THE OCTOROON

A STORY OF SLAVERY DAYS.

BY MISS M. E. BRADDON.

CHAPTER XX.

N the far depths of a California forest, the timber roof of a solitary log hut peeped through the trees.

It was a dreary dilapidated building, which had been deserted by former settlers, and neglected by those who now dwelt in it.

The rough wooden shutters that sheltered the one solitary window were rotting upon their hinges; the wind whistled in shrill cadences through the crevices of the logs.

As far as the eye could reach there was no vestige of any human habitation, while the rustling of the leaves and the hungry howls of the wolves only broke the silence of the night.

It was difficult to imagine this place to be the dwelling of any civilized being; but yet it was tenanted by two men, who had lived in it for the best part of a year, attended by a negro slave, an honest fellow, who served them as faithfully in that dreary retreat as if they had dwelt in a palace.

The night had fallen; the winds shrieked, like some troubled spirit, amid the branches of the trees; red streaks of light gleamed through the cracks of the window shutters and the crevices of the rude timber edifice; the door of the hut is securely closed, though in that lonely region there is little need of bolt and bar.

Let us peep into the neglected building, and gaze unseen upon its occupants.

The two men are seated on either side of a blazing fire of brushwood and broken timber, while the negro sits on a low stool, at a respectful distance, waiting till his masters may have need of his services.

His honest face beams with good temper and contentment, even in that dreary abode.

But it is not so with his masters.

They are both smoking long cherry-stemmed meerschaum pipes, and they sit in silence, their eyes gloomily fixed upon the blazing fire.

It is impossible to judge of their rank in life, for they are both dressed in cutaway velveteen coats, corduroy breeches and great hob-nail boots—serviceable garments suited to their rude life, but which elsewhere would be worn only by laboring men.

They are both in the prime of life, and one is rather handsome; but they have allowed their hair and whiskers to grow in the roughest fashion, and their faces are bronzed by constant exposure to every variety of weather.

The elder of the two is the first to speak.

"Well, Brown," he says, with a sigh of weariness, "nearly a year has gone since we set foot in this dreary district and no good done yet."

The younger man shrugged his shoulders as he removed his pipe from his mouth and knocked out the ashes of tobacco upon the rough stone hearth.

"Yes, a year, a year," he muttered, "and no hope of return yet. No hope of justice being done to the innocent, and punishment and confusion brought upon the guilty."

"Brown," said his companion, "do you remember our first meeting?"

"Yes, we met in the streets of San Francisco; both penniless, yet both determined to conquer fortune, and to ring from the bowels of our mother earth the gold which should enable us to achieve the purposes of our lives."

"You remember we formed a chance acquaintance, which afterward ripened into friendship."

"It did," answered the other man. "But at the same time we entered into a singular agreement. We resolved that whatever our past history might be, it should remain buried in oblivion, so long as we dwelt together in the wilds of California. We agreed that neither should tell his companion the secrets of his life, or the purpose which he had to accomplish in the future; that even our names should be unknown to each other, and that though living together upon the footing of friends and brothers, we should address each other merely as Brown and Smith."

"Yes, this was our bond."

"We further resolved that we would spend the last dollars we possessed in the purchase of a set of implements, and that we would penetrate into the loneliest tract in the continent, into recesses never visited by the herd of gold diggers, whose labors exhaust the soil in districts where the precious ore has been found. We determined to search for our prize where none had sought before us, and we resolved to brave every hardship, to endure every peril, for the several ends of our lives."

"We did."

"At San Francisco, we picked up our faithful Sambo yonder," said the man known as Brown, looking to the negro, "and we got a bargain."

"Because poor Sambo was lame, massa. Very few gentlemen will buy lame niggers."

"Lame or not, we found you a treasure, Sambo, and between us we soon contrived to cure your lame leg, and made you as sound as the best of us."

"Yes," cried the negro, grinning from ear to ear, "you did, massa, you did. Kind good massa, Sambo never forget."

"Well, Smith, after eight good months' labor in this district we find ourselves—"

"About as well off as when we came here," answered the other; "we contrived to find a little gold dust during our first month's work, and that has enabled us to pay for the supplies we've had from the nearest village, and to keep up the war all the time; but beyond that we've had no luck whatever."

"None; therefore my proposal is that we leave this place to-morrow at daybreak, and try a fresh district."

