

sels, who is the bearer of this, is commissioned to let you have as soon as he arrives a sum of four million livres in gold. I reconstruct, on my own authority, our old partnership, which, you will remember, was dissolved at the time of my marriage. On this date the firm of Le Vaillant & Rovero once more comes into existence.

"It is needless for me to add that all drafts drawn by you on me will be duly honored, and that I make myself responsible for any engagements you may enter into in our names.

"Time does not allow me to write at greater length, so I conclude by assuring you of my unbroken friendship.

"José ROVERO."

It is hardly necessary to relate the consequence of the opportune aid Le Vaillant received from his friend. He was speedily enabled to settle with his creditors, and in a few months the house of Le Vaillant & Rovero had assumed its old standing.

One would imagine that José Rovero no longer considered himself under obligations to his friend; that the assistance he had given the latter in the time of his need wiped out the debt of gratitude he had contracted at the beginning of his career. But this was far from being the case. Don José still insisted upon the obligations under which he lay to his friend.

Let us now return to the rich Spaniard, whom we left praying for an extension of life until the arrival of a long-looked-for letter from France. This letter was an answer to a long communication Don José had sent several months before to his friend. As it throws some light upon the actual position of the reputed wealthy merchant it is as well to reproduce it at full length:

"HAVANA, February, 1789.

"Pardon me, my old friend, if the lines I am about to pen give you pain. I should have wished to make you a sharer only in my joy, but, alas! at the present moment I have only misfortunes to relate to you.

"You are unable to believe what you are reading, are you not? You, who know that the name of rich José Rovero has become a household word; you, who think that the loss of my beloved wife is my only sorrow, you cannot understand me when I speak of misfortune.

"Listen, Philip, and believe me when I tell you that the most miserable man on earth is myself, the being for whom you have the greatest brotherly affection.

"This is true, Philip, for what can be compared to the misery of an old man who, having lost an adored helpmeet, lavishes the whole power of his affection on his only beloved child, and yet knows that he is about to leave his darling alone in the world, poor and unprotected.

"Such is my fate, my friend.

"My misfortune may be told in a few words: I am ruined and I am dying. I can count, if not the days, at least the months that I have yet to live, and my immense fortune is so completely involved that not only will nothing be left at my death, but, alas! my very memory will be dishonored.

"No one in the world, my friend, is acquainted with this double secret. You are the only living being to whom I have communicated it. My poor child is happy and unconcerned, in blissful ignorance of the storm that will so soon burst upon us.

"I must tell you, first of all, how it is that I am so surely dying, and why no one suspects the existence of my secret.

"The disease under which I am suffering has its seat in the heart. It is three years since I first became aware of its insidious attacks. Since that time it has increased in intensity; it now never leaves me, never gives me a moment's repose; it tortures me continually. Every day, and several, times a day, I suffer the most hideous torments; as though a vulture were tearing at my breast, as though my heart were being seared with red-hot irons; muscles and nerves stretch and stiffen until they are like as to break; notwithstanding my most vigorous efforts I am unable to restrain my tears and cries.

"When the crisis approaches I shut myself up in my own room that no one may see my weakness.

"Some months ago I happened to hear of an aged man, half-physician, half-hermit, by whose wonderful healing powers thousands of persons in the last stages of disease had benefited. He had taken up his residence in the interior of Brazil, whither the sick daily flocked in crowds. I lost no time in visiting him, and a month after I had heard of his existence I reached his abode. Over five hundred invalids were encamped in the neighbourhood. From one of these, a poor devil afflicted with epilepsy, I bought his turn for a hundred dollars. I was received by the physician, who questioned me, examined me at length, and told me that my malady was incurable, that it was impossible to save me, but that he could give me a little relief. I was to return the next day. The next day he gave me a small metal goblet and a crystal phial filled with a red transparent liquid.

"When the pain is so acute," he said, "that it seems that you can bear it no longer, pour a few drops of this liquid into the goblet and drink it. The crisis will pass away at once. Use, but do not abuse the remedy, for this red liquid contains a vegetable poison which calms but which when taken in any great quantities is deadly in its effects."

"I took the phial and asked:

"How long have I to live?"

"Do you wish to know the truth, whatever it may be?" he asked.

"Whatever it may be," I replied.

