

## CHAPTER XXVII

### HIDDEN THINGS

The next day Señor Don Guzman de Cardona arrived, and the whole house was in a commotion of excitement. There was to be no school, and everything was bustle and confusion. I passed my time in my own room in reflecting severely upon myself for the imprudent words by which I had thrown one more difficulty in the way of this poor harassed child.

Dolores this day seemed perfectly passive in the hands of her mother and sisters, who appeared disposed to show her great attention. She allowed them to array her in her most becoming dress, and made no objection to anything except removing the bracelet from her arm. "Nobody's gifts should take the place of her mother's," she said, and they were obliged to be content with her wearing of the diamond bracelet on the other arm.

Don Guzman was a large, plethoric man, with coarse features and heavy gait. Besides the scar I have spoken of, his face was adorned here and there with pimples, which were not set down in the miniature. In the course of the first hour's study, I saw him to be a man of much the same stamp as Dolores's father--sensual, tyrannical, passionate. He seemed in his own way to be much struck with the beauty of his intended wife, and was not wanting in efforts to please her. All that I could see in her was the settled, passive paleness of despair. She played, sang,

exhibited her embroidery and painting, at the command of Madame Mendoza, with the air of an automaton; and Don Guzman remarked to her father on the passive obedience as a proper and hopeful trait. Once only when he, in presenting her a flower, took the liberty of kissing her cheek, did I observe the flashing of her eye and a movement of disgust and impatience, that she seemed scarcely able to restrain.

The marriage was announced to take place the next week, and a holiday was declared through the house. Nothing was talked of or discussed but the *corbeille de mariage* which the bridegroom had brought--the dresses, laces, sets of jewels, and cashmere shawls. Dolores never had been treated with such attention by the family in her life. She rose immeasurably in the eyes of all as the future possessor of such wealth and such an establishment as awaited her. Madame Mendoza had visions of future visits in Cuba rising before her mind, and overwhelmed her daughter-in-law with flatteries and caresses, which she received in the same passive silence as she did everything else.

For my own part, I tried to keep entirely by myself. I remained in my room reading, and took my daily rides, accompanied by my servant--seeing Dolores only at mealtimes, when I scarcely ventured to look at her. One night, however, as I was walking through a lonely part of the garden, Dolores suddenly stepped out from the shrubbery and stood before me. It was bright moonlight, by which her face and person were distinctly shown. How well I remember her as she looked then! She was dressed in white muslin, as she was fond of being, but it had been torn and

disordered by the haste with which she had come through the shrubbery. Her face was fearfully pale, and her great, dark eyes had an unnatural brightness. She laid hold on my arm.

"Look here," she said, "I saw you and came down to speak with you."

She panted and trembled, so that for some moments she could not speak another word. "I want to ask you," she gasped, after a pause, "whether I heard you right? Did you say"--

"Yes, Dolores, you did. I did say what I had no right to say, like a dishonorable man."

"But is it true? Are you sure it is true?" she said, scarcely seeming to hear my words.

"God knows it is," said I despairingly.

"Then why don't you save me? Why do you let them sell me to this dreadful man? He don't love me--he never will. Can't you take me away?"

"Dolores, I am a poor man. I cannot give you any of these splendors your father desires for you."

"Do you think I care for them? I love you more than all the world together. And if you do really love me, why should we not be happy with

each other?"

"Dolores," I said, with a last effort to keep calm, "I am much older than you, and know the world, and ought not to take advantage of your simplicity. You have been so accustomed to abundant wealth and all it can give, that you cannot form an idea of what the hardships and discomforts of marrying a poor man would be. You are unused to having the least care, or making the least exertion for yourself. All the world would say that I acted a very dishonorable part to take you from a position which offers you wealth, splendor, and ease, to one of comparative hardship. Perhaps some day you would think so yourself."

While I was speaking, Dolores turned me toward the moonlight, and fixed her great dark eyes piercingly upon me, as if she wanted to read my soul. "Is that all?" she said; "is that the only reason?"