The eyes of the man who called himself Smith, sparkled at this proposition, but the negro interposed with an exclamation of terror—

"You'll nebber go to-morrow, massa," he cried; "'scuse poor nigger what ought to mind his own business, but surely massa will nebber go to-morrow?"

"And why not to-morrow?" asked Brown.

"Because to-morrow Friday; massa, Friday bery unlucky day."

"An unlucky day, Sambo, is it?" answered his master; "faith I think every day has been precious unlucky to us for the last eight months."

The negro shook his woolly head, and showed two rows of white teeth.

"Friday bery unlucky day, massa," he said.

"But," answered Brown, laughing, "if it's an unlucky day for staying into-place, I suppose it's just as unlucky for staying and doing another turn at the pickax."

"Don't know that, massa," said the negro, "but Friday bery unlucky day."

"I'll tell you what then," continued Brown, "suppose we take Sambo's advice, for once in a way, Smith, and put off moving to new quarters till the day after to-morrow. We can spend to-morrow in digging the ground about that little creek three miles to the east of this. You remember our passing the spot once on our way home after a hard day's work."

"Perfectly! a miserable, unlikely-looking place enough; I don't fancy if we dug for a twelvemonth we should ever get any good out of it. However, we've wasted so many days that we can't grudge one more, so I'm quite agreeable to stop."

"So be it, then," answered Brown. "Sambo, get our tools in order before you go to bed, and be sure you call us early to-morrow morning."

The two friends flung themselves down upon a couple of rough straw mattresses and the negro brought out a heap of dried grass and withered leaves which served him as a bed, and upon which he laid himself down after carefully preparing the tools for the morning's work.

The two diggers, before they lay down, offered up a short but heartfelt prayer, that Heaven would be pleased to smile upon their honest endeavors and bless their labors.

During the eight months in which they had dwelt in that dreary region they had never once failed to make this supplication, and, fruitless as their toil had been hitherto their faith had never failed them.

They still trusted that a divine and gracious Providence would, in due time, reward their efforts.

At daybreak the next morning, the three men set out, and walked to the creek at which they were to work before they eat their rough breakfast.

Then after offering up another prayer, they took their spades and pickaxes and went to work with good will.

But the day wore on and no result attended their labors.

The negro, Sambo, worked untiringly, and cheered his masters' toil by his merry songs and grotesque capers.

It grew toward evening, and Brown proposed that they should collect their tools and walk homeward, but Smith was anxious to work for half an hour longer, and his companion was too good-natured to oppose his fancy.

The half hour had nearly expired, the dusk was rapidly gathering around them, the lower branches of the trees were streaked with crimson and gold by the last rays of the setting sun, and Brown was thinking sadly how many a day such as this they had wasted, and how many a sun had gone down upon their disappointment, when he was aroused from his reverie by a loud exclamation from Smith, and a wild shout of joy from the negro.

His companion's spade had struck against a nugget of gold.

He had dug the precious lump of ore from its watery bed, and he had fallen upon his knees in the clay and dirt to offer up a thanksgiving to that Eternal Being who alone can give or withhold all blessings.

The man called Brown clasped his hands and lifted his eyes to Heaven, "Oh, merciful Providence!" he cried, "we have waited Thy good pleasure, hopefully, for we knew Thy unfailing justice."

The three men worked till the moon rose high above their heads. They had struck upon a vein of gold, and their labors were amply rewarded.

They returned home laden with the dull yellow metal, which is the master key of all earthly power, the magic influence which can make all men slaves.

They returned the next day to the same spot, and worked again, and continued to do so till they were rich beyond their wildest hopes.

Then they packed their wealth in such a manner as to escape suspicion from any unscrupulous travelers they might encounter, and still followed by their faith follower, Sambo, set out for San Francisco.

"When we once more set foot in the east," said Brown, as they turned their backs on the dilapidated log-hut, "I will tell you my past history, the secret of my life, and the purpose I have to achieve in the future. In the meantime let us remain as we have been before, ignorant of all concerning each other, save that we are both honest men who trust in Providence. Shall it be so?"

"Yes," answered Smith; "friend, brother, it shall be as you say. Heaven shield those we go to save."

CHAPTER XXI.

