

nothing happened to reward his perseverance. Still he did not despair.

"Sooner or later," he would say to himself, "Carmen and Morales will begin to get over the fright with which I inspire them. Just now they are hiding, but this can not last for ever. One of them will appear one of these days; I shall follow, and then—" a terribly suggestive gesture completed the threat.

XXII.

THE CARGADOR.

The time has gone rapidly by. It is the day previous to that fixed for the departure of the "Marsoulin."

Poor Annunziata, unable to remain in the house in which she had spent so many happy days, and which her father's death had now rendered insupportable, had already, with her mulatto waiting-woman, taken possession of the little saloon and two sleeping berths which formed her quarters on board the vessel that was to carry her to France.

For his part Morales, unwilling that it should be said of so exalted a personage that he had embarked without a sufficient quantity of baggage, had sent on board a number of huge chests and packing cases, carefully nailed up, and containing a large assortment of the heaviest stones.

In his negro's disguise the Gitano was promenading up and down the quay, indulging in pleasant anticipations of the future.

"To-morrow," he muttered, as his eyes rested on the "Marsoulin," "I shall be on board that noble vessel, I shall see the sails spread and fill in the wind and the keel cleave through the blue sea, every moment increasing the distance between me and Quirino. No more danger; no more fears. A successful voyage in fine weather, with favorable winds, and a few months hence Don Guzman Morales y Tullpiano, brother-in-law of the Chevalier Tancred de Najac, officer in the fleet of His Majesty King Louis XV, will land in France with a high sounding title and his pockets full of gold pieces. Ah, caramba! I think our friend Don Guzman will lead a sufficiently jolly life—especially when Carmen has paid me the ten thousand dollars she owes me."

In good humor at the pleasant prospect that opened before him Morales began gaily to hum the air of an at that time well-known Parisian song in praise of riches, which formed part of his musician's stock in trade.

Alas, poor Morales! What would have become of him and his brave airs had he been able to guess what was going on behind him, as he boldly marched up and down, protected by his disguise, and relishingly inhaled the salt sea air as though he breathed liberty and distinction from afar.

We, however, more privileged than he, can see what escaped his notice.

As he promenaded up and down, Morales had more than once rubbed against a half-naked mulatto, in the costume of a cargador, who was lying dozing in the full blaze of the sun. The sleeper's eyes had opened the first time the Gitano passed, but seeing only a negro, he shut them again.

Just then Morales began to sing. The cargador started as he heard the voice, low and indistinct as it was. When Morales had once more passed him he raised himself on his elbow, and with a tremendous yawn, as though he had just been awakened, gathered himself up and crouched on his heels against a neighboring wall.

In his position he examined the singer closely.

"It is he," he murmured, after a few moments' scrutiny.

Then, seeing that Morales was making his way into the city, he rose and followed, taking care to put sufficient distance between himself and his prey to avoid suspicion.

When the Spaniard stopped, the cargador stopped too; and the two resumed their way at the same moment. In this manner the chase continued until Morales, having passed through a long, deserted street, halted in front of a small villa, and opening the gate with a key which he drew from his pocket, disappeared.

"So this is the hiding-place," muttered Quirino, for he it was who had so assiduously tracked the Spaniard.

Choosing a convenient post of observation at a short distance he stretched himself under a wall and once more pretended to sleep, keeping a good look-out the while on the door through which Morales had vanished.

During two whole hours he remained motionless in this position, watching the gate, and endeavoring in his own mind to account for the street-singer's apparent rise in life. At the end of that time the gate opened once more. Quirino's heart almost ceased to beat. Was Carmen coming out? No, it was a young negro, the *alesero* of the *volante* hired, as we know, by Morales, who was slipping out to spend an hour at the tavern in drinking tafia, the usual beverage of the lower classes in Cuba. For a bottle of his favorite liquor the poor devil would have sold his soul.

As the negro passed Quirino raised himself, imitating once more the yawns and gestures of a newly awakened man.

"Hullo, comrade," he cried, in the peculiar jargon of the Cuban slaves, "where are you off to?"

"Goin' to drink," replied the other.

