

the drawer you will find a red shagreen portfolio which you will bring me."

The girl mechanically took the key and executed her mission with the apathy and unconsciousness of one who walks in his sleep. When she returned a terrible change had taken place in her father's condition. His face was flushed with pain, and his whole frame was convulsed in a crisis which exceeded in intensity anything that he had hitherto experienced.

"The phial!" he murmured in a choking voice; "the phial!"

Annunziata dropped the portfolio, seized the phial, and was about to measure out the usual dose when her father's feeble tones arrested her.

"No—no," he murmured in a voice that was gradually growing fainter; "the phial, the phial." And stretching out his trembling hand he eagerly grasped it and drained it to the dregs.

"It is all over," he thought. "I should have no further need for it. Now I am almost sure to have an hour to live, and that is more than sufficient to complete my task."

For a minute or two he lay motionless. Then with a mighty effort he raised himself and supported his head on his hand.

"What did you do with the portfolio, child?" Annunziata picked it up from the floor and handed it to her father. The old man opened it and drew out several papers, one of which was folded like a letter.

"My own dear child," he continued, "kneel down at my bed-side. It is fit that you should listen to me on your knees, for as you listen you will have to pray God that he in his mercy may give you strength and resignation."

Annunziata fell on her knees.

"I will go straight to what I have to say," pursued Don José, "for I can understand what you are suffering from suspense and doubt of what is coming. I told you to be prepared for the worst; in one moment you will know the full extent of the evils that threaten you. One of these evils alone will, I am sure, seem harder to bear than all the rest put together."

"I told you some days ago," he continued, after a short pause, "that I had received a letter from Philip Le Vallant. This letter was an answer to a message I had sent him. I have preserved a copy of this message, as well as of his reply. I will read them both to you, they will inform you of a secret that I thought best to keep from you until the last. From them you will learn everything; the past, the present, and I may say the future."

With these few words of preparation Don José unfolded the copy of his own letter and read it in a voice that he tried hard to maintain.

Annunziata listened, still kneeling, her hands hanging lifeless at her sides and her eyes staring fixedly at the ceiling. In this attitude she looked like a statue of Stupor carved in white marble. When her father had read the sentence in which Don José declares himself to be the most miserable of men, she started with a wild gesture, and passing her hands over her face, exclaimed:

"You, father, the most miserable of men! No, no! You did not write that! Am I dreaming or am I mad?"

"My dear child," urged Don José, "let me go on. You will soon see what I mean."

Then he continued to read:

"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."

"What is he saying?" cried the poor girl, "My God, what is he saying? I an orphan! I alone in the world!"

Don José continued without taking any notice of the interruption:

"Such is my fate, my friend. My misfortunes may be told in a few words: I am ruined and I am dying."

"What horrible dream is this?" Annunziata broke in. "Thank God, it is too absurd to be real!"

Still the old man continued, in a calm, firm voice:

"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—"

Annunziata was no longer on her knees. Almost mechanically she had risen from the ground, and now at this climax of misfortune, she burst into an insane, discordant laugh.

"Father," she murmured in a measured, monotonous voice, "for pity's sake awake me. This dream is giving me pain. Do you know what I have heard? The word dishonor coupled with your name. Don José Rovero bankrupt, dishonored! What do you say to that, father?"

Once more she broke into the harsh, hysterical laugh. Her father looked at her in alarm.

"Oh, my God!" he murmured under his breath, "is it not enough that you are taking my life? Will you also take my child's reason?"

"Do not deceive yourself, my dear child," he added aloud. "You are not under the influence of a dream, as you seem to imagine. What I am reading to you is true. It is all real that you have heard. Once more I say, take courage and be resigned. Let me continue. I must go on to the end. My allotted time is passing fast, and I am on the point of death."

"Of death!" repeated the girl, as though she did not understand; and in very truth understand she did not.

"Yes," replied Don José, "of death, and the moment is not far off."

For the first time a glimmer of the truth flashed across Annunziata's mind. Frantically beating the air with her hands she fell, with a piercing cry, once more upon her knees.