ET us return to New Orleans and to the Villa Moraquitos. An hour after Augustus Horton left the boudoir of Camillia, the Spanish heiress and her companion Pauline Corsi were seated, side by side, in a deep recess of a window, looking out upon the shining waters of the Mississippi.

"So you have rejected him, Camillia?" said Pauline.

"Rejected him!" repeated the Spanish girl, contemptuously, "could you ever dream that I should do otherwise?"

"And yet Augustus Horton is rich, young, handsome, distinguished—"

"He may be all that," interrupted Camillia. "Yet I have no feeling for him but indifference—nay, contempt."

"Shall I tell you the secret of that indifference?" said Pauline, with a smile.

"If you please," answered Camillia carelessly.

"The secret is your love for another. Ay, that start and blush would betray you had naught else already done so. My foolish Camillia, did you think to conceal the truth from one who had known you from childhood? On the day of Paul Lisimon's apprehension I told him that I had long known all."

"Forgive me, dear Pauline, if I have seemed wanting in candor," said Camillia; "but it was Paul who bade me be silent."

"Yes, Paul, who feared that the governess might betray her pupil. Now, listen to me, Camillia. The story of my life is a strange one. The day may come when I may choose to reveal it, but that day has not yet arrived. The history of the past may have done much to imbitter a heart that was not once all base. I am ambitious, proud — though policy has taught me to conceal my pride —dependence, even on those I like, is painful to me; all this I have learnt to hide beneath a gay exterior."

"Pauline, you terrify me!" exclaimed Camillia, "this power of concealing your feelings—"

"Is akin to falsehood, is it not Camillia? No matter. For the first time I speak the truth to you about myself. You have been kind, generous, affectionate—I should be worse than a murderess should I have one heart for those who [illegible] your heart would be to kill you—and yet, Camillia, three days ago I should have been capable of that infamy."

"Pauline—Pauline!"

"Ah, well may you open those large black eyes with that gaze of horror and amazement. Yes, I repeat, three days ago I should have been capable of this; because I am ambitious, and the ambitious will trample on the most sacred ties to attain the golden goal of their wishes. But this is past. Another road has opened to me, and henceforth, Camillia Moraquitos, I will be your friend. Say, will you trust me?"

Pauline Corsi fixed her large, limpid blue eyes upon the face of her pupil with an earnest glance of inquiry.

"Will you trust me, Camillia?"

"Yes, Pauline! your words have terrified and bewildered me, but I feel that whatever you may be, you are not deceiving me now."

"I am not, indeed!" answered Pauline; "it is agreed then—you will trust me?"

"I will!"

"Tell me, then, do you love Paul Lisimon?"

"Truly, eternally!"

"And for that love you are prepared to sacrifice all ambitious hopes? You, who have much of your father's haughty nature, can reconcile yourself to a life of comparative poverty and obscurity for the sake of him you love?"

"It would be no sacrifice," answered Camillia; "poverty would have no trials if shared with him."

"But, remember, Camillia Moraquitos, think of his unknown birth—low and obscure no doubt as are all mysterious lineages—would not that cause you to blush for your lover—your husband?"

"I could never blush for him while I knew him to be honest and honorable."

"Ay, but even then how bitter would be your trial! Do not forget that his honor has been sullied by a foul suspicion—that he has been branded as a thief!"

"I forget nothing. I know that I love him and trust him. We cannot love those we do not trust."

"Enough," answered Pauline, "now listen to me. I tell you a new road has opened to my ambitious hopes. I shall win wealth and station, without sacrificing you or your lover. Nay, more, I promise you that the day that sees the fulfillment of my wishes, shall also see you the bride of Paul Lisimon."

"Pauline, what mean you?"

"Seek to know nothing—only trust me. There are dark obscurities in the pathway of guilt, which I would not have you penetrate. I have promised to befriend you in all things. What if the foul plot, which, as I believe, has been hatched by that villainous attorney, Silas Craig, were brought to light by my agency? Would you thank me for that, Camillia?"

"Thank you, Pauline? Oh, if you could but clear him I love from the vile accusation brought against him, I would be your grateful slave to the end of life."

"I do not ask that—I only ask patience and confidence. I hold a power over Silas Craig, which none other possesses, and on the day which crowns my hopes, he shall be made to confess his infamy, and withdraw the charge against Paul Lisimon."

