

And I assure you that you can count on Annunziata's good-will as you can on mine. When you know her a little better you will soon be good friends."

"I thank you, senor, for your kind words. They will encourage me to pay you an early visit."

"Once more I assure you that you will be welcome."

Tancred pressed the old Spaniard's hand and went his way.

"How adorably lovely and graceful she is," he thought. "How sweet it would be to kindle in those magnificent dreamy eyes the first gleam of love; to draw from those rosy lips the first avowal of a heart newly awakened to love. Ah! if I were rich! If I were an admiral! If I were only a marquis! I feel that I could love her, that charming young girl. But what could I offer her in exchange for her father's millions, I, a poor officer, possessed of no fortune but my name and my sword? Come, come, I must not think any more about her, I should be afraid to let my thoughts dwell on her."

Let us now rejoin Morales as he crosses the threshold of the hut in which he and his sister have their abode.

Carmen, who had been sitting with her head hid in her hands, deeply occupied with her own thoughts, rose as she heard the door open, and advanced towards her brother.

"Well?" she asked eagerly.

"A little patience, caramba," expostulated the musician. "I'm warm; I'm tired; I'm thirsty. Let me sit down and give me one of the bottles on the shelf there. Then I'll talk."

Carmen hastily poured out a glassful of liquor for her brother, who was fanning himself with his sombrero. Then undoing the bandage over his eye he emptied the cup, refilled and emptied it again, rolled and lighted a cigarette, inhaled two or three whiffs of smoke which he expelled through his nostrils, and finally, finding himself tolerably comfortable, threw his left leg over the right and addressed his sister.

"Now I am at your disposal. Question me and I will answer you."

"First of all, have you any news?"

"I have."

"Good or bad?"

"That depends on the way you look at it."

"You speak in riddles."

"Bah! you'll understand me just now."

"How is the injured man?"

"He is as well as you or I, your injured man. He is so well that he is running about the streets."

"Did he come out?"

"Yes."

"And you saw him?"

"Saw him! Caramba, I should think so. You should have seen him playing the grand in Senor Don José's carriage. He was superb. Ah! he is a fine looking young man."

"Was he alone?"

"Quite alone."

"Did you follow him?"

"Of course I did."

"Where did he go?"

"Home."

"Then you know where he lives?"

"On the quay, with a French marine store-dealer."

"And did you leave him in the house?"

"No. He only remained long enough to change his dress for a full dress costume."

Carmen started involuntarily, but continued her catechism.

"What costume did he wear?"

"The uniform of a naval officer. He could not have been better dressed if he had gone a-courting."

Carmen turned pale.

"And then?" she said.

"And then he got into the carriage again, which was waiting for him at the door, and was driven to Don José's house, where I left him."

"In that case then he is at this moment with the Senorina Annunziata."

"I am not acquainted with what goes on inside the house, but it seems to me that your supposition is perfectly reasonable. You remember what I said to you the other day? The Mexican has done the Frenchman an immense service, and it is not unlikely the attempted murder will end in a wedding. Well, I have not had reason to change my opinion."

For some moments the girl sat in a reverie. Then she raised her head.

"So you think, Morales, that the Chevalier Tancred de Najac will marry the rich and beautiful Senorina Annunziata Rovero?"

The Gitano replied with a nod.

"And you see no method of preventing the marriage?" continued Carmen.

Morales burst out laughing.

"I see one method," said he, "but only one."

"And that is?"

"Well, perhaps it would hardly answer, for it certainly is a little strong."

"What is it? Don't you see that I am dying of impatience?"

"Simply to give the young gentleman, or to get some one to give him, a neat little stab between the shoulders."

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I have an idea," cried Morales, "a capital idea. Caramba, it just flashed across my mind, and I have no doubt it will please you better than the last."

"Well?"

"Instead of killing the young gentleman, we might assassinate the young lady."

Once more Carmen shrugged her shoulders.

"I know you are joking, Morales," said she in a tone that betokened disgust, "but your jokes are brutal. Any one hearing you talking in this

way would think you were the most ferocious man on earth. But I know better."

