

ZARINA, THE SPIRIT OF THE MOUNTAIN.

The Romance of an Unfinished "Hood."

I.—THE STAGE FROM THE SOUTH.



WITH smoking horses and mud-splashed wheels and box, late in the fall of 186-, the stage from the south came thundering down First street, Portland, and with a sweeping turn drew up at the curbstone in front of a once famous hostelry at the foot of Stark street. The future metropolis was then, in many of its characteristics, only a big and thriving village, and the arrival of the overland mail and passengers evoked the usual crowd and stir of excitement at Cosmopolitan corner. The hard-driven horses snorted and stamped and rattled their harness, as an attache of the hotel opened the door of the heavy "thorough-brace" coach, and the passengers, six in number, slowly emerged from the dark, leather-scented interior, and stood for a moment grouped upon the sidewalk, giving directions for the disposition of their baggage, and shaking the wrinkles of the long, rough ride from their clothes and tempers before they entered the hospitable doors of the old caravansary.

Two of these passengers, a tall, slender, handsome young man, with dark hair and eyes, and the sallow face and languid air of an invalid, and a little girl four or five years of age, comfortably enveloped in a warm traveling cloak, whom he took tenderly in his arms when he alighted, were noticeable as being somewhat different from the usual class of persons who traveled by stage over the barbaric highways of the Northwest. The clear-cut features, brunette complexion and somewhat embarrassed manner, iced by a shade of hauteur, of the young man, suggested at once to the casual observer that he was either a foreigner of Spanish or Italian extraction, or an American Southerner. His slouched hat of fine, soft felt, and the military cloak he wore, aided the impression.

With the child nestling, half asleep, upon his bosom, he made his way, with some difficulty, to the clerk's desk.

"I shall require two rooms connecting with each other, one for myself and one for the child," he said, with a pure American accent. "Have a fire made in them, please, and send your housekeeper to me at once, as I shall need her assistance, when our baggage is brought up, in attending to my little charge here."

"Very well," replied the young clerk, with a slight glance of deprecation at the traveler's burden, as though he suspected it of being contraband of war. "Let me see," turning to the key board, "I can give you twenty-

one and twenty-two, which will suit you perfectly, as they communicate, and one stove answers for both."

Then the stranger registered his name: "Paul Denham and child, S. F." in a delicate hand.

"Here, John!" called the clerk to the porter, "show this gentleman up-stairs to the sitting room, and have a fire made in twenty-one and twenty-two, and the rooms aired."

The little sitting room into which Paul Denham was ushered by the porter was wholly unoccupied at the time, but a brisk fire in the grate stove, and the dark, rich color of the carpet, and substantial furniture, gave it a cosy, home-like appearance.

"Well, Leda, we are at home, now, and will have a nice dinner, and not ride in the old wagon any more," he said, coaxingly, to the child, as he put her on the sofa, and proceeded, with deft hand, to remove her cloak and hood. When this was done, he bent forward and kissed her warm, pouting lips with the tenderness of a mother, and she answered him only with a beautiful smile, pathetic in its utter love and trust. Then she sat very quiet, her dark glance roving about the room with grave, childish wonder, replying only in soft monosyllables to his playful questions and kind assurances.

In the course of half an hour the housekeeper, a motherly, middle-aged woman, appeared.

"What a dear little girl it is!" she exclaimed, as she came bustling forward, as if the care of waifs was her chosen occupation, and began to caress and smooth the child's rumpled tresses. The latter shrank a little, but was instantly reassured by the kindly face and tone of the woman, and reached out a dimpled little hand in token of amity and confidence.

"That is right, darling!" exclaimed the housekeeper, accepting the proffered tribute and kissing the child affectionately as she took her in her arms. "The rooms are quite ready now, and we will have a bath and dress for dinner."

"Her name is Leda," said the young man, coming forward with a pleasant smile, as if glad to be freed from a perplexing situation. "We are, unfortunately, alone, and it is a great relief to me to be assured, by your manner and appearance, that she will be kindly and properly cared for, after the harrassing travel of the last few days. Here is the key to the larger trunk, in which you will find her apparel. Please be guarded in your conversation with her, so as not to recall anything that is past."

"I think I understand you, sir," said the woman, with a sympathetic glance at the rosy little face, whose features so strongly resembled those of the man before her, "and your wishes shall be followed. Will you have your dinner brought to your room?"

"Yes, thank you," he replied, "that will be best on her account. Afterwards, if you are at leisure, I should like to consult with you about finding a proper home for her, as I shall remain in your city during the winter."

"I shall be glad to assist you," she said, with the faintest tint of a blush on her yet comely cheeks, "and