

"And the ship?"
 "You will go to the captain and tell him to lay her up."
 "Have you no orders to leave me?"
 "None."
 "Not even for madame?"
 "Madame will hereafter take care of herself."
 "Will you be long away?"
 Oliver did not answer.
 "Where are you going?"
 "To the end of the world perhaps."
 "And when will you return?"
 "Never."
 And Oliver rode rapidly out of the court-

XLV.

OLIVER IN DANGER.

Carmen was recalled to her senses by a sensation of freshness and coolness. Her women, kneeling beside her, were bathing her temples with vinegar.

As she opened her eyes her presence of mind returned.

"Is there still time?" she cried looking around for the clock. When her eyes rested on the dial the minute finger was pointing at IX.

Carmen raised herself with a convulsive movement. It was nearly half an hour since the poison had begun to spread through her system. Morales' antidote might prove effective, but in three minutes it would be too late.

The Gitana fully understood the imminence of the peril that threatened her. Death was upon her; his icy hand already touched hers.

In a moment she was on her feet. With a swift stride she passed out of the room and through the dining-room. The next instant she was rushing madly up the staircase. Nor did she stop until she reached the little sitting-room off her bedroom. Eagerly she tore open the desk in which she had placed the antidote, placed the bottle to her lips and drained it of its contents.

Immediately the feverish energy and unnatural excitement which had hitherto sustained her gave way. Her limbs were suddenly paralyzed; the floor seemed to sink beneath her feet and the walls to dance around her; then she swooned for the second time. As she fell on the floor the thought flashed swiftly across her brain. "It was too late! I am lost!"

The swoon lasted much longer than before, and the day was well advanced when she returned to consciousness.

On awaking she found herself in bed in her own room. By her side were standing two persons in whom she recognized her brother and the family physician.

"Ah!" cried Morales, "Madam is recovering."

The physician took her hand and placed his finger on her pulse.

"How do you feel, madam?"
 "I am not in any pain," returned Carmen.
 "Am I ill?"

"I thought so until now, madam," replied the doctor, "but you completely reassure me. Your skin is fresh and moist, there is no sign of fever, so I think there is no cause for uneasiness. A night's sleep will completely restore you, and you will awake in the morning in your usual good health."

With this cheering assurance the doctor took his leave.

"In the name of heaven," cried Morales when they were alone, "tell me what has happened!"

"Do you not understand? Can you not have guessed?"

"No, I have been racking my brain over it since morning."

"Do you not see? I drank the poison I intended for Oliver."

"How? Why?"

"One of the mirrors in the room betrayed me. Oliver saw me pour out the poison."

"And he made you drink it?"

"Yes, and had it not been for the green bottle, you would have no sister."

"Aha!" cried Morales triumphantly, "you see I was right in forcing you to take the bottle. What did I say, sister?—No one knows what may happen. So, it was a happy inspiration of mine! Now your husband thinks you are dead, and to all appearance is very little grieved."

"He thinks I am dead!" repeated Carmen in astonishment.

"Certainly."

"Where is he?"

"Gone."

"When?"

"When you swooned the first time."

"Where is he gone?"

"To the other end of the world. Those were his words."

"To whom did he say so?"

"To Zephyr."

"And is he coming back soon?"

"Never. So he said at least."

Carmen raised herself on her elbow.

"Are you speaking seriously, Morales?"

"Seriously and truly. We are masters of the house. Your husband is on the road on his mare Miss Betsy. As I was returning from Havre I saw him pass; he was riding like a man that has the police after him; and I know how one who is in that fix can ride."

"The police!" murmured Carmen in a hard voice, "the police! Perhaps he is trying to escape them, and perhaps he will not succeed."

"Is it possible? What do you mean? Has Oliver been guilty of any crime?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Murder."

"I should like to believe you, little sister, but the thing is too absurd."

"It is true! Do you know why my husband was in such a hurry to put the ocean between him and this city? Do you know why he wished to leave this morning and not this evening?"