"You have a year to live at least; at most four teen months."

"Then I am sure of my life for a year?"

"Yes, but when the three hundred and sixty-fifth day closes, make ready for the grand journey, for death will be upon you."

"This is what the physician told me. At the time I write, my friend, four months have passed since this fatal prophecy. When you receive this letter eight months will have gone by. And by the time your answer reaches me the last month of the year will be at its close. It may be that this very letter will be detained by stress of weather, and then your reply will reach here when I am no more.

"And yet, Philip, I would willingly give the half of the days I have yet to live to read your reply before my eyes are closed for ever.

"Now you know how and why I am condemned to death. It remains for me to explain to you my financial misfortunes. It is a simple but sad story, and a few lines will suffice to tell it.

"You know that my fortune (for which I am indebted to you, my brother) was immense. I owned ten millions. A strange implacable Fate has weighed me down, as though the Almighty in his anger had resolved to destroy me.

"Within the last four months five of my vessels, each carrying a cargo of immense value, have been lost. These disasters are not yet known in Havana. I received the intelligence from private correspondents who had them from eyewitnesses.

"This is not all. How much truth there is in the old saying that misfortunes never come alone!

"On my plantations, which passed for the most productive in the colony, I had nearly ten thousand slaves. Among them there are poisoners at work!

"It is not perhaps known in Europe that the blood of the Borgias, of the Voisins, and the Brinvilliers sometimes is found in negro veins. These monsters, and they are neither few nor far between, have only one desire, one delight, one pleasure; that is, to kill by poison. With these wretches the murderous desire is untameable, unquenched, it is a passion which nothing can satisfy. They live in happiness surrounded by corpses of their own making. Any kind of prey is welcome to them. They spare men as little as beasts. A single negro poisoner on a plantation is the ruin of his master, for among so many it is impossible to discover the criminal. The other slaves, if they knew him, would die in preference to denouncing him.

"Well, my friend, this criminal epidemic, this horrible scourge, has made its appearance on my plantations. One third of my slaves have already died, another third are languishing away, and the remainder will soon be smitten in their turn. Everywhere I find inaction and discouragement, where it used to be all movement and zeal; suffering and death where happiness and contentment were wont to prevail; silence instead of singing, ruin instead of prosperity.

"So you see, my friend, that my position is really and completely beyond hope; and nothing in the world can save me. For a few months longer I can sustain my credit, so the crash will not come until after my death.

"I have calculated with the most scrupulous care what can be realized from the wreck of my fortune. Here is my statement: When ships, plantations, houses, furniture, slaves, and cattle have been sold and the proceeds applied to meeting my engagements, my liabilities will still be two millions, which it will be impossible to meet. My daughter, my Annunziata, will be left poorer than the poorest beggar-girl in Havana, and the name of José Rovero will be a dishonored name.

"Now, Philip, was I not right? And think you that there is a more miserable man on this earth than me?"

"It is in your power, however, my friend and my brother, to afford me a great consolation in my last hours, and sure I am you will do it, for of your love I doubt no more than I doubt the eternal mercy of God.

"Write me that you will be a father to Annunziata, that you will receive her in your house, that you will love and cherish her as though she were indeed your daughter—write me this, Philip, and I will die blessing you, and forgetting, I hope, all that I have suffered, all that I have yet to suffer.

"Farewell, my brother. 'Twere needless to remind you of my affection. For forty years long you have known it.

"Farewell once more, and this time for ever.

"José ROVERO."

Such was the letter, at once touching and sublime, in which the old man, already with one foot in the grave, begged a home and a little kindness for his child from the friend whom he had succoured in dire necessity.

In the first chapter of our story we stated that a vessel flying the Spanish flag was lying becalmed outside the port of Havana. This vessel, when off the Cape of Good Hope, had been hailed by the captain of the "Marsouin," of Havre, which having been damaged in a storm was unable to continue her voyage. Her captain had been persuaded by him of the "Marsouin" to alter his course, which lay for Buenos Ayres, and make for Havana, where he was to deliver to Don José Rovero a sealed packet confided to him by the French captain—the owners of the "Marsouin" being held responsible for any loss sustained by the owners of the Spaniard through delay in delivering the cargo.