"All alone?"

"Yes."

"It's poor work drinking alone."

"Not a bit. Tafia's always good."

"That makes no difference. It's better to drink in company. Will you come along with me?"

The negro looked at Quirino with some suspicion, for the *cargador's* brown face was anything but inviting.

"Well, what d'ye say?" retired Quirino.

"Who pays?" asked the *alesero*.

"I do."

"That so?"

"Don't I say so?"

"Where's yer money?"

"Look here," and Quirino drew from his pocket a handful of small silver which he displayed before the dazzled eyes of the negro.

"Come along," returned the latter linking his arms in that of his new found friend, of whose solvency there could no longer be any doubt.

In a few moments the two were seated at a table in the back room of a tavern, with a bottle of rum, and a couple of glasses between them.

It is not our intention to follow the conversation that took place. It is sufficient to say that before an hour had passed Quirino knew all that the negro could tell him of what went on inside the house occupied by the brother and sister, including the sonorous, high sounding title, and the rank assumed by Morales, and the marriage of Carmen to a French naval officer. He did not learn, however, as the negro himself was unaware of the fact, that the ex-musician and the newly married couple were to leave Havana the following day.

Before the pair parted, a mysterious agreement had been entered into between them and the *alesero* went his way rejoicing, with twenty-five dollars—in his eyes a mine of wealth—in his pocket, as an earnest of what he was to receive if he faithfully carried out his part of the compact.

On leaving the tavern Quirino returned at a rapid pace toward the Puerta de Tierra, shut himself up in the dismantled hut, and went out no more that day.

The following day, as we have already said, was that fixed for the departure of the "Marsoulin."

Early in the morning Tancred went on board to inquire at what hour he should bring down his party.

"Monsieur the Chevalier," returned the captain, in answer to his question, "the tide turns at three, so I shall weigh anchor at a quarter to. If it is your wish to come on board at the last moment, be here at half past two. Don't be later, for notwithstanding the profound respect I have for you, and my desire to oblige you, it will be impossible for me to wait for you. I am longing to put a few hundred leagues of blue water between Mademoiselle Annunziata and the city that has so many painful associations for her."

"I understand your feeling, captain, perfectly; and I respect you for it. But you need have no fear that we shall be late."

"Then I may reckon on you; at half-past two at the latest."

On returning to the city Tancred went to bid farewell to his late hosts, Eloi Sandric and his wife, whom he acquainted with the fact of his marriage, and the strange manner in which it had been brought to pass.

It was past twelve when he returned to Carmen, who was already in her travelling dress, a charmingly tasteful costume, that set off to wonderful advantage her graceful Andalusian figure.

"Oh, Carmen, how charming you look," cried the young man.

"I am quite aware of it, my love," she returned coquettishly. "But that is not the question in point just now. Have you seen the captain?"

"I have just left him."

"At what time does he sail?"

"We must be on board at the latest by half-past two. If we are not there he will sail without us."

"With all my heavy baggage on board," exclaimed Morales. "That would be too bad. We must be exact."

"Yes, indeed," added Carmen.

"We are quite ready," continued Morales. "Berenice has just gone to fetch a palanquin for Carmen, and you and I will go in the *volante*."

"Very good," returned Tancred.

Since the preceding day Morales had been extremely troubled at the idea that it would be impossible for him to go on board in his borrowed disguise. Still it was hardly likely, he reasoned with himself, that Quirino would light on him just at the last moment. The chances were a thousand to one against it, and every precaution must be taken to render the likelihood of detection impossible. He would send on the palanquin in advance, and he and Tancred would follow in the *volante* at a rapid pace. It would be impossible to recognize the occupants of the vehicle amid the clouds of dust raised by the horse and the wheels.

At two o'clock then, Carmen started in the palanquin, and a quarter of an hour after Morales and Tancred entered the *volante*.

"Segua!" cried the Spaniard to the *alesero*, to whom he had already indicated the route he was to follow.

The negro dug his spurs into his horse's flanks, and started off at a gallop.

"The horse is bolting!" cried Tancred.

