

THE OTCORON

A STORY OF SLAVEY DAYS. BY MISS M. E. BRADDON.

CHAPTER IX.

NEITHER Cora nor Toby were aware that there had been a listener during the latter part of their conversation; but it was not the less a fact. Gerald Leslie had returned unobserved by either of the excited speakers, and, arrested by the passionate gestures of the mulatto slave, had lingered in the background, anxious to discover the cause of his agitation.

His anger was terrible when he found that the fatal secret which it had been the business of his life to conceal from Cora was now revealed. But he still lingered, anxious to hear all.

"Toby," murmured Cora, rising from her knees; "tell me where did they bury my mother?"

"Her grave is half hidden in the thickest depths of a wood of magnolias upon the borders of Silas Craig's plantation. I carved a rustic cross and placed it at the head."

"You will conduct me to the spot, Toby?" asked Cora.

"At this moment Gerald Leslie rushed forward, and, springing toward Toby, lifted his riding-whip as if about to strike the mulatto, when Cora flung herself between them."

"Strike me rather than him!" she exclaimed; then turning to the slave, she said quietly, "Go, Toby! I swear to you that while I live none shall harm so much as a hair of your head."

The mulatto lingered for a moment, looking imploringly at Gerald Leslie.

"Forgive me, master, if I have spoken," he murmured pleadingly.

"I will not have you excuse yourself," said Cora. "You have only done your duty. Go!"

Toby bent his head and slowly retired. Cora stood motionless, her arms folded, her eyes fixed upon Gerald Leslie.

"Well," she said, "why do you not strike me? Who am I that your hand has not already chastised my insolence? Your daughter? No! The child of Francis, a quadroon, a slave! Prove to me, sir, that I am before my master; for if I am indeed your daughter, I demand of an account of your conduct to my mother."

"You accuse me! You, Cora!" exclaimed Gerald Leslie.

"I am ungrateful, am I not? Yes, another father would have allowed this child to grow up to slavery; while you, ashamed of your paternal love, as if it had been a crime, tore me from my mother's arms, in order that I might forget her; in order to withdraw me from the curse which rested upon me; to efface, if possible, the last trace of this fatal stain!"

"What could I have done more than this, Cora?"

"You could have refrained from giving me life! You sent me to England; you caused me to be educated like a princess. Do you know what they taught me in that free country? They taught me that the honor of every man, the love of every mother, are alike sacred."

"It is, then, with my affection that you would reproach me?" replied Gerald Leslie mournfully. "I would have saved you, and you accuse me, as if that wish had been a crime! I snatched you from the abyss that yawned before your infant feet, and in return you curse me! Oh, remember, Cora, remember the cares which I lavished upon you! Remember my patient submission to your childish caprices; the happiness I felt in all your baby joys; my pride when your little arms were twined about my neck, and your rosy lips responded to my kisses!"

"No, no!" exclaimed Cora; "I do not remember these things. I would not remember them, for every embrace I bestowed upon you was a theft from my unhappy mother."

"Your mother! Hold, girl! do not speak to me of her! For though I feel that she was innocent of the hazard of her birth, I could almost hate her for having transmitted to you one drop of the accursed blood which flowed in her veins."

"Your hatred was satisfied," replied Cora bitterly. "You sold her. The purchase-money which you received for her perhaps served to pay for the costly dresses which you bestowed upon me! The diamonds which have glittered upon my neck and arms were perhaps bought with the price of my mother's blood!"

"Have a care, Cora! Beware how you goad me to desperation. I have tried to forget—may I have forgotten that that blood was your own? Do not force me to remember!"

"And what if I do remind you! What would you do with me?" asked Cora.

"Would you send me to your plantation to labor beneath the burning sun, and die before my time, worn out with suffering? No! I will sell me rather. You may thus repair your ruined fortunes. Are you aware that one of your creditors, Augustus Horton, offered, not an hour ago, the fifty thousand dollars that you owe him at the price of your daughter's honor?"

