Marriages Are Made in Heaven

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Marriages Are Made in Heaven

By ANNA BLANCHE CUNNINGHAM

To ALL the neighborhood she was known as “Doña Teresa.” She had been born in Madrid and she did not allow her friends to forget that fact, even in her poverty. Gray-haired, petite, she stepped across the earth-swept floor of her little house and picking up a black shawl, draped it carefully about her shapely head. A moment later she was making her way down the street toward the neighborhood grocery store.

The sun shone brightly on the rows of adobe houses that squatted close to the water’s edge and lined the smelter district of the city where Doña Teresa lived. They faced a long, black wall of refuse that hugged the hillside and followed the river for several miles. Just across the river the brown peaks of Old Mexico rose starkly against the morning light.

Doña Teresa quickened her steps. The sun was getting high and the air uncomfortably warm. Already, cluttered backyards were gay with fresh-washed clothes, and children were playing noisily on the streets. A few women, fat and formless, sauntered along the walk, nodding to her in friendly fashion as they passed. Doña Teresa’s superior lineage proved no barrier to their friendship.

“Buenos días,” said the storekeeper politely, as she entered a musty, flat-roofed building. What will you have this morning?”

“A little chili, Señor Garcia,” she answered, “and a bag of frijoles. Frijoles are the only thing cheap these days.” Her laugh was cheerful.

Señor Garcia motioned her to a box beside the counter. “No need to stand,” he said kindly. “You do not look so strong, Doña Teresa.”
"No," she answered with an audible sigh. "In the old days when I was in Madrid—"

But he was out of hearing and she climbed onto the box, her sentence unfinished.

"How is the señor?" the storekeeper inquired, coming nearer to weigh out the beans.

"Ah, Papa, he is not good, not good, Señor Garcia. More and more he forgets. Señor Garcia, he forgets even when we were married. Forty years ago it was, Señor Garcia."

"Is it so?" he asked respectfully. "And did you know, Doña Teresa, that Ramón and Maria are married already?"

"¡Jesús! ¿Es verdad?" she exclaimed. "And by the priest, Señor?"

"No," he replied. "A civil marriage. A wedding costs money, Señora. It can be done without."

"No, no, Señor. That is very bad. Parents should save for the weddings of their children."

Señor Garcia handed her the two small packages of beans and chili.

"Gracias," she murmured, and reaching her hand into her worn purse she took out two small coins and handed them to him.

"Adiós," he called, as she left the store, "Adiós, señor," she answered him.

At home she took off her black shawl, folded it carefully, and laid it away. It had been many years since she had bought a new one. Putting on a clean, checked apron, she took up her sewing and went into the back yard where a rocking chair stood in the wide block of shade made by the house.

Consuela and Josefina Hernandez, neighbor children, were playing under the fig tree and Doña Teresa smiled kindly at them as her needle flew back and forth. Presently a little, white-haired man stepped out of the house. He stood regarding her with a vacant expression on his wizened face.
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"Ah, Papa," she said, "you have got up. And did you have a good sleep?"

Receiving no answer, she left her sewing and went into the kitchen, where she hastily warmed a dish of chili-seasoned beans and set it on the table. The little man had tottered into the house behind her. He drew up his chair to the table, tasted the food, and shoved it aside.

Doña Teresa went back to her work with an anxious expression on her face. Papa might die before—. But her thoughts were interrupted by the two children who were running toward the house.

"Look! Look what we found in the sand, all covered up. And inside it makes a noise."

One of them handed her a small tin box, its lid tied down securely with a strong cord. The contents made a clattering noise.

Doña Teresa's face flushed with anger as she snatched the box from the child's grimy hand.

"Naughty children," she cried: "You have been meddling. Go to your own casas at once. Go!"

Her usually soft voice was raised to a shrill pitch and the children, frightened, crept out of the yard.

A few minutes later Doña Teresa left her sewing and went to the fig tree, taking the box with her. The ground was sandy and there was a scooped-out place where the children had come upon their treasure. She stooped over and made a deep hole where she placed the box; carefully covering it with earth. When she had finished, a little mound remained, scarcely noticeable.

On the other side of the yard, near the shed, was a growth of cactus, interspersed here and there with Spanish dagger and long, drooping branches of ocotilla. She dug up a few of the smaller plants and put them in the ground near the mound where the box was buried. When she had finished her hands were smarting from pricks.

"Cactus needles are sometimes useful," she reflected. "The children will not meddle now with the box."
She was more weary than usual that evening as she lighted the oil lamp and set the table for the evening meal. Her preparations were barely completed when the door opened and a pretty, dark-eyed girl entered the room.

“You are late tonight, my child,” Doña Teresa said, a trifle severely. “It is not well for girls to be late coming home from their work.”

“But, Abuela, dear,” answered the girl, “it is very far up town and the street cars as so slow. And see, Grandmother, is it not pretty?” She held a dainty lace collar against her slim, brown throat. “There was a sale today. It is a bargain, Abuela. Only thirty-five cents.”