At first the old man thought she had fainted. She had not. Although almost heart-broken by the suddenness of this cruel news she still felt all the sharpness of pain. For some moments she remained perfectly quiet with her head hid in the coverlet. When she looked up her face was white as alabaster, and a bright, unnatural light burned in her eyes.

"Father," she said in a perfectly calm voice, "I am listening. Go on, I am strong enough to hear all."

The dying man would willingly have given his daughter a few minutes' respite, but the time was fast ebbing away, and he felt that his hour was close at hand. Continuing where he had broken off, he read the long, sad letter to the end.

Annunziata did not once interrupt him. She mustered up all her resolution to listen to the cruel recital, but the all but audible throbbing of her heart, the convulsive sobs that rose in her throat, and the tears that streamed down her pale cheeks fully betrayed her emotion.

"That is what I wrote to Philip," said Don José. "Here is his answer."

Unfolding the paper he had received through the Spanish captain he read in a trembling voice his friend's short but affectionate letter, which, the reader remembers, closed in the following words:

"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."

When he concluded both father and daughter were in tears.

"Keep this letter, my child," he continued; "it is your only inheritance. I do not bid you love with all your heart him who wrote it. Why should I? Thank God you will not be altogether an orphan, for the father you are about to find will take the place of the father you are about to lose."

"Can the tenderness of a life-time be replaced?" cried the young girl passionately. "Can a heart like yours be replaced? Can another take your place to me, father?"

The momentary calmness she had forced on herself disappeared like a flash. Then she added triumphantly,

"Besides I do not believe it, father! I can not believe it! No, you will not die! You will still live many years for my happiness and your own. Why should God, who gave you to me, now take you away? In what have I offended him that he should punish me so harshly? It would be more than an injustice; it would be cruelty! It is impossible! God is just; he is good. He often pardons the guilty, how much more should he have mercy on the innocent! I tell you that you will live! Does not your own friend, in his letter, say the same thing? The climate of France will give you fresh strength, and the physicians there will restore your health. I have a presentiment that this is so, and my presentiments are never wrong. Get rid of these horrible ideas that are haunting you, and as soon as you are a little stronger we will start. Believe me, dear father, the voyage will begin the work of restoring your health, and the care of your Annunziata and the happiness of seeing your old friend after so many years' absence will complete it. I am sure that a year hence people will say that you have all the appearance and activity of a young man of thirty, as Mr. Vallant, who is your senior, himself says. Come, father, I beseech you, and you cannot refuse me, pluck up courage, do not yield to these fatal anticipations which are killing you, be confident for the future and all will yet be well."

"Alas, alas! my poor dear child," returned Don José, "only a miracle could save me now, or even delay for a few hours the end that is rapidly approaching."

"Are you sure, father?"

"Perfectly certain."

"Then," cried Annunziata, in a magnificent outburst of faith. "I will ask God to work a miracle on your behalf; and he will do it!"

The young girl threw herself on her knees before a painting of the Crucifixion that hung on the wall and murmured in a voice that breathed intense enthusiasm and firm conviction:

"Oh, my God, if a miracle be necessary to save my father, do thou work one!"

And in a lower tone she added:

"And in exchange for his life take mine!"

Then she rose, calm once more and convinced that her heartfelt prayer had mounted to the throne above and had been favorably received.

As she returned to the bedside her face was bright with faith and hope.

Don José, reassured by his daughter's confidence and child-like faith, almost caught the contagion.

"Who knows?" he said to himself. "God may perhaps grant the prayers of the purest of all his angels."

An unwonted and unhoped for change seemed all at once to be taking place within him. The pulsations of his heart appeared to diminish in force and in pain, and after many

nights and days of unceasing sleeplessness, a gentle reviving slumber crept over him.

"My dear child," he said in a low but distinct voice, "I think I can sleep. Kiss me, dear, before my eyes close. Now sit by the bedside and give me your hand. I must hold it while I sleep."