"Oh, Heaven!" exclaimed Gerald Leslie; "all this is too terrible!" and flinging himself upon his knees at Cora's feet, he clasped her hands passionately in his own. "Cora, Cora, have pity upon me! What would you ask of me? What would you have me to do? My crime is the crime of all. Is the punishment to fall upon me alone? Am I alone to suffer? I, who have sacrificed my honor—yes, Cora, my honor as a colonist—to the claim of paternal love? Do you know that every citizen in New Orleans would blame and ridicule me for my devotion to you? Do you know that I am even amenable to the laws of Louisiana for having dared to educate your mind and enlighten your understanding? See, I am on my knees at your feet. I, your father, humiliate myself to the very dust! Do not accuse me; in mercy, do not accuse me!"

Cora's beautiful face was pale as ashes, her large dark eyes distended, but tearless.

"Upon my knees, beside my mother's grave," she said, solemnly, "I will ask her spirit if I can forgive you."

and horrible shadow; it pursued the sinner in every place; it appeared at every moment. Repentance only could lay the phantom at rest, and he was now only learning to repent.

He had never before looked upon his conduct to the beautiful quadroon, Francis, in the light of a crime. What had he done which was not done every day by others? What was she, lovely and innocent being as she was, but a slave—his property—bought with his sordid gold—to be destroyed as he pleased?

Her melancholy death he looked upon as an unhappy accident, for which he himself was in no way responsible. That crime rested upon Silas Craig's overburdened soul.

Gerald Leslie utterly forgot that had he not been heartless enough to sell the mother of his only child, this cruel fate would never have been hers.

But now the consequences of his crime had overtaken him in a manner he had never dreamed of; Cora, his beloved, his idolized child, accused and cursed him as the murderer of her mother.

It was too horrible. He dared not remain at the summer pavilion. He dared not meet the reproachful glances of those eyes which appeared to him as the ghastly orbs of the late Francis. No, alone in his office, surrounded only by the evidences of commerce, and the intricate calculations of trade, he endeavored to forget that he had a daughter, and a daughter who no longer loved him.

And where all this time was Cora? With the Venetian shutters of her apartment closed; with the light of day excluded from her luxurious apartment, sitting with her head buried in the satin cushions of her couch, weeping for the mother whose mournful face she could scarcely recall—weeping for the father whose youthful sins she so lately learned.

Bitter, bitter were the thoughts of the young girl, whose life had heretofore been one long summer sunshine.

She, the courted, the adored, the admired beauty of a London season—she was a slave—an Octoroon—a few drops only of the African race were enough to taint her nature and change the whole current of her life.

Her father loved her, but he dared only love her in secret. The proud colonists would have laughed about at the planter's affection for his half-caste daughter. And he, too, Gilbert Margrave, the poet painter; he, whose every glance and every word had breathed of admiration, almost touching upon the borders of love; he would doubtless ere long know all; and he, too, oh, bitter misery, would despise and loathe her!

CHAPTER X.

AMILLIA and Paul Lisimon no longer children. The young heiress had attained her nineteenth year, while Don Juan's protegee was, as our readers are aware, two years her senior.

Paul still lived at the Villa Morosquitos. He occupied a small but neatly furnished apartment upon the upper floor. Here were arranged the books he loved; here he often sat absorbed in study till the early morning hours sounded from the clocks of New Orleans, and the pale stars faded in the purple river.

Deep in the quiet night, when all the household were sleeping; when the faintest footfall awoke a ghostly echo in the awful stillness of the house, the young student, forgetful of the swiftly-passing hours, toiled on, a steady traveler on the stony road which leads to greatness.

It was to Silas Craig, the attorney, that Don Juan Maraquitos had articulated his protege, much to the dislike of the young man, who had a peculiar aversion to the usurer.

"Let me be with any other lawyer in New Orleans rather than that man," he said; "I can never tell you how deep a contempt I have for his character."

Don Juan laughed aloud.

"His character! my dear Paul," he replied, "what is mercy's name have you to do with the man's character? Silas Craig is a hypocrite! a profligate, who covers his worst vices with the all-sheltering cloak of religion. Granted! He is not the least one of the cleverest lawyers in New Orleans, and the fittest person to be intrusted with the cultivation of your splendid intellect."