"Not at all," returned Morales. "He is a young animal and full of spirit. He is only playful. Besides the *alesero* knows his business. There is no danger, my dear fellows, none at all."

And he added to himself, with a deep drawn sigh of relief.

"In ten minutes I shall no longer be afraid of Quirino."

XXIII.

THERE'S MANY A SLIP, ETC.

Morales was in high glee until an untoward accident came to damp his happiness. The *volante* had just reached a corner formed by the junction of two streets. That on the left led to the harbor, and that on the right stretched to the Puerta de Tierra.

"A la izquierda!" cried Morales.

The order was not obeyed. The horse turned sharp to the right and flew off at a faster pace than ever.

"That's very strange," said the Gitano. "Did you not hear me?" he cried to the *alesero*, "I said, to the left."

"I heard you, señor," replied the man, "but the horse is off; I can't hold him."

"I thought so," said Tancred.

"Wretch!" screamed Morales. "You shall pay for this!"

"Señor," returned the *alesero*, "it isn't my fault. You told me to drive as hard as I could. It's not my fault if he's got the bit between his teeth."

"Try and stop him then, caramba."

"Don Guzman," interposed Tancred, "there is, I think, nothing to fear. The horse will soon be winded, and stop of his own accord, and we can turn back."

"But the time we are losing, my dear chevalier," expostulated the Gitano, despondently. "If we are late they will sail without us."

"I confess it is very annoying, but it cannot be helped."

At this moment the *volante* swept through the Puerta de Tierra. On the left hand side of the road was the hut that Morales and Carmen had quitted a fortnight before. Suddenly a man dressed in grey jumped from the bushes that surrounded the cabin, and took up a position in the middle of the road.

Morales turned deadly pale and almost fell back in his seat. He recognized Quirino.

"We are lost!" he murmured.

"How lost?" asked Tancred in amazement.

"It is he—Quirino," returned Morales in an indistinct voice.

The name was new to Tancred.

"My dear brother-in-law," he asked, "pray tell me who may this Quirino be, and why are we lost on meeting him?"

Morales had no time to reply. The horse galloped at full speed to the spot where the Indian stood.

"The man will be run over," thought Tancred. "If this is the Quirino Don Guzman fears so much there will be very little of him left to fear in another minute."

The Frenchman was wrong. Just as the horse's head was about to strike him, the Indian seized him by the bride and held him with an iron grip. Thus brought to a sudden stop the animal reared and fell sideways, breaking the pole as he came down.

Tancred was on the point of jumping down to assist the stranger, but the latter glared at him with such unmistakable ferocity that he thought better of it. Was the man crazy, he wondered.

Morales would have liked to hide himself under the cushions.

"Get down!" cried Quirino in an imperious voice.

"Hullo, friend," cried Tancred, whose patriotic pride revolted at this unceremonious treatment, "who the deuce are you, that you talk like that to me?"

"Who I am?" returned the Indian with emphasis, pointing to the Gitano, "ask him. He will tell you that I am Quirino."

"Still that mysterious name! The mere fact of your name being Quirino does not constitute a social position. But whoever you may be, what do you want with me?"

"I want to kill you."

Tancred jumped down from the *volante* and burst out laughing.

"My good man," he cried, "your intentions are no doubt admirable, and your frankness in avowing them is worthy of all praise, but pardon me for asking, as I have not the honor of your acquaintance, the reasons for which you thirst for my life, and in what my death can me of service to you."

Quirino seized Morales by the collar of the coat and dragged him violently out of the *volante*. With a cry of terror the poor wretch fell on his knees. Pointing to him as he grovelled in the dust, the Indian replied:

"Ask this man, he will tell you."

Then addressing the astonished *alesero*, who recognized in the Indian hunter the *cargador* of the preceding day, and watched with gaping mouth and wide-opened eyes the strange scene that was passing before him, he threw him the promised fifty dollars, and in a tone that admitted of no trifling bid him go home.