"Pauline, Pauline," exclaimed Camillia; "my benefactress, my preserver."

"Hush!" said the Frenchwoman, laying her finger on her lips, "remember, patience and caution."

As she spoke, Pepita, Camillia's old nurse entered the room. "Oh, missy," said the faithful mulattress, "there is a sailorman below, who has fine silks and laces to show you, if you'll only look at his merchandise. Such bargains, he says, missy."

"But I don't wan't to see them," replied Camillia, indifferently; "tell the man to take his goods somewhere else, Pepita."

"Stay," interrupted Pauline; "we may as well look at these bargains."

"Ay, do, ma'moselle," said Pepita: "it will amuse poor missy. Poor missy very ill lately."

"Why do you wish to see this man?" asked Camillia, when the mulattress had left the apartment.

"Because I have an idea that we should do wrong in refusing to admit him. We shall see whether I am right or not."

Pepita ushered the sailor into her mistress' presence. He was a black-eyed, dark haired fellow, with a complexion that had grown copper-colored by exposure to the wind and sun. He opened a bale of silks and spread its contents at the feet of the Spanish girl.

Camillia glanced at them with listless indifference.

"They are handsome," she said; "but I have no occasion for them."

"But you'll not refuse to buy something of a poor sailor, kind lady?" said the man, in an insinuating tone; "even if you do not wish for a silk dress, there may be something else among my stores that may tempt you to bid for it; see here!" he added, feeling in one of the pockets of his loose trousers, "I've something here that perhaps you may take a fancy to."

He produced a red morocco case, large enough to contain a chain or bracelet.

"Look here," he said, opening it, and holding it toward Camillia, so that she alone could see its contents. "You won't refuse me a dollar or two for that, eh, lady?"

Camillia could not repress a start of surprise. The case contained an imitation gold chain of the commonest workmanship, coiled round in a circle, in the center of which was a note folded into the smallest possible compass. Upon the uppermost side of this note was written the word "Fidelity," in a handwriting which was well known to the Spanish girl.

"Will you buy the chain, lady?" asked the sailor.

Camillia opened an ormolu casket on a table near her, and took out a handfull of dollars, which she dropped into the ample palm of the sailor.

"Will that requite you for your trouble, my good friend?" she asked.

"Right nobly, lady."

"If you can come again to-morrow, I may purchase something more of you."

The sailor grinned; "I'll come if I can, my lady," he answered, and with a rough salute he left the room, followed by Pepita.

"Was I right, Camillia?" asked Mademoiselle Corsi.

"You were, dear Pauline; see, a note in Paul's hand!"

"Shall I leave you to devour its contents?"

"No, Pauline, I have no secrets from you henceforth," answered Camillia, unfolding the precious scrap of paper.

It contained these words:

"Fear not, dearest, and do not think it is guilt which has prompted my flight. Be faithful and trust me that all will yet be well, and remember that I may be near you when least you look for me. Affect an utter indifference to my fate, and mingle in the gay world as you have ever done. This is necessary to disarm suspicion. Above all, throw Augustus Horton off the scent, and let him believe that I have left America forever.

"Ever and ever yours,

"PAUL."

Camillia Moraquitos obeyed the instructions contained in this brief epistle, and when Don Juan entered her boudoir half an hour afterward, he found his daughter apparently in her usual spirits.

Delighted at this change, he proposed that Camillia and Pauline should go to the opera that evening, attended by himself, and the ladies assented with every semblance of gratification.

The Opera House was thronged that night with all the rank and fashion of New Orleans. It was the occasion of the reappearance of a brilliant Parisian actress and singer who had lately returned to Louisiana after a twelvemonth's absence in France.

The box occupied by Don Juan was one of the best in the house, and amongst all assembled, there was none lovelier or more admired than Camillia Moraquitos.

The Spanish girl wore a dress of rich amber silk, flounced with the costliest black lace.

Her classically molded head was encircled by a simple band of gold, studded with diamonds.

She waved a perfumed fan of ebony and gold in her small gloved hand.

They had not been long seated in the box when they were joined by Augustus Horton, who placed himself at the back of the chair occupied by Camillia.

She was not a little surprised at this, after the interview of that morning, and the terrible and insulting repulse which the young planter had received.

