

## DON BASILIO'S STORY.

## CHAPTER I.

"Don Basilio, play the cornet and let us dance! It is not warm under the trees."

"Yes, yes, Don Basilio, play the cornet!"

"Give Don Basilio the cornet on which Joseph learned."

"No use! Will you play it, Don Basilio?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"No, I say not!"

"Because I do not know how."

"Not know how! Was there ever such hypocrisy!"

"Of course you desire to gratify us?"

"Well, come! We know that you were chief musician of the infantry!"

"And that no one played the cornet as you did."

"And that they listened to you at the palace, in the time of Eusebio?"

"And that you have a pension?"

"Come, Don Basilio! Have pity on us!"

"Well, then, senior, it is true! I have played the cornet; I was a specialist, as you say nowadays; however, it is also true that two years ago I presented my cornet to a poor licensed musician, and since then I have not even wished to sound it."

"What a pity!"

"Another Rosini!"

"Ah! since it is this evening you ought to play!"

"Here in the fields everything is permissible!"

"Remember that it is my birthday, Grandpa!"

"Hurray! hurray! Here is the cornet!"

"Yes, now play!"

"A wait!"

"No, a polka!"

"Polka away with you! A fandango!"

"Yes, yes, a fandango, the national dance!"

"I am so sorry, my children; but I cannot possibly play the cornet."

"You, so amiable!"

"So willing to please!"

"Your little grandchild begs you to!"

"And your niece, my child!"

"Leave me alone, for God's sake! I have said that I cannot play."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not remember; and because, moreover, I have sworn not to learn again!"

"To whom have you sworn?"

"To myself and to someone who is dead—to your dead mother, my child!"

"Every face saddened suddenly on hearing these words."

"Ah! if you knew what a cost I learned to play the cornet? added the old man."

"The story! the story!" exclaimed the young people. "Tell us the story."

"In fact," said Don Basilio, "it is quite a story. Listen to it, and you may judge if I can or cannot play the cornet. And when I can or cannot play the cornet, I shall tell you the story of his music lessons."

In the same way Mazzepa, Byron's hero, related one night to Carlos XII. beneath another tree, the terrible story of his rising lessons. Let us listen to Don Basilio.

## CHAPTER II.

Seventeen years ago Spain was agitated by the civil war. Carlos and Isabel were disputing for the crown, and the Spaniards, divided into two hands, poured out their blood in the fratricidal struggle.

I had a friend, called Ramon Gamex, lieutenant of my battalion, the most clever man that I have ever known. We were educated together; together we left college; together we had been reprimanded a thousand times, and together we desired to die for liberty. Ah! I must say he was more liberal than I or than any one else in the whole army!

But a certain injustice had been done by our chief to the hurt of Ramon; one of those abuses of authority which disquiet one with the most honorable profession. This arbitrary act made the lieutenant of the Cazadores desire to abandon the ranks of his brothers, the friend to leave the friend, the liberal to turn to the action, the subordinate to kill his lieutenant-colonel! Ramon was not in the mood so early in the morning, to bear insults and injuries.

Neither my desire nor prayers were sufficient to dissuade him from his purpose. He had decided to change the helmet for the cap, although he abhorred the rebels.

We were then within three leagues of the enemy. It was the night in which Ramon was to desert, a cold, rainy night, melancholy and sad, the eve of a battle.

About two o'clock Ramon entered my lodging.

"I was asleep."

"Basilio," he murmured in my ear.

"Who is it?"

"It is I, Adieu!"

"Thou art going now?"

"Yes, adieu."

And seizing my hand—"Listen," he continued. "If there should be a battle to-morrow, as they think, and we should meet in it—"

"I understand: we are friends."

"Very well; we will embrace and then fight. I shall die in the regular way to-morrow; however, I hope to trample all under foot till I have killed the lieutenant-colonel! As for thee, Basilio, do not expose thyself to danger—glory is only smoke."

"And life?"

"Thou art right; make thyself commander! exclaimed Ramon. 'The pay is not smoke—until after one has smoked it. Ah! all that is ended for me!'"

"What sad thoughts!" I said, not without terror. "We shall both survive the battle to-morrow."

"Then let us arrange to meet afterward."

"Where?"

"At the San Nicolas Inn, at one in the morning. Death alone shall prevent the meeting. Let us agree to it!"

"Agreed."

"Then—adieu!"

"Adieu."

Having said this, and after tenderly embracing me, Ramon disappeared into the shadows of the night.

## CHAPTER III.

As we hoped the rebels attacked us on the following day.

