

clapping Californians, and Concha laughed delightedly when his cap waved with the sombreros.

"I think you will make a good Californian in time," she said, as they rode homeward.

"Perhaps," said Rezanov musingly. His eyes roved over the magnificent estate and at the moment they entered a portion of it that deepened to woods, so dense was the undergrowth, so thick the oak trees. Here there was but a glimpse, now and again, of the mountains swimming in the dark, blue mist of the late afternoon, the moss waved thickly from the ancient trees; over even the higher branches of many rolled a cascade of small, brittle leaves, with the tempting opulence of its poisonous sap. The path was very abrupt, cut where the immense spreading trees permitted, and Rezanov and Concha had no difficulty in falling away from the chattering excited company.

"Tell me your ultimate plans, Pedro mio," said Concha softly. "You are dreaming of something this moment beyond corn and treaties."

"Do you want that final proof?" he asked, smiling. "Well, if I could not trust you that would be the end of everything, and I know that I can. I have long regarded California as an absolutely necessary field of supplies, and since I have come here I will frankly say that could I, as the representative of the Tsar in all this part of the world, make it practically my own, I should be content in even a permanent exile from St. Petersburg. I could attract an immense colony here and in time import libraries and works of art, laying the foundation of a great and important city on that fine site about Yerba Buena. But now that these kind people have practically adopted me I cannot repay their hospitality by any overt act of hostility. I must be content either slowly to absorb the country, in which case I shall see no great result in my lifetime, or—and for this I hope—what with the mess Bonaparte is making of Europe every state may be at the others' throat before long, including Russia and Spain. At all events, a cause for rupture would not be far to seek, and it would need no instigation of mine to dispatch a fleet to these shores. In that case I should be sent with it to take possession in the name of the Tsar, and to deal with these simple, kind—and inefficient people, my dear girl—as no other Russian could. They cannot hold this country. Spain could not—would not, at all events, for she has not troops enough here to protect a territory half its size—hold it against even the 'Americans,' should they in time feel strong enough to push their way across the western wilderness. It is the destiny of this charming Arcadia to disappear; and did Russia forego an opportunity to appropriate a domain that offers her literally everything except civilization, she would be unworthy of her place among nations. Moreover—a beneficent triumph impossible to us otherwise—with a powerful and flourishing colony up and down this coast, and sending bread-stuffs regularly to our other possessions in these waters until the natives, immigrants, and exiles were healthy vitalized beings, it would be but a question of a few years before we should force open the doors of China and Japan." He caught Concha from her horse and strained her to him in the mounting ardor of his plunge down the future. "You must resent nothing!" he cried. "You must cease to be a Spanish woman when you become my wife, and help me as only you can in those inevitable years I have mapped out; and not so much for myself as for Russia. My enemies have sought to persuade three sovereigns that I am a visionary, but I have already accomplished much that met with resentment and ridicule when I broached it. And I know my powers! I tingle with the knowledge of my ability to carry to a conclusion every plan I have thought worth the holding when the ardor of conception was over. I swear to you that death alone—and I believe that nothing is further aloof—shall prevent my giving this country to Russia before five years have passed, and within another brief span the trade of China and Japan. It is a glorious destiny for a man, one man—to pass into history as the Russian of his century that has done most to add to the extent and the wealth and the power of his empire! Does that sound vainglorious, and do you resent it? You must not, I tell you, you must not!"

Concha had never seen him in such a mood. Although he held her so closely that the horses were angrily biting each other, she felt that for once there was nothing personal in his ardor. His eyes were blazing, but they stared as if a great and prophetic panorama had risen in this silent wood, where the long faded moss hung as motionless as if by those quiet waters that even the most ardent must cross in his time. She felt his heart beat as she had felt it before against her soft breast, but she knew that if he thought of her at all it was but as a part of himself, not as the woman he impatiently desired. But she was sensible of no resentment, either for herself or her race, which, indeed, she knew to be but a wayfarer in the wilderness engaged in a brief chimerical enterprise. For the first time she felt her individuality melt into, commingle with his; and when he lowered his gaze, still with that intensity of vision piercing the future, her own eyes reflected the impersonalities of his; and in time he saw it.

#### XXIV.

"We should all wear black for so mournful an occasion," said Rafaella Sal, spreading out her scarlet skirts.

"Father Abella is right. The occasion is sad enough without giving it the air of a funeral."

"Sad! Dios de mi alma! Will he return?"

Elena Castro shook her wise head. She was nearly twenty, and four years of matrimony had made her skeptical of man's capacity for romance. "Two years are long, and he will see many girls, and become one again of a life that is always more brilliant than our sun in May. His eyes will be dazzled, his mind distracted, full to the brim. To sit at table with the Tsar, to talk with him alone in his Cabinet, to have for the asking audience of the Pope of Rome and the King of Spain! Ay yi! Ay yi! Perhaps he will be made

a prince when he returns to St. Petersburg and all the beautiful princesses will want to marry him. Can he remember this poor little California, and even our lovely Concha? I doubt! Valgame Dios, I doubt!"