“Ah, Margarita, will you never stop spending the money. What good is it that you stay working at the store all day when you spend all you make? And your poor grandmother, do you not think of her, sewing all the time for her richer friends?”

“Abuela, Abuela, I do think of you,” cried Margarita, flinging her arms around her grandmother’s neck. “But the collar—it was so pretty, and a bargain.”

There was a sob in Margarita’s voice and Doña Teresa’s chidings turned to words of comfort.

Later, the evening meal completed, Margarita donned the pretty new collar and besought her grandmother’s permission to go to the movie theater only a few blocks down the street.

Doña Teresa gave a reluctant consent. She always fretted when Margarita left the house. “Young people are not as they once were,” she complained to Papa. “In Spain, when I was young—”

Papa, dozing in his chair, opened his eyes and solemnly nodded, almost as if he understood.

Two months passed. The warm, enervating air of summer had given place to the sharp, bracing breezes of autumn. Margarita had gone out again for the evening. Juan Hernandez came almost every night now and the two went out together, sometimes to the movies, sometimes to
the neighboring dance hall; but more often, because pennies were scarce, they went for a leisurely stroll down the crooked little streets of the outlying district. Tonight Doña Teresa had grumbled more than usual when her permission was asked, but she had at last given a grudging consent. "One is young only once," she had remarked to Papa, apologetically.

Papa dozed in his chair for a time and then toddled off to bed. Doña Teresa had taken out her needlework. She was making a scarf for Señora Garcia. Now and then she stopped to hold it out at arm's length while she admired its silken sheen.

If only she could have one for Margarita, she lamented to herself. But the money. Ah, that was the difficulty.

Sighing she folded the scarf and put it away. Throwing a shawl over her head, she stepped to the door, opened it, and went outside.

The night was clear with myriads of stars. Doña Teresa walked cautiously to the shed, picked up a garden trowel, and hurried over to the fig tree where she had buried the box two months before.

She could not avoid a nervous glance about the yard. Shadows dappled the white, moonlit ground. Beneath the fig tree there was discernible only a black patch of mystery. Even the tall yucca, yonder in the corner, seemed a ghostly sentinel, watching her every movement.

With an effort she conquered her momentary fears, and, stooping over, began digging in the sand. A moment later she struck something hard. It was the box. With eager, trembling fingers, she untied the cord and raised the lid.

For a half second she allowed her eyes to rest greedily on the nickles and dimes and quarters which more than half filled the container. Then she set the box down, reached into the inside pocket of her dress and pulled out a handful of small change. There was another handful. Five dollars in all.
She dropped the money into the box and hastily cov- ered it up. Forty dollars that box contained! A large sum. But then, she had spent the greater part of a lifetime accumu- lating it.

"It is enough," she told herself. "I shall begin my preparations at once." So long, so long a time it had taken to get that money!

Suddenly the back door of the house opened and she heard her granddaughter's voice calling, "Abuela, Abuela, where are you?"

Startled, Doña Teresa hurried in. Juan Hernandez was standing with his arm around Margarita. The two looked excited and happy.

"Grandmother, see the ring! Is it not beautiful? Fifty dollars it cost Juan. And, Abuela, we are married already. It happened tonight. Kiss me, Abuela, and say you are glad.

Doña Teresa's tiny form seemed to shrivel as she let herself down on the nearest chair. "And not by the priest?" she asked faintly. "No, Abuela," Margarita replied, in a trembling voice. "It was by the law. We have saved for a wedding. We have begun already. Look, Abuela.

She held out a five dollar bill to her grandmother to see. "We will put it away at once."

Doña Teresa gave no heed to her words. Her face was white with anger and her eyes showed fire, even in that dim light. "It is a wicked thing you have done," she cried. "I shall punish you as you deserve."

She glanced significantly at a long whip hanging against the wall. Margarita screamed with terror. Doña Teresa had never used the whip; but her granddaughter had many friends who had felt the sting of the lash for offences less grave than hers.

"Ramon and Maria were married by the law," Margarita defended.

In the morning she went about her duties in an ab-stracted fashion. Two or three times she started out to the fig tree. But she did not go. No—the money—her purpose. Had she not promised Father Jaramillo, that day in the little chapel, many years ago? Margarita was young. Perhaps she and Juan could save enough money. But she shook her head at the thought. She knew too well the futil-ity of such a plan.

For days and nights she wrestled with the problem. At last, "one evening while Margarita was doing the supper dishes, she walked resolutely out to the fig tree. When she came back she was carrying the little tin box. "See, Margarita," she said, "you shall have a wedding." Her hand trembled ever so little as she opened the lid and set the box on her granddaughter's little dressing table. "Dear, dear Abuela," cried Margarita joyfully. "Shall I really have a wedding, and invite my friends, and have a gown and all?"

"Yes, my child, you shall have a veil, flowers, every-thing."