During the whole night the Spanish vessel lay wind-bound off Havana, and it was only in the morning, when a favorable breeze sprung up, that she was able to make port.

To return once more to Don José, whom we left seated in his easy chair with his face buried in his hands. His bitter thoughts were soon interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Who is there?" he cried rising and hastily wiping his eyes.

"It is Pablo, señor."

Don José opened the door.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Señor, a sea-captain is in the *salon* who wishes to speak to you."

A gleam of hope shot over the old gentleman's countenance.

"Is it a French captain?" he asked.

"No, señor, Spanish."

Don José's face fell.

"But," continued Pablo, "he brings letters from France."

"At last!" murmured Don José, pressing his hands upon his beating heart. "My God, thou hast heard my prayer." And murmuring his gratified thanks he hurried into the *salon*.

"Have I the honor of addressing Don José Rovero?" asked the captain.

"I am Don José."

"I have here a packet which I was commissioned to place in your hands. But before I do so let me tell you how it came into my possession," and in few words the Spaniard related the story of his meeting with the "Marsouin" and the errand he was induced to undertake. He then handed to Don José a small packet on which the latter recognized the handwriting of his friend.

"I am extremely grateful to you, señor," said the merchant, striving to conceal his emotion. "Permit me to hope that during your stay here you will make this house your home."

"I should only be too willing to accept your hospitable offer," returned the captain, "but it is my intention to weigh anchor to-night."

"You must permit me then," said Don José, drawing from his finger a magnificent ring set with diamonds, "to present you with this trifle as a slight token of my gratitude for the service you have rendered me."

The captain made no difficulty in accepting the gift, and left the house blessing the good luck which had brought him across the "Marsouin."

On being left alone Don José hastened to his chamber, locked himself in and tore open the precious packet. Inside was a letter which ran as follows:

"Of all the misfortunes you tell me of, my brother José, one only gives me real concern, and that is the story of your cruel sufferings. But I am loth to put any credence in the prediction of your Brazilian hermit. The man, you say, is a savage, although he is a clever man. We have here in France many physicians of far greater skill than he, who are able, I promise you, to cure you, and that right speedily, for I expect you and your dear Annunziata without delay.

"As to your fears on pecuniary matters, they are, permit me to say, simply absurd. You owe two millions. What are two millions? Are not my millions yours, my good José? Your must decidedly be losing your memory.

"In this manner will we plan our future:—As soon as you arrive at Havre you will dispatch a confidential agent to Havana, who will put your estate in order and pay these two miserable millions about which you are tormenting yourself so needlessly. This done, you shall for the third time become my partner, and we will never leave each other.

"No, we will part no more. Why should we, since we shall form but one family.

"José, my old friend, my dear brother, let me ask you for my son Oliver the hand of your daughter Annunziata.

"PHILIP LE VAILLANT."

As he read the last sentence Don José uttered a piercing cry and fell senseless on the floor.

XI.

THE SPY.

The next morning, thanks to the strengthening regimen that had been prescribed for him, Tancred de Najac found his strength so completely restored that the very idea of keeping his room was unbearable. When Don José (whose attack had not proved serious, for joy seldom kills) entered his room he found him up and dressed, but in a state of great despair over the sad condition of his dress. Indeed, in a dusty, bloodstained coat and a hat that had been beaten out of all resemblance to a hat, he made anything but the brave figure he had cut on the beach two nights before.

"Señor," he said, as his host entered, "I pray you to add one more to the many kindnesses for which I am indebted to you."

"In what is it in my power to oblige you?" asked Don José, smiling.

"I was about to ask to be presented to the Señorina Annunziata, the guardian angel who saved my life when I was lying for dead in the road. But I would rather die a thousand times than go into her presence in this unseemly condition. Permit me, therefore, señor, to return to my lodging in Eloi Sandric's house and array myself in a fitting manner before returning to place my sincere but humble thanks at the feet of the Señorina."

Don José could not help smiling at this outburst.

"My dear boy," he said, "when you have reached my years you will not attach so much importance to mere adornment of the person,

But go; do as you will; my house is always open to you."

"Oh! señor, how shall I ever thank you. Could I but have an opportunity of expressing my gratitude! But that must be for some future time. I will go now, and return as speedily as may be."