"I do not understand you," said I.

She gave me such a desolate look, and answered in a tone of utter dejection, "Oh, I didn't know, but perhaps you might not want me. All the rest are so glad to sell me to anybody that will take me. But you really do love me, don't you?" she added, laying her hand on mine.

What answer I made I cannot say. I only know that every vestige of what is called reason and common sense left me at that moment, and that there followed an hour of delirium in which I--we both were very happy--we

forgot everything but each other, and we arranged all our plans for flight. There was fortunately a ship lying in the harbor of St. Augustine, the captain of which was known to me. In course of a day or two passage was taken, and my effects transported on board. Nobody seemed to suspect us. Everything went on quietly up to the day before that appointed for sailing. I took my usual rides, and did everything as much as possible in my ordinary way, to disarm suspicion, and none seemed to exist. The needed preparations went gayly forward. On the day I mentioned, when I had ridden some distance from the house, a messenger came post-haste after me. It was a boy who belonged specially to Dolores. He gave me a little hurried note. I copy it:--

"Papa has found all out, and it is dreadful. No one else knows, and he means to kill you when you come back. Do, if you love me, hurry and get on board the ship. I shall never get over it, if evil comes on you for my sake. I shall let them do what they please with me, if God will only save you. I will try to be good. Perhaps if I bear my trials well, he will let me die soon. That is all I ask. I love you, and always shall, to death and after.

DOLORES."

There was the end of it all. I escaped on the ship. I read the marriage in the paper. Incidentally I afterwards heard of her as living in Cuba, but I never saw her again till I saw her in her coffin. Sorrow and death had changed her so much that at first the sight of her awakened

only a vague, painful remembrance. The sight of the hair bracelet which I had seen on her arm brought all back, and I felt sure that my poor Dolores had strangely come to sleep her last sleep near me.

Immediately after I became satisfied who you were, I felt a painful degree of responsibility for the knowledge. I wrote at once to a friend of mine in the neighborhood of St. Augustine, to find out any particulars of the Mendoza family. I learned that its history had been like that of many others in that region. Don José had died in a bilious fever, brought on by excessive dissipation, and at his death the estate was found to be so incumbered that the whole was sold at auction. The slaves were scattered hither and thither to different owners, and Madame Mendoza, with her children and remains of fortune, had gone to live in New Orleans.

Of Dolores he had heard but once since her marriage. A friend had visited Don Guzman's estates in Cuba. He was living in great splendor, but bore the character of a hard, cruel, tyrannical master, and an overbearing man. His wife was spoken of as being in very delicate health,--avoiding society and devoting herself to religion.

I would here take occasion to say that it was understood when I went into the family of Don José, that I should not in any way interfere with the religious faith of the children, the family being understood to belong to the Roman Catholic Church. There was so little like religion of any kind in the family, that the idea of their belonging to any faith

savored something of the ludicrous. In the case of poor Dolores, however, it was different. The earnestness of her nature would always have made any religious form a reality to her. In her case I was glad to remember that the Romish Church, amid many corruptions, preserves all the essential beliefs necessary for our salvation, and that many holy souls have gone to heaven through its doors. I therefore was only careful to direct her principal attention to the more spiritual parts of her own faith, and to dwell on the great themes which all Christian people hold in common.

Many of my persuasion would not have felt free to do this, but my liberty of conscience in this respect was perfect. I have seen that if you break the cup out of which a soul has been used to take the wine of the gospel, you often spill the very wine itself. And after all, these forms are but shadows of which the substance is Christ.

I am free to say, therefore, that the thought that your poor mother was devoting herself earnestly to religion, although after the forms of a church with which I differ, was to me a source of great consolation, because I knew that in that way alone could a soul like hers find peace.

I have never rested from my efforts to obtain more information. A short time before the incident which cast you upon our shore, I conversed with a sea-captain who had returned from Cuba. He stated that there had been an attempt at insurrection among the slaves of Don Guzman, in which a large part of the buildings and out-houses of the estate had been

consumed by fire. On subsequent inquiry I learned that Don Guzman had sold his estates and embarked for Boston with his wife and family, and that nothing had subsequently been heard of him.

