she rose and looked at Manuel.

"It is too hot," she said, in a low voice not like her own. "I must go. The sun. I have a pain in my head. Come."

He had not lifted his eyes once to her. It was as if she had not lived--as if she had been Isabella or Carmenita--and he did not give her a thought. No, he had not once looked up.

The next day he was gone. She heard José say so to Jovita, who grumbled loudly. She had forgotten her old distaste for these "fine ones."

"And but for her humors he would have stayed," she said. "What more does she want than a fine well-built man like that--a man who is well-to-do,

and whom every other girl would dance for joy to get? But no; nothing but a prince for her. Well, we shall see. She will work for her bread herself at last, and serve the other women who have homes and husbands."

In the middle of the night she was wakened from her slumbers by something--she knew not what. Soon she perceived it was Pepita, trembling.

"What is it now?" demanded the old woman.

"I stayed out in the dew too long," said Pepita, "and I am cold."

"That is well," said Jovita. "Get chilled through and have a fever, that we may ruin ourselves with doctors' bills; and all because you choose to remain in the night air when you should be asleep."

Pepita lay on her pillow, her eyes wide open in the darkness, her small hot hand clutching against her breast something she had hung round her neck by a bit of ribbon. It was the devisa she had stolen from Jovita, and which had not been thrown away at all. In the daytime it was hidden in the bosom of her dress; at night it hung by a cord and her hand held it. By this time a sort of terror had mingled itself with her passion of anger and pain, and she lay trembling because she was saying to herself again and again:

"I am like Sarita! I am like Sarita!"

She said it to herself a thousand times in the weeks and months which followed, and which seemed to her helplessness like years. She said it in as many moods as there were hours of the day. Sometimes with wild unreasoning childish rage; sometimes with a shock of fear; sometimes in a frenzy of shame; sometimes, as she stood and looked up the road, her cheeks pale, her eyes dilated with self-pity and tears.

"I am like Sarita! Yes--Sarita!" She remembered with superstitious tremor all the things that had been said to her of the punishment that would fall upon her because of her hard-heartedness. She remembered Jovita's prophecies, and how she had mocked them; how cruel she had been to those who suffered for her; how she had laughed in their faces and turned away from their sighs.

She remembered Felipe, whom she had not spared one pang--Felipe, at whom she had only stared in scorn when he wept and wrung his hands before her. Had he felt like this when she sent him back to Seville to despair?

A cruel fever of restlessness burned her. She could find pleasure no more in the novelties of the city, in the gayeties of the gardens, in her own beauty.

Sometimes she was sure it was magic--the evil-eye. And she slipped away, poor child! and knelt in the still, cool church, and prayed to be

delivered.

But once as she was doing this a sudden thought struck her.

"Not to think of him any more," she said, knitting her brows with yet another new pang. "Not to remember his face--not to remember his voice and the words he said! No, no!" And her rosary slipped from her fingers and fell upon the stone floor, and she picked it up and rose from her knees and went away.

All that day and night she thought and thought, and the next day went to pray again--but not that she might be delivered. She brought to the shrine at which she knelt substantial promises as offerings. Hers were not the prayers of a saint, but of a passionate, importunate child, self-willed and tempestuous. She would not have prayed if she could have hoped for help from any earthly means. She had never prayed for anything before. She had always taken what she wanted and gone her way; but she had had few needs. Now in this strange anguish she could do nothing for herself, and surely it was the place of the Virgin and the saints to help her. She stormed the painted wax figure in its niche with appeals which were innocently like demands.

Make him come back--make him come back to her. Mother of God, he must return! Make him come to the wall some night--yes, to-night. He must not know that she was like Sarita, but he must come; and whatsoever she did or said he must not go away again. She would sell her new necklace; the

silver comb her mother had left, her--the comb her father had given her mother in the days of their courtship; she would do some work, and give to the Holy Mother some candles and flowers; but he must come back, and he must not go away again whatsoever she did.

She knelt upon the stone floor, her hands wrung together, pouring forth the same words breathlessly over and over, each reiteration more intense than the last, all her young strength going out into the appeal.

And still she had not yet reached the point of knowing what she should do and say when he came.

When she tried to rise to her feet she was obliged to make two efforts before she succeeded. She had given such a passion of strength to her siege that she was almost exhausted, and she went out into the dazzling sunlight trembling. She did this day after day, day after day, and at night she waited by the wall, but the road was always the same.

And she could hear nothing--not a word. She could not ask, even though sometimes as she sat and gazed at José with hungry eyes it seemed as if she must drop dead if he did not speak. But he did not speak because he could have told her but little, and was quite secure in his belief that the mere mention of Sebastiano's name angered her.

So the time went by--weeks and months--and at last one evening she went to the church and prayed a new prayer.

"Sacred Mother," she said, "I have sold the comb and the necklace, and I have worked and can keep my word. I have bought a little golden heart. And if he comes"--in a fainter whisper--"if he comes I will say nothing ill to him."

That night, for the first time, she heard of Sebastiano.

Little Carlos came in and was full of news.

"They say that Sebastiano has had great success, and that perhaps he will go to America."

"Where is America?" asked Jovita.

"It is at the other end of the world, and never yet have the people seen a bull-fight."

"Never?" said José, staring. "That is impossible!"

"It is true," answered Carlos. "And they are rich, and like new things; and the king has spoken of sending for Sebastiano. He will be rich enough to build a palace for his old age."

A few days later, in the dusk of the evening, there crept into the church a little figure familiar to the painted saints and the waxen

Virgin. But to-day it wore a changed aspect. It moved slowly at first, reluctantly; the brilliant little face was pale; the eyes wild with torture. A moment it stood before the altar, and then flung up its arms with a fierce gesture.

"Mother of God," it cried, brokenly, "then if it must be so--tell him--tell him that I am like Sarita!" and fell upon the altar steps shuddering and sobbing like a beaten child.