These conversations were perpetually recurring between Don Juan and his protege prior to the signing of the articles which were to bind Paul Lisimon to the detested attorney. The young man, finding that all his remonstrances were in vain, and fearing that if he objected too strongly to being articulated to Silas Craig the business would terminate in his being compelled to lead a life of hopeless idleness, made no further difficulties in the matter; and some weeks after the signing of the articles, he took his seat in the office of Mr. Craig.

It was not long before Paul Lisimon discovered that there was a decided disinclination on the part of the attorney to initiate him even in the merest rudiments of his profession. He might have sat in the office reading the paper and idling away his time, but whenever he sought for employment he was put off with some excuse or other, more or less plausible.

An idle young man would have been delighted with this easy life—not so Paul Lisimon. Kind and liberal as Don Juan Maraquitos had been to him, the proud spirit of the young man revolted against a life of dependence. He yearned not only to achieve a future career, but to repay the obligations of the past—to erase the stain of dependence from his youth; to pay for the education which had been given him by favor. Thus, where another would have rejoiced in the idleness of Silas Craig's office, where another would have abandoned himself to the dissipated pleasures that abound in such a city as New Orleans; where another would have snatched the tempting chance which youthful passion offered to his lips, Paul Lisimon, in very defiance of his employer, slowly but surely advanced in the knowledge of the profession whose ranks he was predestined to join.

Strange to say, Don Juan, instead of praising and encouraging the industry of his protege, laughed and ridiculed him for his determined labors.

"You are the most extraordinary young man I ever met with," said the Spaniard. "Where others of your age will be haunting the gaming-houses, which, in spite of our laws for their suppression, secretly exist in New Orleans—where others would be nightly visitors of the theater and the cafe, you are forever brooding over those stupid books."

"Other men are perhaps born to fortune," answered Paul, with quiet dignity; "remember, dear sir, I have to achieve it."

"Nay, Paul; how do you know what fortune is? An elderly Spanish gentleman may have with regard to a document called a will?"

"Heaven forbid, sir," replied Paul, "that I should ever seek to fathom those intentions; and if you allude to yourself, permit me to take this opportunity of declaring that I would not accept one dollar, even were your misguided generosity to seek to bequeath it to me."

"Santa Maria, Mr. Lisimon, and why not, pray?" asked Don Juan laughing at the young man's impetuosity.

"Because I would not rob her who has the sole claim upon your fortune."

"My little Camilla; she will be rich enough in all conscience. Ah, Paul," added the Spaniard, looking somewhat scornfully at Lisimon, "it is a serious matter for a father to have such a daughter as Camilla Morosquitos to dispose of; a beauty and an heiress! Where in all New Orleans shall I find the man rich enough or noble to be her husband?"

Paul Lisimon winced as if he had received a thrust from a dagger.

"You will consult your daughter's heart, sir, I trust," he murmured hesitatingly, "even before the claims of wealth?"

The old Spaniard's brow darkened, and his somber black eyes fixed themselves upon Paul's face with a sinister gleam. Perhaps the reader has already guessed the fatal truth.

Paul Lisimon, the unknown dependent upon a rich man's bounty, the penniless lad who knew not even the names of his parents, or of the country which had given him birth—Paul loved the peerless daughter of the wealthy Don Juan Morosquitos; and it was to be wondered that he loved her?

From her childhood he had seen her daily, and had seen her every day more beautiful—more accomplished.

She possessed, it is true, much of the pride of her father's haughty race; but that pride was tempered by the sweetness of her nature, and her high and generous sentiment that led the young girl to hate a meanness or a falsehood with even a deeper loathing than she would have felt for a crime.

But to Paul Lisimon, Camilla was never proud. To him she was all gentleness, all confiding affection. The very knowledge of her dependence, which had been distant in her ears to Don Juan, rendered her only the more anxious to evince a sister-like devotion which should take the sting from his position.

Instinctively she knew, that spite of all outward seeming that position was galling to the proud boy. Instinctively she felt that, when in company Paul Lisimon had never intended him to fill a subordinate position. He was one of those who are born for greatness, and who, constrained by the cruel trammels of circumstances, and unable to attain their proper level, perish in the flower of youth, withered by the blighting hand of despair.

