

Unfolding the papers, she found in each a tress of silky hair; that in the pocket inscribed "Diana," was black as a raven's wing; in that marked "Sylvandire," it was a rich nut brown; that in the third was golden.

"He is not exactly constant," said the young girl, "but there are no charms so strong that they cannot be broken."

Lifting her head Carmen caught sight of herself, radiant with beauty, in a small glass which hung against the wall.

"Ah, ha!" she cried, "name, fortune, power, courtiers and flatterers, I will have them all, and before very long."

VII.

TANCRED AND DON JOSE.

When the young Frenchman awoke from the insensible condition in which he left him he found himself in bed in a strange room. At first he remembered nothing of what had passed the previous night. A queer sensation in his head and a slight pain in his left arm attracted his attention, and feeling with his right hand he found that his head was bandaged, and that he had evidently been bled. What was the meaning of it?

By degrees his memory returned, and he was able to recall one by one the events of the past night, the gambling-house, his stroke of fortune, the arrival of the street musicians, the songs and dances of the young girl, the roughness of the man in the red coat, the quarrel and the duel it led to, the flight of the Mexican and finally his own departure homewards. So far he could remember, but here his recollection stopped short. The rest was a blank.

After puzzling over the matter for some time without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion, he was compelled to content himself with the supposition that some of the gamblers had attacked him for the sake of his winnings, that he had been stunned, left for dead, and picked up by some charitable passer-by. That he was in good hands was evident.

As he raised himself on his elbow to look around him, the door opened and three persons entered the room.

The first of these was an old gentleman, whose long white hair hung on either side of a face that bore unmistakable traces of care and much anxiety. There was something extremely sad in his countenance, which even its natural kindly expression could not temper. Evidently its owner was weighed down by a dreadful secret.

Another of the new-comers was Pablo, the valet who had found the Frenchman lying stoned in the street; and the last was the best, or rather the least unskilful of the physicians settled in Havana.

Seeing the young man awake and sitting up, the old gentleman addressed him in Spanish.

"It gives me great pleasure, señor, to see that you have recovered from a condition which, I assure you, caused me no little uneasiness."

"Señor," returned Tancred, "how can I ever thank you sufficiently for your kindness?"

"But! you owe me no thanks," returned the other. "Fie, what I have done for you I would do for any man I might find in the sorry plight in which you were found—lying for dead in the middle of the street. But, señor, esteem yourself happy in getting over your accident with no evil effects."

The doctor, who had removed the bandage from the young man's head, here joined in the conversation.

"By to-morrow morning," said he, "our patient will be able to be removed. The contusion on the skull has produced no inflammation, thanks to the refrigerant application. The pulse is calm; there is no feverishness whatever."

"Thanks to my having bled the gentleman in time," joined in Pablo triumphantly.

Neither the host, doctor nor patient could repress a smile at the worthy valet's enthusiasm and his unbounded confidence in his medical skill.

"I beg," said Tancred, "to thank all those who have contributed to my recovery, and to assure them of my sincere and eternal gratitude."

"Once more, señor," replied the host, "let me remind you that you owe us no thanks. We have done our duty, nothing more."

"Do you feel any pain?" asked the doctor.

"Very little."

"And the head, how does it feel?"

"Heavy, that is all. I feel a little stiff, as if I had been on a long and heavy march."

"Ah! that is the natural consequence of the blow you received, reacting on the nervous system. That will go off in a few hours."

"Well, doctor, what are your orders?" asked the venerable host.

"Hum! our patient must be kept quiet, take a little strengthening food every few hours, and a glass of wine at night. That is all that will be necessary. In the morning he may have a couple of glasses of wine."

Having thus pleasantly prescribed the physician withdrew, followed by Pablo. The old gentleman remained by the patient's bed.

"Does it fatigue you to talk?"

"Not the least," returned Tancred. "On the contrary, I am anxious to learn how I come to be indebted for your hospitality."

"Although your accent is perfect, I believe that I am not mistaken in supposing that you are no Spaniard," enquired the other.

"You are right, señor. I am a Frenchman, an officer in the navy, attached to the frigate 'Thunderer.' My name is the Chevalier Tancred de Najac."