"How should I know?"

"I will tell you. It is because last night he killed George de Grancey."

"He killed George de Grancey! He killed the Governor of Havre! a gentleman allied to the highest families at court! Misery! I would not be in his shoes, if he really has done so! But who told you this?"

"He did."

"The unfortunate wretch! He boasted of it, eh? He must be crazy! He will be hunted down and caught and will infallibly be condemned. Caramba, sister, his head is not safe on his shoulders, and I think I see you a widow."

"I am counting on that," said Carmen, with a horrible smile.

"But," continued Morales, "perhaps your husband killed de Grancey in fair fight."

Carmen shrugged her shoulders.

"Come, come," she replied, "a duel at night, without seconds or witnesses! Who will believe such a story, and how can he prove it in court? Besides, his sudden and hasty flight will be looked upon as an additional proof of his guilt."

"You are right. But who will denounce him?"

"I! He has killed the man I loved, and he tried to kill me. I will return him evil for evil. It is only right and just."

"Take care what you do. You will have to confess that the Marquis de Grancey was your lover."

"Do you not know, brother, that I shall only say what I choose, and that what I do say will be believed?"

"You are clever, very clever! I never had the least doubt of it. But take care—that you do not compromise me."

"Just like you!" cried Carmen, "a frightful egotist, always thinking of yourself!"

"What would you have? I have adopted as my motto through life a saying that is both ancient and wise: 'True charity begins at home!'"

"In any case you have nothing to fear. You will not be in any way compromised. So, rely on Carmen's word and do not be uneasy. Now leave me."

"You wish to be alone?"

"Yes. To-night I devote to mourning George de Grancey's death. To-morrow to vengeance!"

Morales took a respectful leave of a sister whose genius was so far above his own and withdrew to his private apartment, where he endeavored to chase away certain unpleasant thoughts that would present themselves by counting his money.

The next day all Havre was thrown into a state of intense excitement by the rumor that the Marquis de Grancey was missing. Forty-eight hours before he had left his house, and nothing had been seen or heard of him since.

In vain were enquiries made. The municipal magistrates, the civil lieutenant, the principal judges, vied with each other in their endeavors to discover the missing man's whereabouts. All their efforts were futile.

A strange air of mystery surrounded the Governor's disappearance. On the night but one before, his valet had, as usual, presented himself for orders, and had been told that his services were not required until ten the following morning. At the appointed time he was surprised to find his master's room empty and the bed undisturbed. Evidently the Marquis had passed the night elsewhere. At first the man made light of the matter, but when the day and another night had passed without bringing any news of his master he became seriously alarmed, and acquainted the magistrates.

As we have said, all search was in vain. Public opinion was divided. Some people insisted that a crime had been committed. Others believed that the Marquis had met with an accident. But, it was argued, on one side or the other, M. de Grancey had not a single enemy in the city; and he could hardly have fallen a prey to robbers, as his purse was found in his bedroom; an accident too was almost as unlikely, for no body had been found, and as the lost man was an excellent swimmer he could hardly have perished by drowning, even supposing that he had chosen the midnight hour for a stroll on the harbor.

Such was the state of the public feeling when the civil lieutenant received a note from Madame Le Vaillant entreating the favor of an immediate visit, as she had important revelations to make.

The magistrate, it is needless to say, lost no time in presenting himself at Ingouville. He was at once received by Carmen, who at once opened the conversation by referring to the matter in hand.

"Sir," said she, "a sad piece of news has just reached me. I had the honor of counting the Marquis de Grancey among my friends. I believe it to be my duty to reveal everything I know which may aid you in discovering his fate."

"Do you know anything, madam," asked the official eagerly, "which would put us on the track?"

"Nothing positive. But what I have to tell may be of some service to you."

"Be kind enough to explain, madam. In such a strange, mysterious case as this the smallest clue is important."

"Well, sir, I firmly believe that a crime has been committed."