"Stop, stop!" cried the merchant, "I cannot permit you to go on foot in this guise. Wait one moment, and I will order round the *volante*."

The young Frenchman broke into new expressions of gratitude, which were hardly terminated when Pablo announced that the *volante* was ready.

The *volante* is an extremely quaint vehicle, still in use in Cuba, but having no counterpart outside of the island. Imagine the body of a gig hung on two poles which extend an equal length behind and in front. At the hindermost extremity of these poles are two enormous wheels, overtopping the hood by more than a foot. The horse is harnessed to the other end of the poles at a distance of six feet from the body of the gig. Such is the Cuban *volante*.

The *volante* in which our hero was about to be conducted was magnificently ornamented with silver mountings, and the horse almost disappeared beneath the rich caparison. The animal was ridden by a negro postillion gorgeously got up in a scarlet coat with gold lacing, white pantaloons reaching to the knee, dazzling white linen, silver spurs, gold-laced hat and silver-mounted whip.

As the Frenchman jumped into the vehicle his host called to him—

"Do you know the route you have to follow to Eloi Sandric's house?"

"Perfectly. Why do you ask?"

"Because you will be obliged to direct your driver. Here in Havana the *caleseros* are accustomed to drive straight on, and never stop or turn unless they receive orders to do so."

"The deuce! How am I to manage?"

"It is simple enough. When you wish to turn to the right you cry, *a la derecha*; to the left, *a la izquierda*. Would you stop, *arrémate*; to go on, *segua*."

"Very good. Then, *segua*!"

The *volante* set off at full speed. As it passed into the street a man who had been idly leaning against the garden wall looked up, and recognizing the Frenchman, without more ado swung himself up between the two wheels, behind the hood and out of sight of either the occupant of the vehicle or the postillion. He was a tall, bony individual, with a black bandage round one eye and a broad-brimmed sombrero pulled over his face. It was Morales, brother of Carmen, the dancing girl.

The Frenchman carrying out his host's orders the equipage finally stopped before the humble abode of Eloi Sandric and Yvonne his wife, both honest Bretons, and dealers in marine stores. The worthy couple had been duly notified by Don José of the whereabouts of their charge, whom they now greeted with as much ardor and affection as if he had been absent a year.

When the *volante* stopped Morales slipped down, and with the utmost nonchalance joined a group of idlers who had gathered round the vehicle, admiring the richness of its appointments. At the end of half an hour Tancred appeared, dressed in the elegant costume of a naval officer of the time, and jumped into the *volante*. His appearance was the signal for a murmur of admiration, and Morales, profiting by the excitement, regained his perch as the *calesero* whipped up his horse. When they reached Don José's gate he again slipped down and took his way homeward, murmuring between his teeth—

"Caramba, this looks bad. I am afraid that little fool Carmen won't be too well satisfied."

On alighting at the entrance to the house Tancred was conducted by his host into the *salon*, where the Señorina Annunziata speedily made her appearance.

The young girl was surpassingly beautiful, and the Frenchman, who had at first been struck dumb with amazement at the gorgeous fittings of the apartment, was completely fascinated by the apparition. Annunziata was dressed in pure white, with a single purple cactus blossom in her bosom and another in her glossy hair. Her only ornaments were a pair of massive bracelets of sequins, which encircled her finely turned wrists. A soft light played in her large eyes, and a faint blush crimsoned her cheeks.

Recovering from his stupor by a mighty effort the young Frenchman paid his respects and laid his thanks at the feet of his fair saviour, with all the grace and elegance of an accomplished courtier.

The interview did not last long. Annunziata, at all times timid, but on this occasion more timid than ever, seemed so embarrassed and her answers to Tancred's enquiries were so curt and accompanied by such burning blushes that the young man, mistaking the cause of her embarrassment and thinking that his visit was inopportune, took an early opportunity of withdrawing.

"My dear chevalier," said Don José, as he re-conducted his young friend to the garden gate, "remember that my house is at all times open to you, and that you will always be welcome."

"To you, señor, I make no doubt, but to the Señorina, I am afraid not."

"And why, pray?" asked the merchant in astonishment.

"Did you remark the coolness, I might almost say the repugnance the young lady manifested towards me?"

"I only remarked the timidity of a child who is not accustomed to the ways of the world."