

A stormy affair

It was enough and more than he could bear. Victoria had again compared him to Zorro, in his disfavor of course, after Zorro had delivered some bandits to the jail that he had chased throughout the night.

He remembered all too well the many occasions when an imposter Zorro had appeared in the pueblo and Victoria had fallen for him only to realize later that he was a fraud.

Zorro was waiting in the kitchen to talk to Victoria. He had waited until it was closing time to be undisturbed in this conversation that he wasn't looking forward to.

"Zorro," Victoria was about to rush in his arms when he stopped her.

"Victoria, we need to talk," he said slowly.

"What is it?" her voice was filled with dread.

"I can't continue like this. I have come to the conclusion that you will never love me as myself and that's why I have decided to end it. Marry someone else you will be happy with!"

"You are taking back your promise?" Victoria was shocked and her eyes started to fill with tears.

"Yes, I'm sorry," Zorro said softly.

"Zorro, how can you do this when you have never given me the chance to see the man behind the mask."

"Oh Victoria, I have given you more than enough chances to figure out who I am, but you chose not to see me at all. Look at the many times you fell for an imposter and how you reacted when Don Alejandro came in to town as Zorro who couldn't possibly be Zorro. No, Victoria, it is enough. You are in love with an illusion. You are in love with a man who is dressed in black and not a man of flesh and blood. As soon as I take off my clothes you will ignore me and I can't bear that anymore."

"Zorro, please give us a chance," Victoria grabbed him by his arm trying to hold him.

"It is too late, Victoria. We must both go on with our lives now." He released himself from her grip and vanished through the door leaving her behind crying.

The next time Zorro came to town he didn't even greet her or seek her out any more, making it all too clear that he hadn't changed his mind.

Her customers saw Victoria crying before she went to the kitchen to escape their curious eyes and in the next weeks the speculations began what Victoria would do now when she had obviously broken up with Zorro. Or maybe he had had his fun with her and discarded her now.

Z Z Z

At the same time Diego stayed more at the hacienda offering his help to his father with the ranch and he finally seemed to be amenable to his father's attempts to match him with one lovely senorita or the other to get his son finally married off.

Victoria could hide a pang of jealousy when she saw Diego more and more surrounded by

marriageable woman, making them compliments.

“Diego, what has made you change your mind? I always thought you weren't inclined to marriage waiting for the the woman you are secretly in love with,” Victoria addressed him when he was for once sitting alone at his table.

“I have decided I don't want to wait anymore and I'd rather marry a woman who does not love me than one who is in love with another man.”

“That sounds pretty sad to me. Have you talked to that woman and she has rejected you?”

“No, but I have made up my mind and my father has been nagging me long enough to get married and I think he is right.”

Z Z Z

The next Saturday there was a big party at the de la Vega hacienda where Alejandro had invited many of his friends with their daughters.

To Diego's surprise Alejandro had also invited Victoria and he took his father to the side to talk about it with him.

“Father, why have you invited Victoria? I thought this party had the purpose to find me a bride!”

“I would certainly count Victoria among the marriageable women in this pueblo. You and Victoria get along well and friendship is always a good base for a marriage.”

“But Victoria! She sees me as a brother and not like a man. I'd rather have one of the other woman who really looks at me.”

Only when he saw Victoria rush by and run for the door he realized that she must have heard their conversation.

“Excuse me, Father,” he said before he followed her to the backyard of the hacienda where her wagon was stationed. Victoria was just about to climb into her wagon when he reached her.

“Victoria, stop, please don't go. I'm sorry what I said.”

“Diego, let me go. You have made your mind all too clear. You don't want me at this party and I'd better leave. Every woman is better than me.” Victoria couldn't hide her tears from humiliation. Diego took her by the arm and kept her from climbing the cart.

“You remember when we talked about the woman I was secretly in love with? It was you, Victoria. But you never look at me and you only see me as a brother. But I'm also a man, Victoria.”

With that he took her in his arms and kissed her passionately, the taste of wine still on his lips. He started to touch her in a way that even Zorro hadn't dared and Victoria felt her body react with a rising heat that was new to her. She started to moan when his hands slipped under her blouse touching her breasts and she felt his desire rise between them. Leaning her against the cart Diego continued to kiss her and when his hand started to run up her thigh they had already lost control. Her hands roamed across his muscular body while she was breathing his masculine scent.

