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The Little Fruit Seller
 A Story of a Mexican Girl
 By F. A. MITCHEL

One afternoon Leonard Hardman, a young man who had gone to Mexico to assume a position as station agent on a railroad, was in his ticket and telegraph office when he saw a little Mexican girl on the platform outside selling fruit to persons waiting for trains. The girl might have been fifteen, though in the short dress she wore she looked like a child. Among others she approached a man who, judged by the leather whip in his hand, was a driver of a team. He was talking to another man, and when the girl nudged him to attract his attention he looked down at her with a scowl, then gave her a cut with his whip.

Hardman was a strapping fellow used to fighting his way wherever it became necessary and with enough humanity in him to feel enraged at so inhuman an act. He jumped through the open window beside him and, taking the teamster by the collar of his shirt with one hand, gave him a cuff with the other. The man put his hand to his hip, drew a revolver and fired at Hardman, but the latter grasped the weapon in time to turn the shot, wrenched it from the man and threw it to a distance. Then he pummeled his adversary with his fist till he cried for quarter. By this time others intervened, and the two were separated. The teamster picked up his revolver and his whip and went away, muttering.

Hardman when he had rearranged his disordered apparel returned to his office. The first thing that attracted his attention was the little Mexican girl standing on the platform before his window holding out an orange to him. Taking some coppers from his vest pocket, he handed them to her and took the orange, but she refused pay for the fruit. It was only an orange, but it was a token of her gratitude to her defender.

"Senior is very good," she said, expressing emotion with her fringed eyes. "You mean the other fellow is very bad," he replied. "What's your name, little one?"

"Pepita."

"Well, Pepita, if he troubles you again call on me."

"Senior is very brave, but to be brave against such a man will do no good, he will stab you in the back."

"Don't you worry, little girl," he returned. "That kind of a man is a coward, and I'm not afraid of a coward any day."

The avowal was lost on Pepita. She said nothing more and showed no concern, but from that time the teamster was seldom out of her sight when he was watching Hardman. She went about selling fruit as usual, but in her basket was something besides oranges and bananas; a bag in which some living creature was evidently confined, for there was a constant wriggling within.

A few days after the fracas between Hardman and the teamster Pepita was following the latter toward the station. The man loomed along without any evident purpose, but he did not deceive Pepita. She flitted after him, now slipping behind a bush, a fence—any object of concealment. When the man stepped up on to the platform, snatching her bag from the basket she made a dash for him, on tiptoe so that he might not hear her coming, and caught him just as he reached the window of Hardman's office. There she shook the bag bottom side up, landing a tarantula on the back of the enemy's neck. The villain uttered a yell and, dropping a revolver he carried in his hand, grabbed the viper and flung it away from him.

Meanwhile Pepita had darted back behind a corner of the station, where she was out of sight. Hardman hearing the yell looked out through the window in time to see the teamster beating a retreat. He recognized the teamster who had maltreated Pepita, but was ignorant of the cause of his flight, holding both hands to the back of his neck. Presently Hardman saw Pepita walking away with her basket on her arm as carelessly as if she had no object in view but the sale of her fruit. He called her to the window and asked her if she knew what was the matter with the teamster. For a reply she pointed to where the tarantula was crawling about.

"Well?" inquired Hardman.

"Senior, he come to kill you. I follow him. Just before he come to the window I put the tarantula on his neck."

Hardman looked grave. He had escaped being shot through the window by such defense as this little Mexican girl was capable of. It was not a man's method, but it had sufficed. A mere child had sent a strong man

away howling and saved the life of another strong man whom he had intended to kill. This was too much for Hardman's equipoise of feeling. He reached out through the window, took the girl in his arms and drew her close to him.

Hardman was twenty-seven years old, and Pepita was fourteen. Had he not been a stranger to Mexico he would have realized that a girl of thirteen there was as developed as one of twenty in a more northern climate. He caressed her in a fatherly way, and she received his caresses apparently as a child. He asked her if there was not something she needed that he could give her, but she declared that there was nothing. This surprised him, for never before had he met one of the peasantry of the country who would decline a gift. Indeed, many of them did not even confine their acceptances to gifts.

Hardman sent Pepita away after exacting a promise from her that she would not attempt thereafter to defend him against any attack from his enemy, but in case she suspected the man of being about to attack him at a disadvantage she might warn him.

Pepita made the promise with as innocent a mien as if she fully intended to keep it. Conscience was a matter that did not concern her. She was a child of nature, governed entirely by her emotions. As for a truth or a lie, that was simply a matter of requirement. How she kept her promise is best illustrated by the next episode in her eventful childhood, though perhaps, despite her few years, she was already a woman.

The teamster disappeared for a time. He was fighting the poison of a tarantula bite. He recovered in time, but he knew who had put the viper on him and feared her. One thing that deterred him from making another attempt on Hardman's life was the fact that Pepita was a witness that he had tried to murder the man he hated. He had counted on doing the deed without the murderer being known, but now he was aware that the little Mexican girl was watching him. He did not often see her, but felt sure that her eyes were constantly on him.

And so they were. One night he was improvising a hand grenade. He was working in a hut where he lived with a ragged curtain over the window. There was a tear in it, and through that tear Pepita was peeping. When he had finished his weapon he began to destroy certain articles. The crafty girl surmised that he was intending to kill Hardman with his bomb, then light out. He was evidently afraid of his grenade, for before going to bed he took it outside, scooped out a small hole in the ground, put it in and covered it with earth and leaves.