The action was very bloody and lasted from three in the afternoon till it grew dark. About five my battalion was fiercely attacked by a force commanded by Ramon. Ramon now wore the badge of commander and the white cap of the Carlists.

I gave the order to fire against Ramon, and Ramon against me; and it is to say, my men and my battalion fought hand to hand.

We were victorious, and Ramon was put to flight with the small remnant of his force; but not without first having himself killed with a pistol-shot him who the night before was his lieutenant-colonel, and who in vain tried to defend himself from the fury of Ramon. At six o'clock the action took an unfavorable turn, and I and a part of my poor company were cut off and obliged to surrender.

They led me to the little village of—

which had been occupied by the Carlists since the beginning of the campaign, and where it was certain they would shoot me immediately. The war was then without quarter.

## CHAPTER IV.

It was one o'clock in the morning after that melancholy day—the hour of my rendezvous with Ramon!

I was confined in the dungeon of the public prison of the enemy. I asked for my friend and he answered me: "He is a brave man! He killed lieutenant-colonel, but he perished during the last hour of the battle."

"How! Why do you think so?"

"Because he has not returned to the camp nor can the men who to-day were under his command give any account of him."

"Ah! how I suffered that night! One hope I still had. Ramon might be waiting for me at the San Nicolas Inn; this would explain his failure to return to the rebel encampment. How distressed he would be to find that I did not keep the appointment!"

"He will," I said to myself, "think me dead! And truly how far am I from my last hour! The rebels always shoot their prisoners, the same as we do!"

Thus dawned the following day.

A chaplain entered my prison. All my companions were asleep. "Death?" I exclaimed at sight of the priest.

"Yes," he answered gently.

"No; within three hours."

A minute later my companions were awake.

A thousand cries, a thousand sobs, a thousand curses filled the prison.

## CHAPTER V.

Every man who is about to die is possessed by some idea which will not leave him.

Whether it were nightmare, fever, or madness, the thought of Ramon—of Ramon alive, of Ramon dead, of Ramon in heaven, of Ramon in the inn, took possession of my brain in such a way that I could think of nothing else during those hours of agony.

They took from me my captain's uniform and dressed me in a soldier's cap and an old cloak.

Thus I went to meet death with my nineteen companions in misfortune.

Only one was to be saved from death.

He was a musician—and the Carlists did not shoot musicians, because they were in great need of them in their battles.

"And were you a musician, Don Basilio?"

Were you saved on that account?" asked the young people with one voice.

"No, my children," replied the veteran.

"I was not a musician!"

The square was formed and we were placed in the middle of it.

I was number eleven—that is, I would be the eleventh to die.

Then I thought of my wife and my daughter, of these and of my mother, my child! They began to fire.

The detonations maddened me. As they had bound our eyes I did not see my companions fall.

I tried to count the discharges, that I might know a moment before dying that my journey in this world was finished.

However, at the third or fourth detonation I lost count.

Ah! these shots will thunder eternally in my heart and in my brain as they thundered on that day!

Now I heard them a thousand leagues distant; now I felt them reverberate in my head. And the detonations continued.

"Now!" thought I.

The discharge sounded and I still lived.

"This one!" I said at last.

Then I felt myself seized by the shoulders and shaken, and voices sounded in my ears.

I knew no more.

Then I experienced something like a profound sleep. I dreamed that I had been shot dead.

## CHAPTER VI.

I dreamed that I was stretched on a small bed in my prison. I could not see.

I raised my hand to my eyes to take away the bandage and touched my wide-open, dilated eyes. Was I blind?

No. I was in the prison, in utter darkness.

I heard the toll of a bell, and trembled. It was the ringing of the ananias.

"It is nine o'clock," I thought, "but what day?"

A shadow, still darker than the dark air of the prison, leaned over me.

It appeared to be a man. And the others—the other eighteen?

All had been shot!

And I?

Did I live or was I delicious in the grave? My lips mechanically murmured a name; always his name, my nightmare—"Ramon!"

"What is it?" the shadow beside me answered.

"My God!" I exclaimed. "Am I in the other world?"

"No!" answered the same voice.

"Ramon, art thou alive?"

"Yes."

"And I?"

"Thou also."

"Then where am I? Is this the San Nicolas Inn? Was I not taken prisoner? Have I dreamed it all?"

"No, Basilio; thou hast dreamed nothing. Listen."

## CHAPTER VII.

"As thou knowest, yesterday I killed the lieutenant-colonel in fair fight. I am avenged! Then, mad with fury, I kept on fighting and killing till it grew dark, till there was not a Christian on the battlefield. Then the moon arose I remembered thee. Then I directed my steps toward the San Nicolas Inn, with the intention of waiting for thee."