“Diego? Diego, where are you?” they heard Alejandro call from the house. It brought them to their senses for a moment.

“You should better leave now, Victoria, as long as you still can and and we both do something that you might regret later.” Diego whispered in a hoarse voice.

He had been about to carry her to his room with Victoria all too willing to go on and they both knew it.

Heated and shaking from emotion Victoria climbed onto the cart and headed to the pueblo while Diego leaned against the wall in the shadows to cool down before he faced his guests again.

Z Z Z

The next time they met in the tavern they could hardly keep from staring at each other. When Victoria accidentally touched his hand serving him lemonade he threw her a glare. He covered her hand with his tall one, whispering, “Don't tempt me Victoria,” making the heat rise again inside her with the contact.

When Victoria went to the kitchen and didn't come back, Diego followed her to find her outside leaning against the back wall.

Without a word he stepped closer, unable to resist her. Faster than that night at the party they were in thrall of their passion forgetting everything around them for the time being. They were it lucky that it was Alicia, Victoria's helper who discovered them and made them draw apart.

They stared at each other for some time not able to deny what was going on between them. The way Victoria eyed him from head to foot made all too clear she no longer looked at him as a brother but as a man.

“I heard you were going to propose to Senorita Maria Valdez. Is that true?” Victoria broke the silence.

“Yes, I intend to ask her tomorrow.”

“Why Diego? Why her? You don't love her,” Victoria asked him accusingly. She didn't ask why not her, but her question was obvious.

“You don't love me, Victoria. Your heart only belongs to Zorro, an illusion of a man nobody can compete with. I'd rather marry a woman who doesn't love me than one who loves another.”

“Oh yes, I understand.” Victoria was furious now. “You cannot have your wife love another, but do you think it is fair to the woman if her husband loves someone else? Don't deny your feelings for me, Diego. How can you even think of marrying Senorita Valdez.” Angrily she stormed back to the kitchen leaving him behind again.

Victoria couldn't believe this was happening. First Zorro had split up with her and now Diego was heading into a loveless marriage after he had declared his love to her. What was she to do? Was Diego right that she would always love Zorro? Was there a place in heart for another man? Her body knew the answer but this wouldn't be enough for Diego who wanted her to give him her heart as well as her body.

At the hacienda Diego was met by his father who snapped at him furiously.

“I just talked to my friend Juan Valdez and he told me that he doesn't want to see you at his hacienda and especially around his daughter Maria.”

“Did he say why, Father?”

“You ask ME why? Someone saw you kissing Victoria today behind the tavern and it must have been quite embarrassing. Didn't I try to raise you as a gentleman? Haven't you got any decency, Diego? How could you kiss Victoria in public when you intended to propose to another woman? I'm ashamed by your behavior, Diego. You will make amends by marrying Victoria as soon as possible.”

“Father, you can't have us marry when Victoria is in love with Zorro.”

“Is that so? What I heard from your kissing today, Victoria seems no longer to be in love with Zorro and the last time he has been in the pueblo he didn't even look at her any more. Obviously Zorro and Victoria have split up and now she is free again to choose another.”

Their reputation shattered they had no choice but to marry three weeks later while Alejandro acted as their chaperone no longer granting them a moment alone without supervision.

During the big wedding celebration they slipped away quietly when it got late and the mood of the guests had become more and more frolicsome from the wine.

The first moment alone, after all these weeks they weren't able to touch or even kiss each other, they immediately began where they had stopped the last times.

Discarding their clothes on the floor they started to explore each other's bodies without any more restrictions and let their passion take over.

Diego felt her crying when they were relaxing in the aftermath of their passion.

“What is wrong, Victoria? Did I hurt you?”

“No, it's not you, Diego. It's me. I'm feeling as if I have been betraying you and Zorro at the same time. You with my heart and him with my body.”

“Don't cry, querida,” Diego soothed her, but he could not hide his voice anymore revealing his identity as Zorro. “It's me who has to ask you for forgiveness for not being honest to you.”

“You? Why didn't you say something?” she was angry now.

“Because I wanted you to find out by yourself.” Stripping her of her anger with his argument he took her in his arms again, getting the desired response from his touch, convinced they would work it out tomorrow, but it wasn't important yet.