"A Frenchman!" exclaimed the host, seizing his guest's hand. "Ah! how glad I am to be able to be of use to you, and thus in a measure to repay a portion of a debt of gratitude I owe your countrymen."

"Ah! you have been in France, then, señor?"

"Yes. The man to whom I owe the most here below, a man who has always been more than a brother to me, is a Frenchman. But I see you do not know who I am. My name is José Rovero."

"Don José Rovero! the rich ship-owner!" cried Tancred in amazement. "The millionaire ten times over, whose name is heard in every port in the world."

"As you say, señor; the rich ship-owner, the millionaire ten times over," returned the other, with a tinge of bitterness in his tone.

"Well, señor, now that we are known to each other, allow me to ask how I came here."

"It is a very short story. Last night Annunziata—"

"I beg your pardon, señor. Annunziata?"

"That is my daughter's name. Annunziata was returning in her palanquin from a ball, and on reaching the end of the Calle de Paseo the bearers found two bodies lying in the road."

"Two bodies!" murmured Tancred in amazement.

"Yes. Yourself and the body of a tall thin man dressed in a red coat, and holding, I am told, an *espada* sword."

"Ha! the *espada* sword?"

"You know him then?"

"I met him last night for the first time, and I then learned that he is Don Ramirez Mazatlan, and that he gives himself out to be a colonel in the Mexican army. I can understand that he attacked me from behind with the double object of satisfying a desire for revenge and for plunder. But how came he to be lying beside me?"

"He was dead, señor."

"Dead! How, dead?"

"He had evidently been run through the body."

"How can that be?"

"Do I understand, señor, that it was not you who gave him his *coup de grâce*?"

"Alas, no. As you may have seen, the only weapon I carried was a small dress rapier, which was sheathed at the time I was attacked. I did not even know who my assailant was."

"But who could have taken the pains to punish your would-be assassin, only to abandon you afterwards?"

"Some robber, I suppose. I had a large sum of money upon me and this colonel was aware of it. No doubt he followed me to take his revenge by assassinating me, intending afterwards to rob me. Probably some other ruffian was following him, and when he had accomplished his purpose ruffian number two fell upon him and made off with the gold of which he had robbed me. That is the only explanation of the affair that I can imagine. But let us return to your story, señor."

"What followed can easily be imagined," continued Don José. "At first Annunziata was very much frightened, but finding that you were not dead she had you placed in the litter and brought here. Now you are acquainted with all that I know of the matter."

"And when may I be allowed to express my thanks to my saviour, the señorina Annunziata?"

"As soon as you are strong enough to leave your room."

"This evening then, I trust."

"If not this evening, to-morrow. I must beg you to be careful. Take time to recover perfectly."

"As you wish, Don José, but I assure you I am quite myself again."

"Chevalier," continued Don José after a moment's silence, "you say that you are an officer attached to the 'Thunderer.' She left this port two months ago. Will you permit me to ask how it comes that you are left behind?"

"Certainly, señor. I can easily satisfy you. During our stay here I had a little bout with one of my comrades—one of the dearest fellows on earth, the Viscount Jean de Tremblay—in which I got wounded."

"Wounded once more! Do you pass your time wholly in sword-exercise, chevalier?"

"No. This was a little quarrel we had about some trifle or another—the color of a lock of hair. I was wounded, and poor Tremblay was more sore over it than I. However, the long and short of it is that I was hauled up for repairs, and nursed by a merchant here, a man of the name of Sandric—Eloi Sandric."

"You fell into good hands, señor."

"Indeed I did. He and his wife treated me as if I had been their son, and brought me through."

VIII.

THE OLD MAN'S PRAYER.

Tancred and Don José continued their conversation for some time, and the latter then withdrew to allow his guest to take a much-needed rest.

In the large drawing-room Annunziata was anxiously awaiting the result of her father's visit. As he entered the apartment she flew towards him.

"Well, father, have you seen our patient?"

"Yes, child."

"And how is he?"

"Quite well again. I left him in a great hurry to come and thank you. He insists that he owes his life to you, and perhaps he is right."

"Did he tell you his name, father?"

"Yes, he is the Chevalier Tancred de Najac."