While she was wondering what could have induced him to forget this, he bent his head and whispered in her ear—

"Let us forget all that passed this morning, Donna Camillia," he said; "forget and forgive my presumption as I forgive your cruelty! Let us be what we were before today, friends and friends only."

Camillia raised her eyes to his face with a glance of surprise. Was this the man whose words that morning had breathed rage and vengeance? Had she wronged him in imagining him vindictive and treacherous?

Don Juan knew nothing of his daughter's rejection of Augustus Horton. He imagined, therefore, from the planter's presence in the box, that his suit had prospered.

About half an hour after the rising of the curtain, a letter was brought by one of the boxkeepers addressed to Don Juan Moraquitos.

"Who gave you this?" asked the Spaniard.

"A colored lad, sir, who said he was to wait for an answer," replied the boxkeeper.

"Tell him that I will see to it."

The man left the box and Don Juan opend the letter.

It was from Silas Craig, and contained only a couple of lines, requesting to see his employer without delay, on business of importance.

Don Juan rose to leave the box.

"I am never permitted to enjoy the society of my only daughter for a few hours without interruption," he said, bending gently over Camillia. "I am summoned away on some annoying business, but I will not be gone long, darling."

"But how long, dearest father?"

"An hour at most. Meanwhile I leave you in the care of Mr. Horton."

"I accept the trust," answered Augustus, with enthusiasm.

In spite of the letter she had that morning received, Camillia found it impossible to simulate a gayety which she did not feel.

She was silent and absent-minded, and replied in monosyllables to the gallant speeches of her admirer. She was thinking of the events of the day—Pauline Corsi's promise and the letter from Paul Lisimon.

Once in looking downward at the crowd of faces in the pit of the theater she recognized one which was turned to the box in which she was seated, instead of to the stage.

It was the copper-colored visage of the sailor who had that morning brought her Paul's letter.

She knew not why, but she felt a thrill of pleasurable emotion vibrating through her breast as she beheld the rough face of this man. He knew, and was known to Paul. He could not then be other than a friend to her.

The watchful eye of Augustus Horton perceived her start of surprise as she beheld this man.

"One would think," he said, with something of a sneer, "that the lovely Donna Camilla Moraquitos had recognized an acquaintance in the pit of the theater."

Camillia did not reply to this remark. It was growing late and Don Juan had not returned. His daughter was unable to repress a feeling of uneasiness at his lengthened absence. The Spaniard's affection for his only child was the one strong passion of his heart. No lover could have been more attentive than he to his daughter's slightest wish.

"Strange," murmured Camillia, as the after-piece drew to a close, "my father never fails to keep his word, yet it is now three hours since he left us."

The curtain fell, and the audience rose to leave the house.

"I will go and look for your carriage, Donna Camillia," said Augustus; "perhaps I may find your father waiting for you in the corridor without."

He left the box and returned in about three minutes to say that the carriage was at the door. Camillia's anxious eye detected something of agitation in his manner.

"My father," she said; "did you see him?"

"No, no," he answered, in rather a confused manner, offering his arm to Camillia, "I have not seen him yet. But pray let me lead you to your carrige, the corridors and lobbies are crowded."

He took no notice whatever of Pauline Corsi, who followed as she best could, but who was speedily separated from them by the crowd, and by the rapidity with which Augustus hurried Camillia through the passages and down the staircase.

By the time they had reached the portico of the theater, they had completely lost sight of the French governess.

Augustus handed the Spanish girl so quickly into a carriage that she was not able to take any particular notice of the vehicle; but when seated inside, she saw, from the gleam of the lamps without, that the cushions and linings were of a different color to those of her own equipage.

"Mr. Horton," she exclaimed, "this is not my carriage." Augustus was standing at the door as she spoke.

"No matter!" he said; "we have no time to lose; drive on," he added, addressing the negro on the box, and at the same moment he sprang into the carriage and drew up the window.

Camillia was bewildered and alarmed by his conduct.

"You have forgotten Pauline," she exclaimed; "we are leaving her behind us."

"Mademoiselle Corsi must shift for herself," answered the planter, as the carriage drove rapidly away, and turning out of the brilliantly lighted thoroughfare, plunged into one of the darkest streets in New Orleans. "I have wished to spare you all anxiety, Donna Camillia, but concealment can no longer avail. Your father has been taken ill, [illegible] has sent for you."