"Caramba!" returned the musician, evidently in a bad humor, "if you are not satisfied with my suggestions think for yourself."

"Thank you. It is a little late for that. I already have an idea of my own."

"You have an idea of a means for preventing the marriage of the Frenchman with Don José's daughter!" exclaimed Morales in astonishment.

"Yes, and a very good idea, too?"

"Well, I am not naturally curious, my dear sister, but I confess that I would willingly give a new dollar to hear it."

"So you shall. The surest way to prevent the marriage is to marry the chevalier to some one else, is it not?"

"Certainly."

"That is what I purpose doing."

"And to whom do you intend marrying him?"

"To myself."

Morales looked at Carmen in amazement, but the girl's face wore such a serious, resolute expression that he understood that she meant what she said.

For some moments he indulged in a fit of immoderate laughter, then filling his glass to the brim he emptied it.

"To the health of Madame la Chevalière."

XII.

WINNING AN ALLY.

Carmen waited until her brother's mirth had subsided.

"Let us talk sense," she said at last.

"With all my heart," returned Morales, "but in that case had we not better change the subject?"

"And pray why?"

"Because you have been talking, with the greatest coolness in the world, the most perfect nonsense ever heard; and, to tell the truth, I have had enough of it."

Carmen frowned, while her brother continued.

"If it were only necessary to listen to your prating, well and good. But when you come to giving me an active part in your dreams, and set me on the watch for a man, for all the world like a detective on the look-out for a thief; when I have to sneak around to get information and then to come home and give you an exact account of everything I have done, seen, and learnt, that is a little too much. It is a business which is infinitely wearisome, and which, in one word, does not pay."

"Stop a moment," said Carmen.

"What for?"

"I want to show you that this business will prove far more remunerative than you have wit enough to discover."

The Gitano made a movement of impatience. Without noticing him the girl continued,

"Before speaking of the future let us look back a moment on the past."

"What is your object in reverting to the past?" asked Morales ill-humoredly. "Don't suppose that I have forgotten it."

"I do not wish you to imagine that I want to offend you, my good Morales, by recalling to your memory certain unpleasant truths. But what is to be done? In the present state of affairs we must call things by their right names. Between you and me you are nothing but a scoundrel."

"Oh!" cried Morales, fairly exasperated.

"Do you not agree with me?"

"Carmen, you are neither polite nor respectful."

The girl burst out laughing.

"Do you know you would have made a first class comedian. You have a most ridiculously solemn way of saying the most absurd things. But to return to our subject. You are a scoundrel; of this fact you have given no end of proofs, which have more than once brought you into trouble with the Spanish police-officers. For a long time, as you know, you were wanted, but you were too sharp to be caught."

Morales smiled triumphantly.

"One day, however, the luck went against you."

"Alas!" sighed the Gitano.

"You were caught."

"Unhappy day!"

"And hung," continued the girl.

Morales put his hand to his throat and murmured in a choking voice,

"For pity's sake, sister, no more on this subject. When I think of that horrible time I feel as if I had no breath left in my body."

"And breath you had none at that time, my poor brother. If I had not raised a riot among the Gitanos of Pampeluna it would have been all over with you. As it was the rope was only just out in time. So you owe me your life, my good Morales."

"And have I not given you ample proof of my gratitude?"

"Never!"

"Are you quite certain, sister?"

"Perfectly certain."

"Then it is because I have never had a chance. But believe me—"

"I believe you to be utterly ungrateful, and that I firmly believe. But it is not with the intention of appealing to your sense of gratitude that I bring up the past, but simply to make you understand how much it would be to your interest to assist me in my project. After your execution, which terminated so happily for yourself, Spain became too hot to hold you. We crossed into France, and while I earned a living

as a street singer and dancer you engaged in the contraband trade in the Pyrenees—"

"And an honorable business it is," Morales put in, "and I am not ashamed of it."

"Granted, but a less honorable business is that of a traitor who betrays his comrades to the revenue officers. This business you also engaged in, did you not?"