"Concha has always been too fortunate," said Rafaella with a touch of spite, for years of waiting had tried her temper and the sun always freckled her nose. The flower of California stood on the corridor of the Mission and before the church awaiting the guest of honor and his escort. A mass was to be said in behalf of the departing guests; the Juno would sail with the turn of the afternoon tide. Men and women were in their gayest finery, an exotic mass of color against the rough whitewashed walls, chattering as vivaciously as if the burden of their conversation were not regret for the Chamberlain and his gay young lieutenants. Concha, alone, wore no color; her frock was white, her mantilla black. She stood somewhat apart, but although she was pale she commanded her eyes to dwell absently on the shifting sand far down the valley, her haughty Spanish profile betraying nothing of the despair in her soul.

"Yes, Concha has always been too fortunate," repeated Rafaella. "Why should she be chosen for such a destiny—to go to the Russian court and wear a train ten yards long of red velvet embroidered with gold, a white veil spangled with gold, a head-dress a foot high set so thick with jewels her head will ache for a week—Madre de Dios! And we stay here forever with white walls, horsehair furniture, Baja California pearls and three silk dresses a year!"

"No one in all Russia will look so grand in court dress as our Conchita," said Elena loyally. "But I doubt if it is the dress and the state she thinks of losing to-day. She will not talk even to me of him—Ay yi! she grows more reserved every day, our Concha!—except to say she will wed him when he returns, and that I know for did not I witness the betrothal? She only mocks me when I beg her to tell me if she loves him, languishes, or sings a bar of some one of our beautiful songs with ridiculous words. But she does. She did not sleep last night. Her room is next to mine. No, it is of Rezanov she thinks, and always. Those proud, silent girls, who jest when others would weep and use many words and must die without sympathy—they have tragedy in their souls, ay yi! And you think she is fortunate? True she is beautiful, she is La Favorita, she receives many boxes from Mexico, and she has won the love of this Russian. But—I have not dared to remind her—I remembered it only yesterday—she came into this world on the thirteenth of a month, and he into her life but one day before the thirteenth of another—new style! True some might say that it was an escape, but if he came on the twelfth, it was on the thirteenth she began to love him—on the night of the ball; of that I am sure."

Rafaella shuddered and crossed herself. "Poor Concha! Perhaps in the end she will always stand apart like that. Truly she is not as others. I have always said it. Thanks be to Mary it was Luis that wooed me, not the Russian, for I might have been tempted. True his eyes are blue, and only the black could win my heart. But the court of St. Petersburg! Dios de mi vida! Did I lie awake at night and think of Concha Arguello in red velvet and jewels all over, I should hate her. But no—to-day—I cannot. Two years! Have I not waited six? It is eternity when one loves and is young."

"They come," said Elena.

The cavalcade was descending the sand hills on the left, Rezanov in full uniform between the Comandante and Luis Arguello and followed by a picked escort of officers from Presidio and Fort. The Californians wore full-dress uniform of white and scarlet, Don Jose, a blue velvet serape, embroidered in gold with the arms of Spain.

As they dismounted Rezanov bowed ceremoniously to the party on the corridor, and they returned his salutations gravely, suddenly silent. He walked directly over to Concha.

"We will go in together," he said. "It matters nothing what they think. I kneel beside no one else."

And Concha, with the air of leading an honored guest to the banquet, turned and walked with him into the dark little church.

"Why did you not wear a white mantilla?" he whispered. "I do not like that black thing."

"I am not a bride. I knew we should kneel together—it would have been ridiculous. And I could not wear a colored reboso to-day."

"I should have liked to fancy we were here for our nuptials. Delusions pass but are none the less sweet for that."

They knelt before the altar, the Comandante, Dona Ignacia, Luis, Santiago, Rafaella Sal and Elena Castro just behind; the rest of the party, their bright garments shimmering vaguely in the gloom, as they listed; and enough fervent prayers went up to insure the health and safety of the departing guests for all their lives.

Rezanov, who had much on his mind, stared moodily at the altar until Concha, who had bowed her head almost to her knees, finished her supplication, when their eyes turned and met simultaneously. For a moment their brains did swim in the delusion that the priest with his uplifted hands pronounced benediction upon their nuptials, that probation was over and union nigh. But Father Abella dismissed all with the same blessing, and they shivered as they rose and walked slowly down the church.

Dona Ignacia took her husband's arm, and muttering that she feared a chill, hurried the others before her. The priests had gone to the sacristy. Before they reached the door Rezanov and Concha were alone.

His hands fell heavily on her shoulders.

"Concha," he said. "I shall come back if I live. I make no foolish vows, so idle between us. There is only one power that can prevent our marriage in this church not later than two years from to-day. And although I am in the very fulness of my health and strength, with my work but begun, and all my happiness in the future, and even to a less sanguine man it would seem that his course had many years to run, still have I seen as much as any