The man did not wait to be told twice, and pocketing the purse lost no time in whipping up his horse and driving off. He did not go far however. Some hundred yards off he drew up the *volante* behind the projecting angle of a wall, and diving among the bushes crawled on his hands and knees to a sheltered spot where, himself unseen, he could see, hear all that went on,

Tancred, in the meantime, could hardly restrain an expression of disgust at the miserably abject condition of Morales. The wretched Gitano grovelled in the middle of the dusty road clasping his trembling hands with an expression of the most intense terror.

"My dear brother-in-law," said the Frenchman at last, "Señor Quirino here pretends that you are able to inform me of the cause of the hatred he appears to bear me. It seems to me very strange, but I look to you for a solution of the enigma. Tell me what you know about it."

"Alas!" was all Morales could murmur.

"Tell me quickly, I beg you. Señor Quirino appears to be in a hurry, and, moreover, you know we have no time to lose."

"Alas!" murmured the Gitano a second time.

"He is trembling with fear," said the Indian. "You will get nothing out of him, the coward." As he spoke he spurned the writhing figure with his foot.

Tancred crimsoned with indignation. For a moment he felt strongly inclined to throw himself upon the Indian. Unfortunately he was unarmed, while Quirino carried, besides his musket, a long hanger in his belt.

"Señor Quirino," he burst out with a threatening gesture, "I forbid you to insult in my presence a gentleman whose relation I have become."

"A gentleman!" returned the hunter disdainfully, placing his foot on Morales' shoulder, "this is too much. This pretended gentleman who has been bragging to you of his high birth and his immense wealth, is nothing but a miserable gitano, a fugitive gipsy, a bandit belonging to the scum and off-scouring of the world. But little over a fortnight ago he lived in that hut you see there; he and his sister Carmen were earning their livelihood by singing in the streets and gambling houses."

"It is a lie!" thundered Tancred furiously.

But a vague recollection took him back to the gambling hell in the Caia du Paseo, the one-eyed musician and the dancing girl. He looked at his brother-in-law. Yes, supplying the black bandage and the broad-brimmed sombrero, it was the same. Carmen too; the long glossy hair, the beaming eyes, the white shoulders and the exquisitely turned ankles, he recognized them now.

"Great Heavens!" he burst out as furiously as before, "you are right! The villainous scoundrels, how they have deceived me!"

Morales shuddered.

"In any case," he thought, "I am done for. If Quirino spares me the Chevalier will kill me."

Tancred, who had been absorbed in his bitter reflections, raised his head.

"Sir," said he, addressing Quirino in a firm tone of voice, "I have been deceived, and it is evident that I have been playing the part of fool, but that only concerns myself and those whom I shall call to task for the deception. It does not explain the hatred you evince towards me. Do you wish to take my life because I have been made a fool of?"

"I wish to take your life because Carmen was my betrothed," replied the Indian; "because I have sworn that while I live Carmen shall belong to none but me, and that the day her hand touches the hand of another man, I will crush that man, and her with him. I am an Indian, señor, and when an Indian has sworn to do a thing he does it."

"Exactly," returned Tancred ironically. "I understand perfectly the binding nature of the oath. So you are going to kill me. Very good. Only as I am unarmed you will have to assassinate me."

"No," replied the Indian picking up from the ground the fellow musket to that he carried slung over his shoulder. "I do not wish to assassinate you. We will fight with the same weapons and the same chances."

"Ha, a duel!" cried Tancred. "A duel with muskets, eh! I have fought often enough in my life, but always with a sword. It will be something new. I shall not be sorry to have such an original adventure to relate when I get back to France."

Quirino shook his head ominously, as much as if to say: "I doubt very much if you will ever get back."

"Where shall we fight?" continued Tancred.

"In this enclosure," replied Quirino, pointing to a thickly overgrown garden that surrounded the hut.

"So be it."

Quirino held out the two muskets crossed one over the other.

"Take one."

Tancred took the nearest one.

"I am ready," said he, "let us make haste."

"Go on first," returned Quirino, "I will follow you."

Stooping down he seized Morales by the collar, raised him to his feet and pushed him roughly forward into the enclosure.

"He is going to murder me," thought the Gitano. "My last hour is come! Great St. James of Compostella, take pity on me!"

(To be continued.)