"Yes. My conscience would not permit me to abuse the hospitality of the generous monarch in whose realms I found a refuge. In betraying the smugglers I acted like an honest man."

Carmen shot a glance of profound contempt at her brother.

"The result of your conscientious scruples," she continued, emphasizing the last two words, "was that we were compelled to leave France in order to escape the vengeance of the relations of the men you betrayed. You were dreadfully frightened, for like most rogues you are an ardent coward. So we took passage in the first vessel sailing from the nearest port, which happened to be destined for Havana. We have been here now six or eight months, and have been leading a miserable life."

"No, no," cried Morales, "I find our life, on the contrary, very agreeable."

"You do, eh? Well, I do not. I am sick of it. This dancing business disgusts me, and I will do it no longer, do you understand?"

"There is nothing easier than for you to give it up and marry Quirino. He will support you in comfort."

"I become the wife of that half-savage—a low proacher who lives in a hut in the woods!"

"You did not talk in that fashion some time ago."

"No, but I have changed my ideas. I once thought I loved him, but I find I do not. As I say, my ideas have completely changed, and my ambition aims higher than Quirino."

"Are you going to repeat what you said to me the other night—that nonsense about being rich and great?"

"Yes, I intend to be both great and rich, and you will see that I shall be."

"Ah, bah!"

Carmen put on her most winning smile.

"Listen, my good Morales," she said in a persuasive tone. "I was talking rather severely just now, but no one is more ready to do you justice than I."

"Faith, I don't doubt it."

"You have your faults."

"Who has not?" murmured Morales with unctious. "No man is perfect."

"But," continued Carmen, "you also have talents."

"Ah! several. In the first place I am a good musician, my voice is clear and flexible, and I play the guitar sufficiently well. I have a supple leg and a ready hand, and am an expert swordsman. At a push I can write poetry. In fact I have many strings to my bow."

"No doubt, but you are forgetting other things of a higher order."

"What are they? My modesty is so great that I cannot imagine—"

"I mean your marvellous spirit of intrigue, which, had you ever had the proper chance of displaying it, would have done much for you."

"Yes, that is true, what you say there. I have often thought of it, but unfortunately I never had the chance. My light is hidden under a bushel."

"A chance may yet arise."

"How so?"

"Don't you think, for instance, that if, instead of being a miserable Gitano here in Havana, obliged to hide half your face with a bandage, for fear some newly-arrived Spaniard should recognize you, you found yourself in Paris, suddenly metamorphosed into a gentleman of quality, a Hidalgo of an old and noble race, and calling yourself, as you have a right to do, Don Guzman Morales y Tullipano, you could make up for lost time, especially if your connection with a few great families prevented any too curious inquiry into your antecedents?"

"Without a doubt. But the question is how to compass all this."

"It is very simple. My marriage with a French gentleman would realize all these fine suppositions."

"Ah!" cried Morales, smiting his fist on the table, and addressing himself to an imaginary by-stander, "You won't tell me any more, I hope, that women have no ideas! Now you get round to the old story of the Chevalier Tancred de Najac."

"Certainly."

"Well, my dear sister, marry him. I will not prevent you."

"But I cannot manage it without your assistance."

"Come now, let us have done with it once and for all. Tell me what you want me to do, and if it is not absolutely impossible I will do it—if it were only to hear no more about the matter."

"In the first place you must put a thousand dollars at my disposal."

"I don't understand you," said Morales in astonishment. "You said?"

"A thousand dollars."

The Gitano started from his seat.

"You are mad!" he cried. "My poor Carmen, a thousand dollars! Caramba, you unhappy girl, where am I to get them?"

"Come, come, let me have no clumsy lies. You have got in a hole under your bed there over forty thousand French livres."

Morales turned as white as a sheet. With his two hands he clutched his bald head as if to ward off a blow.

"Alas! woe is me!" he murmured in a broken voice, "I am done for, robbed, ruined, destroy-

ed. All I can do now is to tie a stone round my neck and pitch myself headlong into the sea."