So died the poet Chatterton, a victim to the suicide's rash madness. So dies many a neglected genius, whose name is never heard by posterity.

Paul loved the heiress; loved her from the first hour in which she had soothed his boyish anguish at the loss of his patron Don Tomaso; loved her in the tranquilly years of her youthful studies; loved her with the deep devotion of manhood, when his matured passion burst forth in its full force, and the flickering light became an unquenchable and steady flame.

He did not love in vain.

No, as years passed on, and the bud changed to the lovely blossom, Camilla's feelings changed toward her father's protege. No longer could she greet him with a sister's calm smile of welcome. The ardent gaze of his dark eyes brought the crimson blush to her cheek and brow; her slender hand trembled when it rested in his—trembled responsive to the thrill which shook the young man's strong frame when he felt that she addressed him, and her Southern eyes veiled themselves beneath their sheltering lashes, and dared not uplift themselves to his.

She loved him!

Happy and cloudless sunshine of youth. They loved, and earth became transformed into a paradise—the sky a roof of sapphire glory; the sunny river a flood of melted diamonds. The magic wand of the young blind god, Cupid, changed all things round them into splendor.

They dreamed not of the future. They thought not of the stern policy of a father, implacable in the pride of wealth. No, the distant storm-cloud was hidden from their radiant eyes.

"My Camilla!" exclaimed the young man, smiling, "you can talk to achieve greatness, and who your love is to be the crown of the struggle? Think you I can falter on the road that leads to success, when your eyes will be the loadstars to guide my way?"

The reader will see, therefore, that love and ambition went hand in hand in the soul of Paul Lisimon, and that high, or motives that the more lust of gain, or even the hope of glory, beckoned him on to victory.

It is not to be expected that Camilla Morosquitos was without suitors amongst the higher classes of New Orleans.

Had she been blind, lame, or a hunchback, she would have had a suitor; there would have been a suitor, had she even the hope of glory, beckoned him on to victory.

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—of wounded pride, she would not confess, even to himself, that there was any fear of his failing to obtain the prize. He despised the young boys who whispered soft speeches and high-flown compliments into the unheeding ear of the splendid girl, and thinking these his only rivals, dreamt not of defeat.

In all the planter's visits to the Villa Morosquitos he had never yet met Paul Lisimon.

The young Mexican scrupulously held himself aloof from the rich and frivolous guests assembled in Don Juan's splendid mansion.

Each time did the Spaniard bid his protege to join in the festivities of the villa. In vain did Camilla reproach her lover with coldness and neglect. Paul was inexorable.

"No, Camilla," he said, when the young girl remonstrated with him, "I should hear your father's guests ask each other in the superb disdain of their creole insolence, 'Who is this Mr. Lisimon? I wait the time, Camilla, when my own exertions shall have made this simple and now unknown name of Lisimon familiar to every citizen of New Orleans.'"

While the soft echoes of piano and guitar floated through the luxurious saloons; while the rich contralto voice of Camilla, mingling with the chords of her guitar, enchanted her observant listeners, Paul toiled in his lonely chamber, only looking up now and then from his books and papers, to listen for a few brief moments to the sounds of revelry and laughter below.

"Laugh on!" he exclaimed, as a sarcastic smile curved his finely-molded lips. "Laugh on, frivolous and ignorant ones—whisper unmeaning compliments, and murmur inanities to my peerless Camilla! I do not fear you; for it is not thus she will be won."

Augustus Horton was a rich man; he belonged to one of the best families in New Orleans, and the old Spaniard knew of no one better suited as a husband for his beloved daughter.

Don Juan therefore encouraged the young planter's addresses, though at the same time thoroughly resolved to throw him off, should any richer or more aristocratic suitor present himself.

Camilla knew nothing of her father's intentions to her, for her heart was irrevocably given, and her faith irrevocably pledged to Paul Lisimon.

While these changes had been slowly working amongst the heads of the household, the hand of Time had not been idle in the chamber chambers of the Villa Morosquitos.