With a fervent expression of thanks for what seemed a speedy answer to her prayer Annunziata took her place. Don José fell back on his pillow, and with a glance of affection and gratitude at his daughter dropped into a sweet sleep.

"Thank God!" she said to herself, as hope once more dawned in her breast, "He has heard my prayer!"

For a whole hour Annunziata sat perfectly still for fear of awakening her father.

"How calmly and sweetly he sleeps," she thought. "For days past his breathing has been hard and forced, and now I do not even hear it. Ah! how good God is!"

Notwithstanding the fatigue to which she had been exposed, the days and nights she had passed in watching, the freshness began to return, with rekindled hope, to her face.

Suddenly she turned ashy pale; her eyes dilated with terror, and a sharp cry escaped from her trembling lips.

The hand she held in hers was stiff and cold. At first she refused to believe it. Putting her arms around her father she tried, with many caresses and kisses, to awake him.

"Father, wake up! Father, speak to me! You frighten me! Father, father, why do you not answer me?"

Her father was a corpse. At the very moment when she was indulging in hopes for his recovery he had returned his soul to its Maker.

With a long wail of grief the orphan fell senseless on the bed.

## XX.

## A VERY UGLY NIGGER.

While the great house in the Caia de Obispo was the scene of the sad events related in the last chapter, a drama of a more pleasant nature was being enacted in the villa rented by Morales.

Tancred and Carmen had wholly given themselves up to the lovers' delights of the honeymoon, to the utter exclusion of all other mundane affairs.

The Frenchman, who perfectly adored the young wife whom Fortune had given him in so strange a manner, devoted himself entirely to her, lived for her, and with her forgot the past and gave no thought to the future.

Carmen herself, who felt no real love for Tancred, though she feigned to dote upon him, could hardly resist the charming attentions and sincere but respectful adoration of her young and handsome husband. In the little lovers' *litté-à-litté* she played her part to perfection, and Tancred had no reason to doubt that he was loved fully as much as he loved.

As for Morales, he was having but a sorry time of it. He had so arranged matters that during their stay in Havana Tancred should not learn the truth respecting his marriage, nor the real condition of his bride and her noble and esteemed brother.

Once safely arrived in France Morales had made up his mind as to the course to be pursued. He would be suddenly ruined. His negroes had revolted, the poisoners had been at work, an insurrection had broken out. There were a hundred stories that he could use to account for the sudden change in his fortunes. Then he would be at liberty to draw on his brother-in-law's purse, and through his means mount the first step of the ladder that leads to wealth and fame. This once accomplished he had no fear for the future.

The only thing that troubled him was the getting away from Havana. That must be done at once, before Quirino discovered their whereabouts. With this thought uppermost in his mind Morales's one care was to find a vessel of any nationality which might carry them anywhere out of range of Quirino's musket.

During the first few days after the marriage of his sister the terror with which the mere thought of the Indian inspired him kept him at home. Berenice had received orders to watch the movements of all the vessels in the harbor, and we must do her the justice of adding that she performed her task with the utmost exactitude.

Soon, however, Morales tired of his self-imposed seclusion. He had persuaded himself too that the mulatto was playing him false. On the one hand he was longing to go out and see for himself, while on the other, fear of the redoubtable Quirino forbade his quitting the house. Thus hesitating between two alternatives he finally devised an expedient which should cover the whole ground.

One day he determined to put his idea into execution. Sending Berenice out to make some necessary purchases he locked himself in his room, where he remained for fully two hours. At the expiration of this time the door was opened and some one came out—but it was not our well-known Morales.

It was a tall, thin and bony negro, with a shiny black skin and curly grizzled hair. He was dressed in a coarse colored shirt, jacket and pantaloons of striped twill, the latter reaching to the knee, with an old straw hat and a pair of earrings in his ears.

The negro's nose was perhaps a little long and curved and his lips rather thin for a true son of Africa, but with these slight exceptions he was a perfect specimen.

Of course our readers have recognized the Gitana. Our description of his disguise could not effect so perfect a metamorphose in his appearance, as did the wig, the dye, and the costume he had assumed. As it was the disguise was perfect.