"That is a French name, is it not?"

"Yes, and its bearer is a member of a noble French family and a naval officer."

"Then I am twice repayed for what I was able to do for him, for I know you love France, and the French. I love France too, though I have never been there."

"Would you like to visit it, my child?"

"Oh! so much, father. I often dream that we are on the way."

The old man smiled sadly.

"Well, it is likely that your dream will soon be realized."

"Oh!" cried the girl in a burst of childish delight, clapping her tiny hands. "That is good news! How glad I am!"

Tears stood in the old man's eyes as he watched his daughter, but without noticing them she rattled on.

"When we go, shall we see your good friend—?"

"Philip Le Vallant, the ship-owner at Havre, yes, child, we shall see him. In all probability we shall partake of his hospitality."

"How glad I shall be to see him, to thank him for his goodness to you. What a pity it is he has no daughter, we would have been such friends."

"He has a son, a young man of twenty-five, named Oliver. He is, I am told, as handsome as his dead mother was pretty, and he inherits all his father's nobleness of character."

"Alas!" thought the old man, "how I have dreamed of these children! Oliver and Annunziata, what a handsome pair they would have made. But now it is not to be thought of." And in his despair Don José buried his face in his hands.

"What is the matter, father?" asked the girl in alarm. "Are you unwell?"

"It is nothing, my dear. Merely a slight headache."

"Father, are you deceiving me? What has gone wrong?"

"Nothing, child, nothing is wrong. Why should I deceive you. I have nothing to hide from you. I am in excellent health, and with my child's love all is well."

Annunziata replied with a kiss.

"And now, my child," he continued "I must leave you, I have business to attend to which cannot be postponed."

"Mind you don't fatigue yourself, father."

After affectionately embracing his daughter Don José left the apartment and sought the privacy of his own room. As he closed the door behind him and turned the key in the lock the smiling expression he had assumed to re-assure Annunziata disappeared, giving place to one of intense agony. His face became deadly white, the forehead wrinkled by intense pain, and black circles surrounded his eyes. Convulsively he pressed his two hands to the left side of his breast, as if to repress the pulsations of his heart.

"Oh! my God!" he cried "how I suffer! My God, the tortures you impose upon me are greater than man can bear!"

A frightful spectacle, disfigured beyond recognition, he dragged himself to an arm-chair which stood in the middle of the room in front of a large iron-wood writing-table, and dropped upon the cushions, apparently insensible. Yet the agonized expression still depicted on his face, the trembling of his hands, and the quivering of his eyebrows showed that he had not swooned and that he still felt all the sharpness of the pains which had seized him.

After a few minutes he moved. With a trembling hand he seized a small key that hung by a black ribbon from his neck, and with it opened one of the table drawers. From the bottom of this drawer he took a small phial containing a crimson liquid, and a little golden goblet of about the capacity of a tumbler. Filling the goblet from the phial he eagerly swallowed the draught. The effect was miraculous. His nerves relaxed from the rigidity with which they had been seized, his eyelids ceased to quiver, and a faint tinge of color replaced for an instant the corpse-like pallor of his face. The crisis, whatever may have been its cause, was over.

"Once more," he faintly murmured, "I am saved, and God has pity upon me. But it is only a brief respite. Death is not far off, I feel, I see it close at hand. For the last few days it has been drawing nearer and nearer, and now it is ready to seize its prey."

After a moment's silence he continued, half aloud, and in a tone of earnest supplication:

"Oh my God, God all-powerful, thou knowest that I have made the sacrifice of my life without rebelling, if not without resigning, though with anguish of soul, the cruel misfortunes which unceasingly pursue me—misfortunes that no one suspects, but which are breaking me down, are killing me. Everything is being taken from me at once, oh my God. You take from me fortune, health, life, and perhaps honor. Refuse me life, if thou wilt, but do not thou refuse me my last, my only prayer. Let me at least live until a reply comes from France telling me that my beloved child has yet a future to look forward to, that she will have home and food in a foreign land—she, oh my God, who is now so happy and thinks herself to be so rich, but who may find herself, perhaps to-morrow, an orphan and a beggar. This I ask thee, oh God, prostrate before thee. Wilt thou not grant me this, oh, good and merciful God. Wilt thou not grant this much to an unhappy dying father?"