"Your opinion is shared by many. On what ground do you base your conviction?"

"The Marquis de Grancey had an enemy."

"Are you certain?"

"I am. I can prove it."

"Who was his enemy?"

"My husband."

"What, madam," cried the magistrate in astonishment, "do you suspect—do you accuse Mr. Le Vaillant?"

"God forbid!"

"And yet your words signify as much. You believe a crime has been committed, you say that the Marquis had an enemy, who was no other than your husband."

"What conclusion do you draw therefrom?"

"Madam, an old lawyer was accustomed to say in cases such as this, 'Find out who benefits by the crime.' If a man who has but one enemy is murdered, it is only reasonable to suspect his enemy."

"I am convinced that my husband is incapable of such a deed, but I think it possible that some friend or devoted servant of his may have murdered the Marquis without Mr. Le Vaillant's knowledge and against his wish."

"It is certainly possible. We will make every search in this direction. But it is my duty, madam, to ask you one or two questions—questions of a very delicate nature."

"Certainly, sir. I should not have asked you to come here, had I not been prepared to answer any question; you might put to me. What do you wish to know?"

"In the first place, madam, I must beg you to inform me, what may have been Mr. Le Vaillant's grounds for his hatred of the Marquis de Grancey?"

"He had but one—jealousy," returned Carmen unhesitatingly.

"Jealousy!" exclaimed the amazed magistrate.

"Yes, sir; that unfortunate passion which since the beginning of the world has caused so much mischief and spilt so much innocent blood."

"Madam," continued the magistrate, visibly embarrassed, "once more I beg you to pardon me, if I ask an indiscreet question. Mr. Le Vaillant you say, was jealous. Had he any grounds for his jealousy?"

"None. He had no right to suspect his wife. I know what my duties are, and I know how to perform them."

"And yet the Marquis loved you?"

"So he said."

"And you allowed him to say such things to you?"

"Why not? When a woman is sure of herself may she not listen to the compliments of a gallant?"

The magistrate did not seem to care to discuss the dangerous theory Carmen thus put forward.

"Did this jealousy," he continued, "ever lead to an open rupture between your husband and Mr. de Grancey?"

"My husband, carried away by his insane suspicions, went so far as to request the Marquis no longer to honor us with his visits."

"And what did Mr. de Grancey do?"

"He did not return. But he wrote."

"To you, madam."

"Of course."

"And you received his letters?"

"I could not help myself. I found them in my room without knowing how they came there. And again I should have been sorry to wound the feelings of an honest and courteous gentleman whom my husband had grievously injured."

"Did the correspondence between you last any length of time?"

"About two months."

"And what did you do with the Marquis' letters after having read them?"

"I burnt them."

"Your husband never found any of them in your possession."

"One only, which he took from me by force."

"When was this?"

"The day before yesterday."

"Do you know the contents of that letter?"

"Yes."

"What did Mr. de Grancey say?"

"He begged me to give him a rendez-vous for one moment in a small house he had purchased, which is situated in a lonely street which skirts my garden."

The magistrate pricked up his ears.

"A small house in a lonely street," he repeated. "And your husband read this letter?"

"He took it from me, notwithstanding my resistance, and carried it off to his room where he shut himself in."

The magistrate reflected a few moments.

"Madam," he said at last, "you are right. The information you have given me is of the highest importance. I must see Mr. Le Vaillant, and that at once. Would you have the kindness to let him know that I am here and that I wish to see him?"

Carmen looked at the magistrate with an admirably feigned air of astonishment.

"Are you not aware, sir, that my husband is not here?"

"I did not know it, madam. When did he go away?"

"Yesterday morning."

"How did he travel?"

"On horseback."

"Was anyone with him?"

"No, he was quite alone."

"What was his destination?"

"I do not know."

"When will he return?"

"I have no idea."

"How is it, madam, that you know nothing of his movements?"