Thus, my young friend, I have told you all that I know of those singular circumstances which have cast your lot on our shores. I do not expect at your time of life you will take the same view of this event that I do.

You may possibly--very probably will--consider it a loss not to have been brought up as you might have been in the splendid establishment of Don Guzman, and found yourself heir to wealth and pleasure without labor or exertion. Yet I am quite sure in that case that your value as a human being would have been immeasurably less. I think I have seen in you the elements of passions, which luxury and idleness and the too early possession of irresponsible power, might have developed with fatal results. You have simply to reflect whether you would rather be an energetic, intelligent, self-controlled man, capable of guiding the affairs of life and of acquiring its prizes,--or to be the reverse of all this, with its prizes bought for you by the wealth of parents. I hope mature reflection will teach you to regard with gratitude that disposition of the All-Wise, which cast your lot as it has been cast.

Let me ask one thing in closing. I have written for you here many things most painful for me to remember, because I wanted you to love and honor the memory of your mother. I wanted that her memory should have something such a charm for you as it has for me. With me, her image has always stood between me and all other women; but I have never even



intimated to a living being that such a passage in my history ever occurred,--no, not even to my sister, who is nearer to me than any other earthly creature.

In some respects I am a singular person in my habits, and having once written this, you will pardon me if I observe that it will never be agreeable to me to have the subject named between us. Look upon me always as a friend, who would regard nothing as a hardship by which he might serve the son of one so dear.

I have hesitated whether I ought to add one circumstance more. I think I will do so, trusting to your good sense not to give it any undue weight.

I have never ceased making inquiries in Cuba, as I found opportunity, in regard to your father's property, and late investigations have led me to the conclusion that he left a considerable sum of money in the hands of a notary, whose address I have, which, if your identity could be proved, would come in course of law to you. I have written an account of all the circumstances which, in my view, identify you as the son of Don Guzman de Cardona, and had them properly attested in legal form.

This, together with your mother's picture and the bracelet, I recommend you to take on your next voyage, and to see what may result from the attempt. How considerable the sum may be which will result from this, I cannot say, but as Don Guzman's fortune was very large, I am in hopes it may prove something worth attention.

At any time you may wish to call, I will have all these things ready for you.

I am, with warm regard,

Your sincere friend,

THEOPHILUS SEWELL.

When Moses had finished reading this letter, he laid it down on the pebbles beside him, and, leaning back against a rock, looked moodily out to sea. The tide had washed quite up to within a short distance of his feet, completely isolating the little grotto where he sat from all the surrounding scenery, and before him, passing and repassing on the blue bright solitude of the sea, were silent ships, going on their wondrous pathless ways to unknown lands. The letter had stirred all within him that was dreamy and poetic: he felt somehow like a leaf torn from a romance, and blown strangely into the hollow of those rocks. Something too of ambition and pride stirred within him. He had been born an heir of wealth and power, little as they had done for the happiness of his poor mother; and when he thought he might have had these two wild horses which have run away with so many young men, he felt, as young men all do, an impetuous desire for their possession, and he thought as so many do, "Give them to me, and I'll risk my character,--I'll risk my happiness."

The letter opened a future before him which was something to speculate

upon, even though his reason told him it was uncertain, and he lay there dreamily piling one air-castle on another,--unsubstantial as the great islands of white cloud that sailed through the sky and dropped their shadows in the blue sea.

It was late in the afternoon when he bethought him he must return home, and so climbing from rock to rock he swung himself upward on to the island, and sought the brown cottage. As he passed by the open window he caught a glimpse of Mara sewing. He walked softly up to look in without her seeing him. She was sitting with the various articles of his wardrobe around her, quietly and deftly mending his linen, singing soft snatches of an old psalm-tune.

