

A whispered conversation was also going on amongst the visitors.

"Are you satisfied now?" said the monk to the weeping girl. "No human power can save your accomplice. As for you, *Senorita*! you have promised that, if I would allow you to see this wretch for but an instant, you would enter a convent, and bestow all your property on the monastic order to which I belong. I have kept my word—will you keep yours?"

"Yes!" she replied, in the same low tone. "But since nothing in the world can now save Joachim, permit me to bid him a last farewell. Let him not think that I have basely deserted and forgotten him!"

"No!" said Fray Eusebio sternly; "for I have sworn, by the memory of my brother, Don Ramon Carral, that Joachim the pearl-fisher shall not again see your face, until the last moment of his life; that it may be the more embittered by despair."

"Let me at least speak to the Leopard," urged Carmen.

"To the Leopard, who regards you as the cause of his nephew's destruction!" replied Fray Eusebio. "Certainly! I consent to this."

An almost imperceptible glance of joy, lighted up the features of the girl, whilst a turnkey opened the barred gate that separated the visitors from the prisoners, and delivered to the Leopard the message with which he had been charged by Fray Eusebio. The buccaneer at first hesitated, but could not resist the entreaties of Joachim to grant the interview. As soon as Carmen saw him advance, she left Fray Eusebio and went forward to meet the adventurer.

"You know that you are all condemned to death!" she said firmly.

"Yes!" replied the Leopard; "and we will die like brave men."

"Like brave men!" repeated Donna Carmen bitterly; "not so, but like cowards whose limbs fail them ere they reach the scaffold."

"You are a Spaniard, *Senorita*!" said the buccaneer, regarding her sternly; "still I thought you possessed a noble heart. There is little generosity in thus casting insults in the face of dying men."

"I tell you, master!" resumed Donna Carmen, "that the Spaniards are too cunning to allow you to march with firm footstep to your death. To satisfy their revenge, they must see you act the trembling coward in your last moments!"

"Explain yourself, *Senorita*! explain yourself!" cried the Leopard.

"Think you," she added, "that those who call you pirates and robbers, will permit you to mount the scaffold bold and undaunted? No! no! They

know what enervating juices can blanch the cheeks of the bravest, can instil weakness and anguish into the most fearless hearts, and wring the cry of fear from the firmest lips!"

"'Tis infamous!" exclaimed the buccaneer, an involuntary shudder running through his frame.

"Hush! hush!" resumed Donna Carmen; "speak not so loud as to reach their ears. Yes, master! your nephew himself—aye! even you, the terrible Leopard—you will let yourselves be dragged to the place of execution, pale and trembling."

She seized the rough hand of the old adventurer, and slid into it a small silver flask, which he mechanically clutched.

"This contains opium, master!" she continued, in a whisper. "By means of this flask, you may spare yourselves the shame and weakness of that fatal hour."

"Thanks, Donna Carmen, thanks!" replied the Leopard. "I can now forgive you all the misfortunes of which you have been the innocent cause."

"But stay!" exclaimed the girl. "Before making use of the drug, be sure that all hope is lost. It is rumoured that a party of filibusters are on their way to San Fernando to attempt your rescue. And should they arrive in time —?"

"Who commands them?" interrupted the Leopard, his features animated with an expression of joy.

"A chief named L'Olonnais, it is said," replied Carmen.

"Then those reserved till to-morrow will be saved," returned the buccaneer. "Those whom the lot spares to-day, may witness the death of their judges."

"Yes!" murmured the girl; "but those condemned for to-day —. Joachim may perchance be among them —."

"Perchance!" repeated the Leopard, with a menacing smile.

"Do you then still hope for him?" asked Carmen, her heart beating wildly.

"Come, *Senorita*!" interrupted the imperious voice of Fray Eusebio, ere the buccaneer could reply; and the monk advanced to her side.

Donna Carmen was drawn away, pale and almost fainting, whilst Fray Eusebio, turning to the adventurers, and shaking his hand at them with a threatening gesture, exclaimed:

"Enjoy life while you may—to-morrow the prison shall be empty!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]