"Don't be afraid," said Carmen, laughing heartily at this grotesque explosion of grief, "you are neither robbed nor ruined. I shall not touch a maravedi of your store. I ask for a thousand dollars because I calculate that I have earned at least that much during our stay in Havana. And, besides, I am sure of repaying you ten times over."

"Ten times over," repeated Morales, on whom these words seemed to make an impression.

"Yes, ten times over."

"Do you know that makes ten thousand dollars?"

"I know it. In other words, fifty thousand French livres."

"But you will have to be enormously rich to be able to give me that much."

"I am perfectly aware of it, and I shall be enormously rich before very long."

"Well, let me hear your plan, and afterwards we will see what can be done."

"Listen then."

It is not our intention to relate to our readers the conversation that followed, for they will learn soon enough the result of the clever plot proposed by the Gitano to her brother. It is sufficient for them to know that as Carmen went on her brother's face lost little by little its expression of incredulity, and finally an enthusiastic smile lit up his sinister features.

"Well," said Carmen, when she concluded, "what do you say now? Do you still think my hopes are extravagant?"

Instead of replying Morales solemnly filled the cup before him and raised it to his lips.

"The health of Madame de Najac."

This time there was no sarcasm in his tone. Then, placing the empty cup on the table, he added,

"There is not a moment to be lost. We must set to work this very evening."

"That is my opinion," said his sister.

XIII.

QUIRINO.

Carmen had hardly spoken these words when a loud knocking was heard at the door. Both brother and sister started.

"Caramba," whispered the Gitano, "who can that be?"

"Don't open the door," returned the girl in a low voice.

The knocking was repeated, louder and more imperiously than ever, and was followed by the barking of a dog.

"It is Quirino," said Morales, "that is the bark of his spangle."

"All the more reason for not opening the door."

"Nonsense. He knows there is some one in the house since the door is bolted. He wants to see you and if he thought there was anyone with you he would break the door in."

"And I was to be the wife of such a man," thought Carmen. "I would rather die on the spot."

Morales rose and drew back the bolt.

"Ah! it is the senor Quirino," he cried in a joyous tone and with a pleased look that was but ill-assumed. "Welcome, senor Quirino. Had we but known that it was you knocking, I can swear you would not have been kept waiting. Walk in. Carmen is here. How glad she will be to see you. She was speaking of you only this moment."

Instead of replying to these affectionate advances, Quirino entered the house and looked around suspiciously, while his dog, a magnificent spaniel, went to Carmen to be caressed, but the girl took no notice of the animal.

Having satisfied himself that the brother and sister were alone Quirino unbent. The frown disappeared from his forehead, and his eyes rested with a tender light on Carmen.

Quirino was a young man of twenty-four or twenty-five, of medium height, and admirably proportioned. When not discomposed by passion his irreproachable features wore a thoughtful expression tinged with sadness. His bronzed skin, his long, fine, silky black hair, his large dark thoughtful eyes, and his partly white teeth gave him a strange, but almost majestic appearance.

To borrow an expression from the Tuff, there were in Quirino all the characteristics of pure blood.

This young man, whom a few moments previous Carmen had called "a half-savage," was one of the descendants of the primitive lords of the soil, who then, as now, lived in profound misery, but in absolute independence, among the mountains.

Like the rest of his race Quirino had no regular calling or employment. He spent his time in hunting and once or twice in the week came to Havana to dispose of the spoils of the chase.

As a rule he was very successful, and was in making money. And as his only expenses were for the purchase of powder, lead, and rum, it was probable that he too had a little store hidden away in the floor of his hut.

In his wandering and solitary life the young hunter had preserved the customs and passions of his ancestors, the latter disguised under an appearance of perfect stolidity. He spoke but little, and at times his metaphorical and flowery language was almost poetical.

He was very simply dressed in a coarse cotton tunic and long leather leggings, with a Mexican hat. On his shoulder he carried an old Spanish musket with a single barrel, which by the aid of his keen eye made a very efficient weapon. A