"My father ill! dangerously ill?"

"I do not say that."

"But perhaps it is so. Oh, Heaven, my beloved and honored father—that noble and generous friend who never denied a wish of my heart—tell them to drive faster, for pity's sake! Let us lose no time in reaching him!"

She turned to Augustus Horton with clasped hands raised in supplication.

At the very moment when she thus appealed to him, the carriage passed a corner of a street at which there was a lamp.

The light of this lamp flashed upon the face of the planter as they drove rapidly by.

Brief as the moment was, Camillia fancied she detected a smile of triumph upon the countenance of Augustus Horton.

A thrill of horror crept through her veins as she thought that perhaps this alarm about her father was some vile subterfuge of her rejected lover.

She had often heard—heard with a careless and unheeding ear, of deeds of darkness done in the city of her birth.

She knew that the wealthy members of New Orleans society were not over scrupulous in the gratification of their viler passions—and she trembled as she thought of her helplessness—but she had the brave spirit of her father's race, and she had sufficient presence of mind to conceal her terror.

She determined upon testing her companion.

"Why did not my father send his own carriage for me?" she asked.

"Because Don Juan was not taken ill at the Villa Moraquitos. He was attacked in a gaming house at the other end of the city, and it is thither I'm taking you."

"My father stricken with illness in a gaming-house!" said Camillia. "My father a gambler?"

"Ah, that surprises you no doubt. There are many secrets in this city of ours, Donna Camillia, and your father knows how to keep his. It was to avoid all scandal that I brought you away from the opera house by a species of stratagem. It would not have done for that brilliant assembly to know whither I was bringing you."

"It is to some infamous haunt then?" said Camillia.

"All vices are infamous," answered the planter. "It is to the haunt of the rich and idle—the aristocratic and dissipated. But perhaps your womanly nature shrinks from this ordeal. If it be so, I will drive you home without delay. There is no absolute necessity for your seeing your father tonight. To-morrow he may be well enough to return to the Villa Moraquitos, and in the meantime I do not think there is any serious danger."

These last words were uttered slowly and hesitatingly, as if the speaker felt them to be untrue, and only spoke them in his desire to comfort his companion.

Camillia's suspicions were completely dispelled.

"You do not think he is in danger?" she exclaimed. "Can you imagine Camilla Moraquitos so poor a coward as to shrink from visiting her beloved father because he lies in a gambling house? Had he been stricken in the most infamous den in New Orleans, I would enter it alone to comfort and succor him."

Had there been a lamp near to illumine the planter's face at this moment, Camillia might have again beheld the triumphant smile which had before alarmed her.

Five minutes after this the carriage stopped at a low door, in a dark but highly respectable looking street.

The negro coachman kept his seat, but Augustus sprang on to the pavement and handed Camillia out of the vehicle.

The door before which they had stopped appeared to be closed so securely, as to defy all the burglars in New Orleans.

Yet Augustus Horton neither knocked nor rang for admission; there was a brass-plate upon the door; he simply pressed his finger against one of the letters engraved upon this plate, and the door opened slowly and noiselessly.

The passage within was unillumined by one ray of light. "Give me your hand, Donna Camillia," whispered the planter. The brave-hearted girl obeyed, and Augustus led her cautiously onward.

As he did so she heard the door close behind her with a muffled sound.

They ascended a narrow winding staircase, at the top of which they entered a long corridor, lighted by shaded gas-lamps, which emitted a subdued radiance.

At the end of the corridor Augustus Horton opened the door of a room, into which he led Camillia.

In this room she expected to find her father; but she was cruelly disappointed.

The apartment was handsomely furnished, and lighted with a lamp which hung from the ceiling, and which, like those in the corridor, shed a subdued and shadowy light; but it was empty.

Camillia looked hurriedly around her. All her suspicions had returned at the aspect of the place to which the planter had brought her.

CHAPTER XXII.

S the planter uttered the horrible threat, contained in our last chapter, every drop of blood fled from the cheeks and lips of Camillia Moraquitos, leaving them pale and colder than marble.

"This morning you insulted me—to-night you are in my power!"

It was then as she expected—as she had feared. She was entrapped—cajoled—in the power of a villain and a hypocrite.

She knew not even in what quarter of the city this mysterious house was situated.