The following days were filled with busy preparations. At the end of each week Juan put by what savings he could out of his meagre earnings, but Doña Teresa was obliged to bear most of the financial burden. Early and late she planned and worked, and in the hurry and bustle of prep reserva-tion her troubles were forgotten. She even sang snatches of old songs as with deft fingers she fashioned the beautiful folds of white satin into a wedding gown for Margarita.

"Dear, dear Abuela," cried Margarita joyfully. "Shall I really have a wedding, and invite my friends, and have a gown and all?"

"Yes, my child, you shall have a veil, flowers, every-thing."

Not a single detail was lacking that tightly belonged to the occasion. Whatever of sorrow and hardship Margarita might be facing, she was carrying the little tin box.
“And an evil thing it was to do,” Doña Teresa retorted. But her quick anger had already receded and grief was taking its place. She pressed her little blue-veined hands to her temples and moaned aloud.

“My granddaughter, my own granddaughter, not married by the priest!”

Marcia drew a little closer to Juan. For a time there was silence in the room, broken only by the heartbroken sobbing of Doña Teresa. At last, summoning all her dignity, she looked up to say, “It is not fitting that Doña Teresa’s granddaughter should be married with no priest to say a blessing. Dear child, marriages are made in Heaven.”

There were happy tears in Margarita’s eyes when at last her grandmother gave her a kiss of forgiveness and kindly patted the arm of her new grandson.

“We must manage somehow,” Doña Teresa murmured, as the young couple left the room. Through the long, weary hours of the night she lay thinking, thinking, thinking. Margarita’s marriage must be solemnized by a priest. There must be the service at the church, a wedding—everything must be seemly. But the money. Where could she get it? Juan could help very little, she knew. There was the little linen box; but the good Lord knew how many years she had struggled and saved to get that forty dollars. And for a purpose, a very special purpose.

There in the darkness she went over again those years of her girlhood in Spain, and later in Mexico. There had been money enough for comfort in those days, before the wars had eaten it up. It was in the States she had met Papa. Poor Papa! He had been kind to her, but always there had been the bitter struggle with poverty. Births, deaths, funerals, they had taken all the money. Then had come Papa’s illness and its subsequent disaster. That forty dollars—she must hold on to it. But Margarita—

would always remember this day with pride and satisfaction.

But when it was all over and life had settled down to its monotonous round of duties, Doña Teresa’s face was clouded once more. Her usually light step lagged, and even her sewing made her nervous and weary. One evening, Margarita found her sitting alone in her little dark bedroom. She knelt down at her feet and laid her head in her grandmother’s lap.

“Abuela, why are you not happy? Was not the wedding very beautiful?”

“Yes, child, very beautiful.”

“Then why—?”

Dona Teresa laid her hand fondly on the girl’s head.

“There is something I must say, Margarita. I have many years and death may come soon. One should not live a lie.”

“Abuela, I do not understand.”

Dona Teresa gave no heed to the interruption.

“Margarita, your grandmother is not married. By the law—yes. But that is no marriage. Marriages are made in Heaven.”

Margarita’s eyes showed only wide-eyed wonder as her grandmother told her story.

“Papa and I were very poor, and so we were married by the law. But we were going to go as soon as possible to the church. Many times we had the money. But children came and died, and then there were the funerals. Always we began over again. At last Papa got the sickness and after that he could no longer remember. Then your mother must marry, and now you. I have not many years, Margarita; there will not be time to start again.”

Margarita gave a short cry. “Abuela, I did not know!”

“It is best so, Margarita. I shall pray to the blessed Madre Maria. She will understand.”

It was a week later. Doña Teresa had been sewing. She had just finished the beautiful scarf for Senator Cunningham. Marriages Are Made in Heaven [35] Published by UNM Digital Repository, 1938

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Garcia, and had laid it away in a box, when Margarita burst into the room.

"See, see!" she cried, running up to her grandmother and dropping a roll of bills into her hands. "Forty dollars—for your wedding."

Doña Teresa's voice trembled.

"Margarita, child, where—?"

"My engagement ring. We sold it. I have no need of it now. The money is for you. It is to pay back."

"Ah, mi propia nieta, you should not have done it." Tears filled her eyes but her face was shining. "May the saints in Heaven bless you."

Within a month another marriage was solemnized in the little church near the smelter. The tall candles burned brightly on the altar and the pews were filled with friends and neighbors. The bride wore a veil and carried flowers in her small, blue-veined hands. Doña Teresa and Papa were celebrating their nuptials at last. But Papa did not understand.

Paradox

By ROBERT DARK

Around the corner we met a tardy spring
Ruthlessly flinging emeralds into a sky
As tired of such wanton display as those who find
It droll to hear remorse become a sigh.

This sudden resurrection does not possess
The lure which made the Grecian ode or Keats Revered. For us it is sheer paradox—
Brief victories whose ultimate ends are defeats.