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## THE GITAINA.

Expressly translated for the FAVORITE from the French of Xavier de Montepin.

XVIII.

CAPTAIN MATHURIN LEMONNIER.

Let us leave for a while the house in which the strange marriage of the Chevalier Tancred de Majac with the street dancing girl Carmen had taken place, and bend our steps to the hospitable mansion of Don José Rovero.

It is a sad spectacle to which we are about to introduce our readers.

It was the hour of sunrise—four in the morning. The faint rays of the breaking day were feebly streaming through the half-closed shutters of a sick room and struggling with the light of two dying night-lights which stood on a table in the middle of a richly-furnished bedroom. On the bed lay Don José Rovero, his face, of a deadly paleness, turned towards heaven, his eyes wide open, and his eyelids twitching in the half-light. Were it not for these indications of lingering life he might have been taken for dead.

At the foot of the bed Annunziata, the beautiful Cuban heiress, lay in a half reclining attitude. The poor girl's eyelids were swollen with long watching, and her face bore the traces of utter exhaustion. During the whole night she had watched untiringly by her father's side, until her strength gave way, and she fell into a broken, troubled sleep.

The old man was awake, endeavoring to soften as much as possible his hard gasps for breath, lest his daughter's rest might be disturbed.

Alas! the fatal hour predicted by the Brazilian sage was drawing fast to its term. Three days after Philip Le Vaillant's letter had caused hope and joy to spring up in his soul he had been stricken down, this time to rise no more. Yet he had struggled with all his strength and with all his energy against the approaching dissolution, but strength and energy were both unavailing, and the old man, crushed beneath the relentless malady that had so long pursued him, was now compelled to resign himself to the bitter thought that at last he must acquaint his darling child with the soreness of the afflictions that had overtaken him.

Annunziata, as the reader already knows, was unacquainted, not only with the extent, but even with the very existence of her father's misfortunes. His announcement of what had taken place took her completely by surprise, yet she contrived to persuade herself—indeed, in her place it was hard to imagine otherwise—that the disaster was not so great as on its first appearance. Don José had not the heart to tell her the bare, ghastly truth.

The poor child, he argued with himself, will know it only too soon. It will be time enough, when I have only a few hours to live, to tell her the worst.

Day by day the old man's agony increased. One paroxysm followed another with unceasing regularity. His life was now a mere wearisome burden to him, a continual and unbearable existence of martyrdom, from which he would have prayed earnestly for release had not the chains of affection bound him so closely to his only child.

At times, when suffering incomprehensible agony, he would think almost with envy of those who slept undisturbed in the silence of the tomb, and would murmur, almost unconsciously, in the words of the Psalmist, "*Beati, quia quiescent!*"—Blessed are the dead, for they are at rest.

Annunziata never left her father now, not for an hour even. In vain he besought her to take a little rest; she always refused to leave him. During the whole night she had watched, but as the morning broke exhausted nature demanded its necessary repose, and she gave way to the sleep that overpowered her.

One of those sudden crises which Don José compared to a hot iron searing his breast coming upon him with intense vehemence he was unable to prevent himself crying out in his agony. The cry awoke Annunziata, who started up in alarm and ran to the bedside. The sight that met her anxious gaze caused her to recoil in dismay.

Don José was hardly recognizable, even by his daughter. The veins on his forehead and temple were swollen almost to bursting beneath the livid skin, his eyes were sunk deep in his



"ALAS!" HE MURMURED, "THE END IS NOT FAR OFF!"

sockets, and bloody foam issued from his distorted lips.

Seizing the phial that contained the Brazilian empiric's remedy, Annunziata filled the little golden goblet and handed it to her father. Don José seized it and emptied it eagerly, and the crisis passed immediately. With a trembling hand he then took the phial from his daughter and anxiously held it up to the light. It was as he feared. Only a few drops of the precious liquid remained.

"Alas!" he murmured, "the end is not far off!"

Big tears rolled down the girl's cheeks as she watched him.

"Courage, my dear child," said the old man. "Your sorrow breaks my heart, and destroys the little energy I have left."