White hairs were mingled in the black locks of the mulatto woman Pepita; and the negro Zara, bent with age, and Tristan, the negro lad, had become a man—a man with powerful passions, and a subtle and cunning nature, hidden beneath the mask of pretended ignorance and simplicity.

He could sing grotesque songs and dance half-savage dances, as in the early days of his young mistress's youth, when he was Camilla's only playmate. He knew a hundred tricks of jugglery, sleight-of-hand by which he could assume an idle humor, and even now he was often admitted to display his accomplishments before the Spanish girl, her devoted attendant, Pepita, and her old governess, Mademoiselle Pauline Corsi, who still remained with her, no longer as an instructor, but in the character of companion and friend.

He was as yet refrained from speaking of the Frenchwoman; but as she may by and by play by no means an insignificant part in the great life drama we are relating, it is time that the reader should know more of her.

Pauline Corsi was but seventeen years old when she first came to Villa Morosquitos as the preceptor of Camilla, then a child of six. She was therefore thirty years of age at the time of which we write.

But although arrived at this comparatively mature period of life, she still retained much of the girlish beauty of extreme youth.

Unlike most of the countrywomen, she was very fair, with large, limpid blue eyes, and a pair of brown hair, which she curled in the fashion of a New Orleans belle. Small and slender, with delicate little feet and hands, there was much in her appearance to indicate patrician extraction. Yet she never alluded to her country or her friends.

She told Don Juan that she was an orphan, homeless, penniless and friendless; France she named in the shores of her sunny France for the chance of finding better fortune in the New World.

"And I have found better fortune," she would say, lifting her expressive eyes to the dark face of her haughty employer; "for where could I have hoped to meet a nobler patron, or to find dearer friends or a happier home than I have here. Ah, bless you, noble Spaniard, for your goodness to the helpless stranger."

It was in the summer that Pauline Corsi first came to Villa Morosquitos, and it was in the winter of the same year that Don Tomaso Crivelli expired in the arms of his brother-in-law.

We must request the reader to bear this in mind, for on the truth of certain dates hangs much of the tale of mystery and crime which we are about to reveal.

The gossips of New Orleans were ready to insinuate that the Spaniard's heart would surely be in a little danger from the presence of so young and lovely a woman as the French governess, but they soon grew tired of whispering this, for it was speedily perceived by all who knew Don Juan Morosquitos that his heart was buried in the mansion of his fair young wife, Olympia, and that all the love of which his proud nature was capable was lavished on his only child.

Some girls in the position of Pauline Corsi might have nourished ambitious hopes, and might have angled for the love of the wealthy Spaniard; but it was impossible to suspect the light-hearted and frivolous young Frenchwoman of the mean vices of the soberer. She was a thing of sunshine and gladness—gay and heedless as the birds she tended in her chamber, careless and happy as the flower that perfumed her balcony. So thought all who knew Pauline Corsi.

Did any of them know her rightly? The hideous skeleton, Time, whose bony hand lifts, inch by inch and day by day, the dark and pall-like curtain that hangs before the vast stage of the future, did not always answer this question.

Camilla Morosquitos was much attached to her old governess. All her varied accomplishments she owed to Mademoiselle Corsi; and, far too generous and high-minded to consider the handsome salary paid to the Frenchwoman a sufficient recompense for her services, she looked upon Pauline's devotion to her as an obligation which could be only repaid by gratitude and affection.

The young heiress had often endeavored to bestow some handsome present upon her instructress (a valuable article of jewelry—a ring, a chain, a bracelet), but always to be firmly, though kindly, repulsed.

"No, Camilla," Mademoiselle Corsi would reply, "I will take no gift from you but affection—that is a priceless treasure. Bestow that upon me, and you would amply reward me for a life of service."

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time or devotion; the new order years I have given to your instruction have been more than repaid by my pupil's love."

Haughty and reserved as Camilla was to mere acquaintances, she was almost foolishly confiding to those whom she loved.