Don José had prostrated himself before a large ivory candelabrum which hung on the wall—a candelabrum of crimson velvet and ebony. As he raised his

eyes his heart and his hands toward the Divine Crucifix, big tears rolled down his pale, pinched cheeks. For some time he remained in this humble posture with his eyes fixed on the emaciated figure that hung from the cross. Perhaps he hoped for a miracle, and expected the ivory lips to open and address him.

When he rose again he was calm once more. "Perhaps," he thought, "Philip's answer will arrive to-morrow. If not to-morrow, the day after; and if not then the day after that. At the utmost it must arrive within a month. God will let me live till then, it is so little to ask of Him to whom Eternity belongs."

He again seated himself in his arm-chair, and leaning his elbows on the table hid his face in his hands.

Was he meditating on the splendor of the past and the darkness that overhung the future, this future that was to be so short for him, and so long for his cherished daughter? Tears dropped from his eyes and fell fast between his fingers.

Is there any more afflicting spectacle than the sight of an old man weeping?

IX.

CIUDAD-REAL WINE AND ESTREMADURA HAMS.

We shall have to go very far back to trace the antecedents of Don José Rovero.

Forty years before the events related in the last chapter took place, a French trading vessel, the "Marsouin," from Havre, after having completed her landing, was riding at anchor in the roadstead of Cadiz. The captain, with that patience which should always have been found among the cardinal virtues of the sailor of that time, had for several days been awaiting a favorable breeze. Still it came not, so one morning he ordered a boat to be lowered and manned by five sailors.

On the shore opposite the vessel, at a distance of about a mile and a half from the outskirts of the city, stood a small tavern, the rendezvous of the merry-makers of Cadiz, who were wont to resort thither for the purpose of discussing the classic *olla-podrida*, with the accompaniments of great slices of Estremadura ham and wine of Ciudad-Real—a liquor with the color of ink and almost the consistency of molasses, and possessing withal a charmingly penetrating odor borrowed from the goat-skins in which it was customarily stored.

It had so chanced that the captain of the "Marsouin" one day dined at this famous resort and had been greatly taken by both ham and wine. The tender recollection of these delicacies had served to pass many a weary hour as he paced his deck in fruitless waiting for the wind, and on the morning in question he had made up his mind, as the substance is better than the shadow, and as the former was within his reach, that it would be a good thing to do if he were to send for a couple of hams and a skin or two of wine. Hence the expedition which had just put off from the vessel, with instructions to bring back four hams and six skins.

After an hour's rowing the men reached the shore, and after beaching the boat, which they confided to the care of the youngest of their number, four of them made their way to the posada, which stood some ten minutes' walk from the shore.

Some thirty or forty paces from the boat, squatting in the shade of a bush, nominally engaged in keeping a flock of goats which roamed at will around, but really absorbed in the pages of a tattered book that lay before him, sat a young man of eighteen or nineteen. Although he was clad in the most miserable rags, there was something noble in his appearance which would have attracted attention anywhere. The expression of his countenance was remarkably intelligent for one in his humble situation.

Left alone, the young sailor drew a book from his pocket, and throwing himself on the sand, also commenced to read.

From time to time the two students glanced at each other, evidently struck by the similarity of their tastes.

At the end of half an hour the four sailors returned, bringing the hams and wine-skins, which they deposited in the bottom of the boat. Then, as the weather was warm, and they were tired with rowing, they agreed to return to the posada with the intention of attacking a succulent *olla-podrida* and a few horns of wine.

"We'll bring you your share," they cried to their young comrade as they moved off.

"It don't matter," he replied; "I am neither hungry nor thirsty." And so he returned to his reading.

Hardly had the four sailors entered the tavern when three ill-looking fellows came out and began to sneak towards the boat, now and then casting a glance behind them to make sure that they were not followed. The young sailor, seeing the three men approaching him in a manner that looked, to say the least, suspicious, rose, replaced his book in his pocket, and seated himself on the bow of the boat. The men still came on, talking excitedly in an under-tone. They were now near enough for the young man to distinguish their evil countenances. When they came to within five or six paces of him he