



BROTHER ADINO knelt at the foot of the cross which towered high above the rank growth of grass spread in front of the mission buildings of Santa Maria del Mar. Behind him were the gray stone walls, which looked so hard and cold now that the red evening light came down and rested on the mountains in the background. A few yards in front of where he knelt ran the clear water of the San Lorenzo River.

Brother Adino's head was bare and his face was buried in the loose sleeves of his robe. He knelt and prayed earnestly—prayed as he never had before, for he was sick and weary and troubled, and in despair he had thrown his arms about the great stone cross and clung to it, crying for relief. The vesper bell rang out from the tall adobe belfry, and a beautiful, sad-looking Spanish senorita drifted down the river in a canoe. As she passed she sang a low, soft song in her own tongue and looked long at the mission buildings. The high grass hid the object by the cross from her view. The brothers were all filing into the chapel, and when the last one had disappeared she sighed, ceased her singing, and rested on the paddle that she might gaze longer at the picturesque walls of Santa Maria del Mar.

Brother Adino had been ill. His handsome face was pale and thin, and Father Benedicto had said that for one so young it was strange, and that he must rest and pray for renewed strength. There was a sad, sad look in the old father's eyes when he spoke of their young brother. But the others did not notice it, for often the good old priest would grow pensive and sigh, saying that worldly thoughts always brought the soul unrest. Then he would glance uneasily at Adino, bring his ebony crucifix to his thin lips, and hurry to the seclusion of the altar. He was there now, kneeling quietly; but out from beyond the tall grass, which hid the cross from the buildings, came a choking, sobbing sound, and then Adino's voice, weak from suffering, cried:

'Oh, my God, my God! Teach me the right way—deliver me from this sin. It is hard—so hard—and his voice sank as he slowly lifted his white face toward the light. There was no answer from the sky and no echo from the earth, but the long grass was pushed aside in front of the cross, and Brother Adino, looking up, beheld what to him seemed a beautiful vision. He stretched out his arm to make sure, and his hand rested on the shoulder of Carmen, a Spanish maiden whose mother the fathers had rescued from the Indians.

She was pretty, as most of her type are. Her dark, liquid eyes were wide open, for she was startled to find that the cries she had heard while in her little canoe came from the mouth of Brother Adino. His hand rested on her delicate shoulder for a moment. Quickly he arose from his knees and muttered something hurriedly.

'Oh, I didn't know it was you, or I wouldn't have—trespassed,' she said. Brother Adino looked up very much confused. 'Is it late?' Have the bells for vespers rung, I wonder?

'Yes, and Father Benedicto was looking from the window a while ago.'

'Ah!' said Adino, 'I must go in. He knows not where I am.'

His face became sad for only one brief moment while he stood with his eyes fastened upon those of the girl in front of him. There was an awful conflict within himself. The muscles around his mouth and eyes twitched, and the expression on his face changed to mercilessly hard, bitter defiance. He stepped nearer, held out his trembling hand, and, almost hissing, said desperately,

'Carmen, do thou be near here to-morrow night when the bell rings for vespers.'

From the quiet bay a heavy fog came rolling inland. The sun had disappeared behind the mountains, and the night was coming on with silent speed. The bell which hung over the chapel had struck for prayers, and the priests, young and old, filed out of the large building and entered the smaller one for worship. Their heads were all reverently bowed—all except that of him who came last in the line. His was turned with nervous anxiety toward the field of waving grass, and on to where the grey cross stood out indistinctly through the fog. He was Brother Adino, and, being the last in line to pass

through the door, he took a seat back and a little apart from the others.

He neither glanced at his prayer book nor followed in the chanting. There was a strange, satisfied light in his blue eyes and the ghost of a sarcastic smile upon his lips as he looked around on the kneeling men, lost in their devotion. Old Father Benedicto was nearest him. Once he turned and saw that Adino's head was erect. The same hopelessly sad look came upon him again, and he clutched his beads more tightly. Adino moved his lips mechanically and watched for a chance to slip out. When they sang he crept to the aisle, then to the door, and made his way out through the darkness to the place where he had prayed long the night before. The fog was now dense, and stare as much as he would, the object he sought could not be seen. When he reached the little beaten down patch of grass by the cross he stopped and listened. There was no sound. He looked around once more and then softly called:

'Carmen—oh, Carmen!'

There was a little rustle of leaves and then the grass was parted, and a neat figure, clad in black, stepped quickly up to him.

'I tried so hard to get here on time,' said Carmen. 'Aunt Berta told me it was too late to go out in my boat, so I pretended I wanted to see a sick woman, and then ran over here as fast as I could. Oh, I'm a dreadful hypocrite! I must be back in a moment,' and she ended with a nervous little laugh.

The faces of the two were just visible to each other. Carmen's was not as rosy and happy as usual. She looked wonderingly at Adino, and said anxiously, 'You look so solemn, Brother Adino. You're not going to be romantic and run off—escape—are you?'

'Yes, I am,' he answered.

'What! Adino, Adino, not going away!' she cried. 'Oh, you're only jesting! No, no, I see it in your face.'

'Hush, Carmen, some one will hear you. I told you that you must keep my secret,' he said firmly.

The shoulders of the Spanish girl shook, and she stepped away from him, back into the darkness, that he might not see her cover her white face with her hands.

But he did see it, and followed after her, snatching her hands from her moist eyes. 'Yes, Carmen,' he began. 'I'm going. It's useless for me to stay here longer. You must know why I tell you this. You must know why I go away. I love you so much.'

She had not resisted when he took her hands, and he still held them tightly.

'Yes,' she said slowly; but if that's the reason, why do you go away? I'll never see you again then.'

Her voice faltered.