"M. Le Vaillant told me of his departure. His leaving me is the more inexplicable as we were to have sailed a few hours later for Havre, where I have property. He went away suddenly, leaving me in a faint after a terrible scene that was due to his jealousy. I only learnt of what I may call his flight on recovering an hour after, and this unexpected intelligence threw me into a second swoon from which I only awoke in the evening. The last person to whom my husband spoke in this house is an old servant who was forty years in the service of my father-in-law. Would you like to question him?"

The magistrate signifying his assent, Zephyr was sent for.

"What did your master say to you," the magistrate asked him when he had made his appearance, "when he was leaving you yesterday?"

"Mr. Oliver said to me; 'Give me your hand and do not forget me,'" replied Zephyr.

"Is that all?"

"Then said I, 'Where are you going, sir?' He replied, 'To the end of the world.' As I thought that was rather far, I asked: 'When will you return?' Then he looked back at me with a sad face, spurred his horse and galloped off, crying: 'Never!'"

"Very good, my friend," said the magistrate, "you can go."

Zephyr left the room.

"Well, sir," said Carmen, "what do you make of this?"

Instead of replying the magistrate asked another question.

"Is there a door leading from your garden into the street of which Mr. de Grancey spoke?"

"Yes."

"Have you the key of that door?"

"I really can not tell you. The servants can no doubt tell you. I do not know. But it is quite likely that there is such a key. If your wish it, I will send and ask."

"It is not worth while giving you that trouble."

"It is no trouble."

"I thank you, madam. But it is not worth while—at present at least."

Here the visitor rose to take his leave.

"I am going now, madam, but before night I shall have the honor of seeing you again, and unless I am mistaken I shall be able to tell you that, thanks to your information, we have found a clue to this terrible mystery."

As he rode back to the city the magistrate pondered over the interview he had just had.

It was very strange, he thought. Evidently the woman he had just left was wittingly accusing her husband. As matters stood appearances went dead against Oliver Le Vaillant, and yet appearances are so frequently deceitful. In an hour, however, a clue to the truth would be obtained. How beautiful she was, that woman, and yet how likely it seemed, why, he could not tell, that her angelical beauty concealed the heart and the nature of a demon.

When the door closed behind the worthy magistrate Carmen had but one thought; "George will be avenged!"

To be continued.

HABITS OF THE BALTIMORE OYSTER.

In a conversation with a prominent oyster packer, says the *Baltimore American*, some curious and interesting features of the oyster trade were related. As is well known, the habits of this bivalve are an entire mystery; what it eats and how it lives are questions not yet understood. The spawn of the oyster floats around with the action of the waves and tide, and adheres to whatever it may come into contact with. Oysters taken from a rocky bed are of superior quality; those taken from a soft bottom are comparatively poor in quality. Thousands of "poor innocent" oysters died annually from resting on a soft bottom, a fact which should arouse the sympathies of all tender-hearted people.

The weight of the oyster, as it gradually matures, sinks it beneath the surface; and as soon as it is covered with sediment or mud, it dies. Many people suppose that the oyster really eats, and kind-hearted people, buying oysters in the shell, sometimes throw corn meal over them, thinking to feed them. The peculiar noise emanating from them has been supposed to be produced by feeding. All shellfish at times have their shells open, and when touched will instantly close them. The noise thus produced has been mistaken for mastication, when, in reality, it is from fright.

Most of the Baltimore dealers in raw oysters during the summer months transact their business at Fair Haven, Conn., wether large beds of Baltimore oysters have been transplanted. The beds are so arranged that, on the receding of the salt water tide, fresh water from a small stream covers the oysters; it is said that this fattens oysters better than any other method. Orders are received for the article in question during the summer months, and they are taken from the beds and shipped with the greatest possible dispatch, and many eat them with apparent relish, notwithstanding the warmth of the season. Altogether the oyster packing trade of Baltimore is an enormous one, and in connection with fruit and vegetable packing business, employs a capital of about \$25,000,000, a fact which sufficiently expresses the great importance of this interest to Baltimore.