She had never kept a secret from Pauline Corsi until within the latest year, and even then she would have told all to her trusted companion, had she not been forbidden to do so by one whom she loved even better than the Frenchwoman.

This secret was the engagement between herself and Paul Lisimon.

"You will not breathe one word to a mortal of the vows which bind us until death, will you, my Camilla?" said the young man, as, intoxicated with happiness, he pressed his betrothed to his wildly throbbing heart.

"To no one, dearest," answered Camilla, "until your position will warrant you in asking my father's consent to our union. That is to say," she added hesitatingly, "to no one but Pauline. I shall be so anxious to talk of you, and I know I can trust her."

"Not one word to her, Camilla," as you love me," exclaimed Paul, with energy.

"What? you mistrust my faithful Pauline?"

"I mistrust no one," answered Lisimon; "yet, paradoxical as it may seem, I trust scarcely any one. To give your secrets into the keeping of another, is to give your life—nay, the better part of life; for those secrets appertain to the most intimate of your heart. No, Camilla, I will not trust until that day comes, when, proud and triumphant, I can claim you before your father and the world."

"But you believe Pauline to be all that is good?" urged Camilla, her affectionate nature wounded by the warning of Paul.

"Yes, since you tell me so, dearest; but, young as I am in the winding ways of the world, I am older than you, and the experience of Silas Craig's office has taught me many iniquitous secrets."

Augustus Horton had, as our readers are aware, many business transactions with the attorney and usurer, Craig. Despising the man most completely, yet desiring the young planter's purpose to employ him, for Silas was a master in the art of conducting a business lawyer for all business, but above all useful in such affairs as were of too dark and secret a nature to bear exposure to the light of day.

He was the attorney employed by Augustus Horton, by Don Juan Morosquitos, and by most of the wealthiest men of the city of New Orleans; men who affected ignorance of his character, because his style of doing business suited their purposes.

It was at Silas Craig's office that Augustus Horton first saw Paul Lisimon.

The two men encountered each other in an office opening out of the private room occupied by the attorney.

Paul was seated at his desk, copying a deed; he looked up only for a moment as the planter entered the apartment, and immediately returned to his work.

He knew that the visitor was his rival, Augustus Horton, but, secure in the love of Camilla, he was utterly indifferent to his presence. Not so the planter. He looked long and earnestly at the handsome and Spanish face of the young Mexican.

Simply as Paul was dressed, in the loose linen coat and trousers suitable to the climate, with an open shirt collar of the finest cambric, under which was knotted a black silk handkerchief, there was something so distinguished in his appearance that Augustus Horton could not help wondering who this elegant stranger was who had found his way into Silas Craig's office. So great was his curiosity, that when his business with the lawyer was ended, he lingered to ask a few questions about the strange clerk.

"In goodness' name, Craig," he said, "let me see a cigar from a box of allumettes upon the attorney's desk, 'who is that young aristocrat whom you have secured as a pigeon for plucking, under pretense of teaching him the law?'"

"Yes, a young man I saw in the next office. A Spaniard, I should imagine, from his appearance. Very dark, with black eyes and curling black hair."

Silas Craig laughed aloud.

"An aristocrat!" he exclaimed, "why, surely you must mean Paul Lisimon?"

"Who is Paul Lisimon?"

"Why I thought you were a constant visitor at Villa Morosquitos?"

"I am so," replied Augustus.

"And you have never met Paul Lisimon?"

"Never, man! Don't question me, but answer me. Who is this Paul Lisimon?"

"My article pupil, a young Mexican, a protege of Don Juan's who is studying for the law."

"Who is he, and where did he come from?" asked Augustus, eagerly.

"That no one knows," answered Craig; "the brother-in-law of Don Juan Morosquitos, Don Tomaso Crivelli, brought him to New Orleans thirteen years ago, when the little heiress was about six years old."

"Indeed!" muttered Augustus, biting his lip fiercely, "and the children were brought up together, I suppose?"

"They were," said the planter, striding toward the door.

ON A RUNAWAY ENGINE.

CONGRESSMAN CRANE'S PERILOUS FEAT AS AN ENGINEER.

He Coupled His Tender to a Wild Locomotive and