'Why, Carmen, you innocent little angel; I'm going away so that I can take you; take you away—over the mountains and from the ocean, and off to my old home. You'll go, won't you, dear?'

She sprang back from him, her beautiful dark eyes flashing and her cheeks growing crimson.

'Do you think for one instant that I would stay here without you? No, when I love, I love!'

He drew her towards him with a happy little cry.

'Well, then, next week I ring the bell, and on the night when I strike three times instead of two, you meet me here, ready to go. Eleven will be the best and safest time.'

He stooped down to kiss her, and there was a cautious step dangerously near by. Some one was passing carefully through the grass. Carmen's hands grew cold within his, and she slipped quickly out by the way she had come.

Adino went back, reaching the chapel before the priests had left it. They were all there. No—Father Benedicto! Where was he? If he had heard them, every thing was spoiled. There would be such a cruel watch put upon him that escape would be impossible.

In a few moments prayers were over and the fathers returned to their bare rooms for the night. They were weary from the work of the day and were soon fast asleep. No one but Adino, as he sat in the darkness at his open window, heard old Father Benedicto enter at the front door and draw the creaking bolt as he locked it behind him.

It seemed as if the bolt never made such a grating, rasping sound as it did that night. Surely the locking or unlocking of the door was enough to arouse the sleeping inmates of the house.

Adino glanced out of his window and looked down into the inky blackness below. There was no possibility

of his getting out that way, for the small court below was surrounded by an immense adobe wall which it was impossible to climb. But all that was of the future. Now he could sit at the little window with the delicious cool night air coming in upon his hot brow, and think and dream exquisite things about his love. Before it had been a sin for him to think of it—now he was certain it was right, and a new life thrilled through his veins at thought of it. Why had it not come to him before, he wondered? Perhaps it was because he had always been used to the monastery and its influence since his boyhood. There had been no chance for him to choose the life he wished to lead.

When his parents died the fathers had taken him, bringing him with them out into the frontier, and only now, after dull years of study and work, did he realize that there was another life, and that he was his own master. Father Benedicto had indeed been a father to him, and now he was beginning to totter when he stepped, and Adino sorrowed at leaving him. His good old voice, which had comforted and cheered so many, was now feeble, and his hair was white—so white that it seemed a halo around his head. What would he do when he found that Adino had gone? Would he turn against him and denounce him as a sinner? Adino had never heard him speak an unjust word, and he did not believe he would.

The coyotes howled from the near mountains, and Adino came to himself with a start. The wind had turned colder and he was chilled through, so, with only the moonlight to see by, he disrobed, lay down upon his narrow couch, and slept.

He waited patiently until the second night of the next week, and then he walked out to the chapel and ascended the narrow stairs to the belfry. He grasped the rope and pulled so vigorously that the old bell rang out its three notes louder than it had for many a day. Then he descended the stairs and walked quickly over to the main building and up to his own room. He snatched up his worn prayer book and hurried out to join the others on their way to service.

This would be the last time he would kneel in the mission chapel. He gazed all around, taking farewell of all the old familiar objects, but in his heart he was impatient to get out into the air.

Father Benedicto was in his regular place, and upon his face there rested a happy, contented look. Surely there was nothing to fear from him.

The prayers were finally over, and Adino, with mechanical movements, went back to his room and sat, again looking out of his window, until the big, old-fashioned clock down in the lower hallway struck eleven. He listened at his door. There was no sound except the heavy breathing of the priests who had left their doors open. He needed no light to gather up the few articles which belonged to him. He lingered for a moment at Father Benedicto's room, his head bowed, and then went on noiselessly down the stairs and to the heavy door. This was the only place where he was afraid of being heard. The bolt always creaked, and on this particular night it would be sure to awaken some light sleeper. He tried to push it back. It would not move. Then he grasped the door, thinking that if he pulled at this with one hand and pushed at the bolt with the other, it might move. And it did move. The great door swung noiselessly open, for it had not been locked.

He had no time to stop and wonder. His only thought was that perhaps some one had gone out before him, so he rushed to the edge of the high grass and pushed on through it to the opening around the cross. He hardly dared think Carmen would be waiting for him. It would be too good. But she was, and gave a low, happy little cry as she advanced to meet him.

'Oh, I'm so glad you're here,' she said, drawing a long, relieved breath. 'I've been so nervous that I'm faint.'

Adino took her cold hands between his.

'Carmen, dear, you're trembling,' he said gently, pulling her wrap more closely around her. 'We'll sit down here just a moment until you are rested.'

'Yes,' she answered, 'we have plenty of time. I brought the boat, and we can row to the next town and catch the train which comes through there shortly after midnight. And oh, Adino, Aunt Berta told me something so strange this afternoon. I know you'll be surprised. She said that when my mother was very young she paddled on this creek just as I do, and one day—I don't exactly understand how it was—some Indians waylaid her, and Father Benedicto—he was a young priest then—rescued her—and, Adino, what do you think? He fell in love with her and told her so. I expect maybe they would have run off just as we are doing, but she was so proud that, although she knew she loved him, she would not listen, and after a while she married my father. He was the handsomest and richest man in the town then, but mother, poor mother—she died, and then my father left me with Aunt Berta—'

There was a sound, and they both sprang to their feet. Adino put his arm around Carmen, and was just going to push her into the shadows when a third figure stepped feebly out beside them.

Carmen gave a smothered scream. The figure came closer, and then Father Benedicto—for it was he—put a hand upon the shoulder of each, and, looking first at one and then at the other, said:

'My children, may the peace and blessing of the Father rest upon your souls.'

He turned as slowly and as quietly as he came, and disappeared in the darkness before anyone could speak. He went back to the old, cheerless life which he had led from duty, and Adino and Carmen went forth, beyond the mountains and away from the seas, seeking a new life and taking his blessing with them.

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