"It was ten o'clock. The appointment was for one, and the night before I had not closed my eyes. So I slept profoundly. About one I gave a cry and awoke. I dreamed that thou wast dead. I looked about me and found I was alone. What had become of thee? It struck two, three, four—what a night of anguish!"

"Thou didst not appear."

"Without doubt thou wast dead!"

"Day dawned."

"Then I left the inn and directed my steps to this village in search of the rebels. The sun arose."

"Every one thought that I had fallen the day before."

"Thus at sight of me they embraced me and the general loaded me with honors."

"Then I learned that they were about to shoot 21 prisoners. A presentiment arose in my mind."

"Could Basilio be one of them?" I asked myself. I ran then to the place of execution."

"I heard several shots."

"They had begun to shoot the prisoners."

"I strained my eyes, but I could not see."

"Grief blinded me. I was delirious with fear."

"Finally I distinguished thee."

"Thou wast about to be shot!"

"There were two victims only before thee."

"What should I do?"

"I became crazy, I screamed; seized thee in my arms, and with a hoarse voice trembling with emotion exclaimed:

"Not this one! Not this one, my general!"

"The general who commanded the square and who knew me for my deeds of the day before, asked me:

"Why not? Is he a musician?"

"That word was to me what it would be to an old man blind from birth to see suddenly the sun in all its brightness."

"The light of hope shone so vividly in my eyes that it blinded me."

"Musician!" I exclaimed; "yes—yes, general! He is a musician—a great musician!"

"In the meantime thou wast stretched senseless."

"What instrument does he play?" asked the general.

"The—the—the—yes!—exactly!—it is—the cornet!"

"Do you need a cornet player?" asked the general, turning to the band of musicians.

In five seconds, which seemed five centuries, came the answer:

"Yes, general; there is one needed," replied the chief musician.

"Then take that man from the ranks and let the execution continue instantly," exclaimed the Carlist chief.

"Then I took thee in my arms and carried thee to this dungeon."

## CHAPTER VIII.

As Ramon ceased speaking I got up, and weeping, laughing, and trembling I embraced him.

"I owe thee my life!"

"Not at all!" replied Ramon.

"And why not?" I exclaimed.

"Dost thou play the cornet?"

"No."

"Then thou dost not owe me thy life. I have only compromised mine without saving thee."

I turned cold as stone.

"And music?" asked Ramon, "dost thou know it?"

"A little, very little. I remember what they taught us at college—"

"A very little it is, or better say none! Thou shalt die without fail, and I also as a traitor. Just imagine in less than two weeks the band to which thou shalt belong will be organized."

"Two weeks?"

"Neither more nor less! And as thou dost not play the cornet (unless God performs a miracle) they will shoot us both without doubt."

"Shoot thee!" I exclaimed; "thee! and for me! for me who owes thee my life! Ah! no, heaven forbid! In less than two weeks I shall understand music and play the cornet."

Ramon laughed.

## CHAPTER IX.

What more shall I tell you, my children? In two weeks—oh, power of the will—in fifteen days, with fifteen nights (for I neither slept nor rested a minute for half a month), in two weeks I learned to play the cornet. What days they were!

Ramon and I left the camp and passed hours and hours with a certain musician who came daily from a place near by to give me a lesson. Escape? I read the word in your eyes. Nothing more impossible! I was a prisoner and they watched me, and Ramon would not escape without me.

I neither spoke, thought, nor ate.

I was crazy, and my monomania was music—the cornet, the devilish cornet!

I desired to learn, and I learned! And if I had been dumb I should have talked.

And if paralyzed should have walked, if blind should have seen.

Because I would it so!

Oh! the will can do anything! To wish is to be able.

To wish—that is a great word!

To wish—and I advise you, children, learn this great truth!

I saved, then, my life and Ramon's. But I was mad, and my madness was art. During three years the cornet did not leave my hand. Doze-mil-la-sol-la-si—that was my world during all that time. My life was reduced to blowing. Ramon did not leave me. I emigrated to France, and in France I continued to play the cornet.

The cornet was I! I sang with the cornet at my mouth! Men, people, celebrated artists crowded to hear me.

Here was a wonder, a marvel. The cornet was flexible in my fingers; became elastic, mellowed, wept, cried, and roared; it imitated a prayer, a human sob, or a wild beast.

My lungs were of iron. Thus passed two more years. At the end of them my friend died. Looking upon his body I recovered my reason. And when, now in my senses, I took up the cornet one day, to my astonishment, I found I did not know how to play it.

Will you ask me now to play it for you to dance?

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