

PERICO'S REVENGE.

(FROM THE SPANISH OF FERNANDEZ-JUNCOS.)

I.

PERICO was a jolly good fellow, who led a free, happy and independent life, such as did the Iberian people previous to the invasion of the Phenicians.

Young, rich, elegant, and endowed with sound common sense and no mean parts, it seemed as if Dame Fortune had taken an especial delight in bestowing upon him the most inestimable gifts at her command.

His was a life exempt from cares and creditors.

He was a bachelor.

He resided in his own house.

He read no political papers.

He was, in short, what may be called a thoroughly happy mortal.

But . . .

Alas! How true it is that there can be no happiness without a but in this miserable world of ours!

It had been written in the Book of Destiny (mark the Arabian elegance of my style,) that the hero of this voracious history was doomed to be the victim of a more cruel and woeful invasion than that of the Carthaginians of old.

And the predestination was fulfilled.

The house of Perico was invaded by a terrible vixen who succeeded in converting into a perfect bedlam what erstwhile had been a quiet and peaceful home.

Wretched Perico!

II.

Catalina Tormenta, (the female in question,) was a species of fury with *chignon*, ear-rings and bracelets, a panther in petticoat, a basilisk with bustle.

She possessed, however, a great talent: that of concealing her ferocious instinct under a cloak of devoutness and modesty that would have deceived even the most experienced physiognomist.

She was, moreover, a perfect marvel of physical beauty.

So that Perico, who was somewhat sensitive, and from his tenderest age had evinced a greater inclination for women than for men, as soon as he beheld the graceful form of Catalina, could not help falling head over ears in love with her.

Catalina did not care a snap for Perico; but the latter's wealth was to her soul a powerful incentive.

Besides this, she needed some one to bite and scratch in her frequent bursts of ill-temper, and it seemed to her that a good-natured fellow like our hero, would exactly answer her purpose.

With such a felicitous disposition on both sides, what was to be expected took place as a matter of course.

Perico and Catalina were made one.

III.

Contrary to the old established matrimonial custom, the newly wedded couple had no honeymoon.

Indeed, the very day in which the nuptial celebration occurred, there were growls, scratches, bites, blows, and other suggestive indications of a domestic storm.

And these scenes were repeated at brief intervals, with increased violence, until they assumed a truly dramatic character.

As is to be supposed, Perico's part in them was purely passive: he bore them in silence with stoical resignation.

Only now and then would he be heard to exclaim, paraphrasing Cicero's celebrated apostrophe:

How long, O Catalina! wilt thou abuse my patience?

-To which outburst she would instantly reply with impressive arguments, such as a broomstick or finger nails, vigorously administered.

But the woes of our hapless Perico did not by any means end here.

I had occasion to remark that Catalina, in spite of all,—was a marvel of beauty.

This circumstance, which could in some way extenuate his foolishness in marrying such a shrew, proved, ere long, a source of additional uneasiness and troubles to the poor fellow.

Anon, Perico began to observe that the visits to his house of a certain party, who was no acquaintance of his, were becoming more frequent.

"Surely" thought he "this individual doesn't come here for the purpose of admiring my beauty. It's more likely he admires that of my wife. I'll watch him."

And in thus thinking Perico gave evidence of being no fool.

IV.

Now, with your permission, gentle reader, I am going to write this chapter in the tone and style of the dime novelist.

Please lend me your attention.

More than a year had elapsed since Perico had been suffering (that's the word,) under the ruthless power of Catalina.

In the language of the poet, Night, the sable goddess, stretched forth her leaden sceptre over a slumbering world.

It was just past "the witching hour of midnight" when a man, muffled up to his nose in a sort of dark colored cloak, silently crossed several streets, and finally stopped in front of Perico's residence.

He cautiously looked about him, to see if he was being observed; then inserted a key in the lock of the door, which immediately turned on its hinges, and entered the house.

A moment after, another mysterious figure emerged from the portico of a neighboring mansion, glided silently towards the same door, which had been left ajar, and also went in.

Let us follow the first one, if you have no objection.

With firm step, despite the darkness, he ascended a flight of stairs, and crossed various apartments, as if accustomed to these nocturnal excursions.

Catalina met him on the way.

"Is that you, Juan?"

"Yes, my dove."

"I did not expect you at such a late hour. If you cannot be more punctual—"

"Come now, dearest, you are not going to scold me for a minute more or less."

"You deserve something worse."

"Don't say that."

"I not only say it, but mean it."

"You are cruel. Next time I promise to be more exact."

"And you'll again break your word. Oh, these men!"

(Here follows, in the original, a very piquant and spicy dialogue and scene, written after the now universally recognized realistic school. I felt that my neat rendering of it was something to be proud of. But, alas! I had reckoned without my host, I mean the Editor, who has had the cruelty of requesting me to either alter or suppress the whole passage, fearful lest the *décollé* style in literature might shock the sensitive nerves of some of those dear souls of the "unco guid" description, who, I dare say, fail to perceive any impropriety, however, in that *very style*, when exhibited at the theatre or ball-room. While thus compelled to mutilate my poor author's story—sacrificing him, so to speak, at the altar of Prudery,—I cannot help declaring that Jules Janin knew whereof he was speaking when he remarked that "the fear of hypocrites and fools was the great plague of thinking and writing." Craving the sensible reader's pardon for this digression, I proceed with my *curtailed tale*.)

V.

While the two lovers were thus unsuspectingly engaged in conversation, the mysterious personage whom we saw follow Juan into the house, was attentively listening behind the door of Catalina's *boudoir*, and anxiously peeping into the interior through the keyhole.

He remained in that uncomfortable position for about an hour.

Then, silently retracing his steps through the deserted hall, he