She seemed to have resumed quite naturally that quiet care of him and his, which she had in all the earlier years of their life. He noticed again her little hands,--they seemed a sort of wonder to him. Why had he never seen, when a boy, how pretty they were? And she had such dainty little ways of taking up and putting down things as she measured and clipped; it seemed so pleasant to have her handling his things; it was as if a good fairy were touching them, whose touch brought back peace. But then, he thought, by and by she will do all this for some one else. The thought made him angry. He really felt abused in anticipation. She was doing all this for him just in sisterly kindness, and likely as not thinking of somebody else whom she loved better all the time. It is astonishing how cool and dignified this consideration made our hero as he faced up to the window. He was, after all, in hopes she might blush,

and look agitated at seeing him suddenly; but she did not. The foolish boy did not know the quick wits of a girl, and that all the while that he had supposed himself so sly, and been holding his breath to observe, Mara had been perfectly cognizant of his presence, and had been schooling herself to look as unconscious and natural as possible. So she did,--only saying,--

"Oh, Moses, is that you? Where have you been all day?"

"Oh, I went over to see Parson Sewell, and get my pastoral lecture, you know."

"And did you stay to dinner?"

"No; I came home and went rambling round the rocks, and got into our old cave, and never knew how the time passed."

"Why, then you've had no dinner, poor boy," said Mara, rising suddenly.

"Come in quick, you must be fed, or you'll get dangerous and eat somebody."

"No, no, don't get anything," said Moses, "it's almost supper-time, and I'm not hungry."

And Moses threw himself into a chair, and began abstractedly snipping a piece of tape with Mara's very best scissors.

"If you please, sir, don't demolish that; I was going to stay one of your collars with it," said Mara.

"Oh, hang it, I'm always in mischief among girls' things," said Moses, putting down the scissors and picking up a bit of white wax, which with equal unconsciousness, he began kneading in his hands, while he was dreaming over the strange contents of the morning's letter.

"I hope Mr. Sewell didn't say anything to make you look so very gloomy," said Mara.

"Mr. Sewell?" said Moses, starting; "no, he didn't; in fact, I had a pleasant call there; and there was that confounded old sphinx of a Miss Roxy there. Why don't she die? She must be somewhere near a hundred years old by this time."

"Never thought to ask her why she didn't die," said Mara; "but I presume she has the best of reasons for living."

"Yes, that's so," said Moses; "every old toadstool, and burdock, and mullein lives and thrives and lasts; no danger of their dying."

"You seem to be in a charitable frame of mind," said Mara.

"Confound it all! I hate this world. If I could have my own way now,--if

I could have just what I wanted, and do just as I please exactly, I might make a pretty good thing of it."

"And pray what would you have?" said Mara.

"Well, in the first place, riches."

"In the first place?"

"Yes, in the first place, I say; for money buys everything else."

"Well, supposing so," said Mara, "for argument's sake, what would you buy with it?"

"Position in society, respect, consideration,--and I'd have a splendid place, with everything elegant. I have ideas enough, only give me the means. And then I'd have a wife, of course."

"And how much would you pay for her?" said Mara, looking quite cool.

"I'd buy her with all the rest,--a girl that wouldn't look at me as I am,--would take me for all the rest, you know,--that's the way of the world."

"It is, is it?" said Mara. "I don't understand such matters much."

"Yes; it's the way with all you girls," said Moses; "it's the way you'll marry when you do."

"Don't be so fierce about it. I haven't done it yet," said Mara; "but now, really, I must go and set the supper-table when I have put these things away,"--and Mara gathered an armful of things together, and tripped singing upstairs, and arranged them in the drawer of Moses's room. "Will his wife like to do all these little things for him as I do?" she thought. "It's natural I should. I grew up with him, and love him, just as if he were my own brother,--he is all the brother I ever had. I love him more than anything else in the world, and this wife he talks about could do no more."

"She don't care a pin about me," thought Moses; "it's only a habit she has got, and her strict notions of duty, that's all. She is housewifely in her instincts, and seizes all neglected linen and garments as her lawful prey,--she would do it just the same for her grandfather;" and Moses drummed moodily on the window-pane.