He had not taken many steps when he found himself face to face with Berenice, who started back in alarm.

"Where's he coming from, that fellow?" she cried. "Who are you? Where have you been? What do you want? How did you get in? I have the keys of all the doors."

Morales was delighted. He was evidently unrecognisable.

"Hush!" he whispered, laying his finger on his lips. "Caramba, my good Berenice, it seems that I am capitally disguised. I must be frightfully ugly, eh?"

"I didn't notice anything particular," returned the mulatto naively.

Morales took this doubtful reply for a compliment, and with the grin that usually did duty as a smile passed into the street.

After having spent the morning in promenading the streets without attracting any attention he returned home well satisfied with the result of his experiment.

From this time Morales took his walks abroad in disguise. Both Carmen and Tancred, however, were unaware of this.

On the morrow of the fatal day on which Don José Rovero had breathed his last Morales returned home much earlier than usual, and after having washed off the dye which formed not the least portion of his disguise, and changed his clothes, he went in search of his sister and her husband.

Tancred and Carmen were in the garden, where Morales found them billing and cooing like a pair of young turtle-doves, in a cool grassy nook.

"My dear chevalier and my charming little sister," said the Gitano. "I have some news for you."

"Good news?" asked Carmen.

"Not exactly so just yet, but it may be good news before very long."

"What is this new mystery?" asked Tancred, laughing. "What have you to tell us, Don Guzman?"

"A French Vessel, the 'Marsouin,' from Havre, came into port yesterday. It sails again at the end of the week for France."

"That is really good news!" cried Carmen, with sparkling eyes.

"Capital!" added Tancred, who was filled with joy at the prospect of seeing his beloved country again, and especially in company with a young and charming bride, "Capital, my dear brother-in-law!"

"So I thought at first," returned Morales; "but then—"

"But then. What?"

"Well, I repeat what I said before. It is not exactly good news, but it may become such."

"What do you mean?"

"As soon as I learnt to what port the 'Marsouin' belonged I took a boat and boarded her. I saw the quarter-master, intending to scour our passage, but he informed me that he could make no arrangements in the absence of the captain, who, however, he said, would soon return, as he had only gone to a funeral."

"A funeral!" cried Tancred and Carmen together.

"Yes. And whose funeral do you suppose it was?"

"One of his sailors, no doubt."

"Not a bit of it. It was the funeral of a friend of yours, my dear chevalier."

"A friend of mine," cried the Frenchman. "You must be mistaken, Don Guzman. I know no one in Havana—no one, at least, that could be related to the Captain of a French vessel. I am convinced that you must be mistaken."

"No, I am sure I am right. Your memory is playing you false. Think a little, my dear brother."

"I can think of no one but the good people with whom I lodged, Eloi Sandric and his wife. With all my heart I hope that nothing has gone wrong with them."

"No, they are well. Think again."

"I am acquainted with no one else but Don José Rovero and his daughter. Surely nothing has happened in that house. Tell me quick, Don Guzman."

Morales assumed a grave, sad look, and wiping, as usual when he wished to appear particularly affected, the invisible tears from his eyes, resumed in a melancholy tone of voice:

"Alas, my dear brother, I regret extremely having to be the bearer to you of news which has profoundly afflicted me—the news of the death of the best man and the richest merchant in Havana—in a word, of Don José Rovero."

"What!" cried Tancred in amazement, "Don José Rovero dead?"

"Last night, almost suddenly, after an illness of five or six days which no one looked upon as dangerous."

"How sad! How very sad! I cannot tell how much your news grieves me!"

"What does it matter to you?" asked Carmen sharply. "Don José was no such very great friend of yours, you hardly knew him."

"My dear Carmen," returned Tancred, "can you or I ever forget that only a few days ago the good man who is just dead took me in wounded and almost lifeless, treated me as his own son; me, a stranger, and perfectly unknown to him? Why then are you so astonished, so vexed at my feeling a sorrow which after all is only natural?"

"You ask me why?"

"Certainly I do."