As soon as all was quiet in the cabin Pepita possessed herself of the bomb and carried it away. Coming to a window within which was a bright light, she examined her find, a tobacco box with explosive contents. She had seen the teamster place percussion powder under a certain point in the side of the box and mark it with a cross. She noted the cross, and, returning to the cabin with the weapon which she knew was intended for Hardman, she scraped out just enough earth before the door to set the box in, leaving its crossed side uppermost and nearly on a level with the ground. Then she placed dry leaves over it.

The next day a report was heard, and later persons passing the teamster's cabin found it a wreck. The occupant was missing. Supposing that he had been killed or injured by the force that ruined his home, a search was made for him, but neither he nor any part of him was found.

For a time Pepita said nothing to any one as to her part in the explosion, but as time passed and the teamster did not reappear she revealed the secret that she had seen him making a bomb. Then it was surmised that it had been accidentally exploded, but that he had not been within striking distance. How the explosion came about without his being its victim was not known to any one except Pepita, who, remembering where she had placed the bomb, was enabled to look more directly than others for the cause. At the time of the explosion there had been a violent windstorm. Pepita, looking for the cause of the explosion, cast her eye on the limb of a tree that had been broken. The detached fragment she found some distance from the cabin blackened as if by an explosion. She felt sure that this fragment had been blown down upon the bomb. The explosion occurred in the daytime when the teamster was away, so that he was not injured. But it is likely that when he saw his cabin blown to stumps he surmised the cause and concluded that it was time for him to depart.

Meanwhile Pepita was wandering about selling fruit apparently as unconcerned as if she were not mixed up in an affair of a tragic nature. Every one else in that region was discussing the matter of the explosion, but the little Mexican seemed content to carry her basket about, taking in a few coppers at a time for an orange or a banana, paying no attention to the talk.

There was one who looked upon Pepita with very different feelings from the generality of persons; that

was Leonard Hardman. He had learned that she was not a child, but a woman; that she loved him with all the passion of a girl of the south. He questioned her about the explosion and had learned the facts. Twice he owed her his life. What was he to do? Respond to the passion of a Mexican girl but little more than a child and a fruit peddler?

Notwithstanding her ignoble position the fact that she had been so devoted to him affected him seriously. His life belonged to her. Without her protection he would not be living. After much thought he came to a conclusion. "Pepita," he said one day, "how would you like to go to school?"

She looked at him inquiringly.

"If you go to school you and I might some day be more to each other than we are," he added.

"Yes, senior; I will go to school."

This proposition and its acceptance were the keynote to the future of these two persons. Pepita went to school, and there came a remarkable change in her. She is now Senora Hardman. She worships her husband and he worships her.

FARM COST ACCOUNTS.

- * The principles used to obtain
- * costs on the farm are really no
- * different than those used in the
- * factory. The principal activity of
- * both farm and factory is to pro-
- * duce.
- * The elements entering into the
- * cost of the finished product, be it
- * on the farm or in the factory, are
- * the same—namely, labor, mate-
- * rial and expense.
- * The labor on the farm is
- * classed as man labor, horse la-
- * bor and machine labor.
- * The material consists of such
- * items as seeds, fertilizers, etc.
- * The expense items are taxes,
- * insurance, depreciation on build-
- * ings, small sundry expenses, etc.
- * The total of the expense items
- * are proportionately charged to
- * the production departments of
- * the farm.—Hoard's Dairyman.

OLD AND NEW FARMING.

Organization of a National Agricultural Society Marks an Epoch.

Going to the city of New York to organize a national agricultural society and holding the meeting in a smart hotel may strike surviving members of the old Society of Grangers with surprise, but the farmer has been such a progressive in things pertaining to his business that he has lost that sense of exclusiveness which once influenced his thinking concerning great centers of population, says the St. Louis Globe-Democrat. Still, in the mass the farmer is not nearly as progressive as he can and will be made, according to former Secretary of Agriculture Wilson, who was elected as first president of the National Agricultural Society. Mr. Wilson knows about all that can be known of practical farming under both old and new conditions, and his address at the New York meeting shows him highly capable of doing the thinking needed to fit the majority of farmers to present conditions and prepare them for new conditions of the future. Pointing out that continuing improvement in environment and living conditions of all classes is necessitating larger incomes for all those dependent upon returns for labor, he insisted that the inevitable increase in labor cost in all industrial lines must be met by greater efficiency toward increasing the capacity of labor for the production of larger product and for the avoidance of waste both of labor and material. By this means increased production can be made to more than offset its increased cost. "Agriculture," he said, "is the greatest productive industry, the fundamental industry and practically the one upon which all others are based. Great advances have been made in this primary industry and in some sections have been effective, but the great mass of agricultural production is as yet unmoved. The new generation in that field wants to get the best and latest. This society will seek to co-ordinate all that is being done and bring it closer to the individual farmer." When this work is well done the problem of how we are to stop the rush from farm to city will have been solved, and that solution will carry with it the solution of some economic and social problems beginning to disturb city life.

A Common Curiosity

"Willie why weren't you in school yesterday afternoon?"

"Do you want to know too?"

"Of course."

"Oh, see, teacher. Pa and ma says we busy all evening explaining that Detroit Free Press."

Taken at His Word.

He (after marriage)—What! You have no fortune? You said over and over again that you were afraid some one would marry you for your money. She—Yes, and you said over and over again that you would be happy with me if I hadn't a cent. Well, I haven't a cent.

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The presidential contest also will soon be at hand. Already candidates for the nomination are in the field and the campaign, owing to the extraordinary character of the times, will be of supreme interest. No other newspaper will inform you with the promptness and cheapness of the Thrice-a-Week edition of the New York World.

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