Annunziata wiped her eyes and endeavored to force a smile.

"Father," she asked, "how do you feel now?"

"Better, Much better. I am no longer in pain."

"Is that true, father?"

"It is, indeed, child. For some moments I was in cruel agony, I confess, but it is over now. But you, Annunziata, are tiring yourself out."

"Oh, father! Pray do not mind me. I am young and strong. In mind only am I out of health, and your recovery will soon cure me."

"My recovery!" thought Don José. "Oh, my God, thy hand is weighing heavy upon me, for it strikes me through my child who lives in my life and who will perhaps die of my death."

"My dear, dear child," he continued. "My cries awoke you from the sleep you need so much. I am sorry for it."

"No, no, father, do not talk so. I tell you once more I need no rest. I was only taking a passing nap, dreaming of France."

"Of France?"

"Yes, France that you will be so glad to revisit, for there you will find the friend of your youth. Ah, how I long for you to be strong again, that we may get away. I do not know how it is, but I detest Havana, with its perpe-

tual blue sky. You will think me silly, but indeed there are times when I cannot help thinking that there is misfortune in store for us in this country. Yet I am mistaken," she added with a smile that was pitiful to see, "for we are happy, are we not, father? Or at least we will be, soon?"

The old man had not the courage to reply to this hopeful appeal, coming from a mind that already presaged disaster.

The day had now fully broken, and the conversation was interrupted by the announcement that the medical men had arrived for their daily consultation.

Don José's illness was one of those incomprehensible and incurable affections which are undefined by science and occupy no recognized place in the category of human diseases. In the eighteenth century (and in the nineteenth for aught we know to the contrary) the doctors of Havana were no marvels of science and skill. But this absence of ability did not prevent them from having ample confidence in themselves. Compelled to admit their ignorance of the seat of the disease they were not far from actually denying its existence. They could not but see that the old man's system had undergone frightful ravages, but this they attributed to causes more or less plausible, which did infinite credit to their imaginative powers. One of these gentlemen insisted, in all good faith, that their patient's suffering were more the effect of imagination than anything else. The others were perfectly willing to agree that Don José's life was in no danger. Their opinion might be formulated as follows:

"We are all mortal, and Don José may die to-morrow, like any of us. But if so undesirable an event were to take place, it would be in no way due to disease."

Everyone will understand that the daily consultation of these sage advisers, so far from doing the patient good only added undue nervous excitement to his other complaints. Nevertheless, as the presence of the physicians and their learned talk gave infinite relief to Annunziata's fears, he sacrificed himself for his daughter, and allowed them to call and consult as they pleased. On the day in question they had, as usual, talked nonsense to their hearts' content.

"Alas," thought the old man, as he listened to their jargon, "on one point they are right enough—I shall soon be out of pain."

When the medical men had retired, a servant brought Don José, as usual, the list of vessels arrived within the last twenty-four hours. As he cast his eyes over the paper the merchant uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Thank God!" he cried, "he has come in time, and at least I shall die content."

Among the names of new arrivals on the list was that of the "Marsouin," of Havre. The captain of this vessel, which we already know belonged to Philip Le Vaillant, after having repaired the damages done to his ship off the Cape of Good Hope, at once sailed for Havana, intending to learn whether the captain to whom he had entrusted a letter for Don José had faithfully fulfilled his commission.

The arrival of the "Marsouin" removed the great cause of the dying man's anxiety. He now had the certainty that his orphaned daughter would leave for France under the care of a friend, and that she would be spared the many discomforts that a lady travelling alone too often has to meet.

Annunziata had watched her father attentively.

"One would think, father," she said, "that you had found some good news in that paper."

"And one would be right in thinking so, my child. One of Philip Le Vaillant's vessels is in port."

"It has come to take us to France, has it not?"

"Yes."

"And we will go by it?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Soon?"

"Yes, soon."

"You see, father, my presentiments were right, after all!"

Don José smiled and gave orders that the captain of the "Marsouin" should be sent up as soon as he came.