She was utterly ignorant of its character or its occupants.

It might be the den of a band of thieves—the haunt of a gang of murderers—and she was alone, alone with a man who evidently hated her with the vengeful hate of a wicked and vindictive soul.

Yet even in this terrible emergency, her courage did not forsake her.

Her high and noble spirit rebounded after the shock which had, for one brief moment, depressed it.

She looked at Augustus Horton, gazing upon him with such a glance of mingled horror and loathing, that the meanest hound would have shrunk from the contemptuous expression of her superb countenance.

"I thought you a villian," she said, with cold deliberation, unmixed with terror; "but I did not think you were capable of such a deed as this. There were depths of black infamy which I had yet to fathom. I thank you for teaching me their black extent."

"You shall thank me for a better lesson ere we part, Camillia Moraquitos."

Again the Spanish girl looked at him with the same [illegible]

"I do not fear you," she murmured between her clinched teeth; "I can suffer—but I can also die!"

Her small white hand wandered almost mechanically to the bosom of her silken dress, where, concealed by the rich folds of black lace, lurked the jeweled hilt of a small dagger.

It was a glittering toy, a bauble which, after the custom of her Spanish ancestry, she wore sometimes when the whim seized her—but, plaything though it was, the blade was of the finest Toledo steel and workmanship.

"I can die," she repeated, as her fingers entwined themselves convulsively about the gemmed hilt of this tiny weapon.

"Ay, lady," answered Augustus, with the bitter irony of some triumphant fiend, "you can die here, stabbed to the heart by your own hand, that jeweled dagger buried in your breast. And when your corpse is found here to-morrow, by the astounded police, what think you will be said by the scandalmongers of New Orleans? If you knew them, Donna Camilla, as well as I, you would be able to guess what they will say. They will whisper to each other how the lovely and haughty daughter of Don Juan Moraquitos went to meet her lover at midnight, in one of the secret chambers of a certain gambling house; where, on being pursued thither by her infuriated father, the unhappy girl, overcome by despair, drew a dagger from her bosom and stabbed herself to the heart. This is what will be said, unless I am much deceived in human nature."

"Oh, misery!" exclaimed Camillia.

"And even should the worthy citizens of New Orleans fail to put this interpretation upon your death, a few judicious whispers dropped by my chosen friends—a smile of triumph, and a shrug of the shoulders from myself will soon set afloat any report I please. So think twice before you use that pretty plaything, Donna Camillia," added the planter, pointing to the hilt she grasped in her hand; "think twice if you are prudent, and remember that death to-night, and in this house, is not death alone—it is disgrace!"

The young girl buried her face in her hands. She shuddered, but she did not speak.

Augustus Horton perceived that involuntary shudder, and an exclamation of triumph escaped his lips.

"Ah, proud Spanish woman, you whom the wealthiest and most aristocratic creole of New Orleans is not worthy to wed, you no longer defy me then. You tremble though those stubborn lips refuse to entreat—those haughty knees cannot stoop to kneel—you tremble! Now listen to me!"

He pushed a chair toward her.

She sank into it and, as if with an effort, removed her hands from her face.

Whatever struggle she had endured in these few brief moments, she had conquered herself once more, and her face, though pale as death, was calm as that of a statue.

"Listen to me, Camillia Moraquitos," repeated the planter, resting his hand upon the back of her chair and addressing her with deliberate and icy distinctness. "I sought to wed you for your beauty, your aristocratic bearing, and your wealth. You, amidst all the beauties of Louisiana, were the only woman whom I should have wished to place at the head of my table—to make the mistress of my house. Your beauty would have been mine—a part of my possessions; my pride, my boast. It would have pleased me to see you haughty and capricious—treading the earth as if the soil were scarcely good enough to be trodden by your Andalusian foot. Your wealth would have swelled my own large fortune, and made me the richest man in New Orleans. This, then, is why I sought to wed you. This is why I seek to wed you still."

"And more vainly now than ever," murmured Camillia.

"Not so fast, lady; we will test your resolution by and by. I have told you why I wooed you, but I have something yet more to tell you."

"I am listening, sir."

"I never loved you! No, beautiful as you are, I can gaze with rapture upon your gorgeous face, but it is the rapture of an artist who beholds a priceless picture in some Italian gallery. I admire, and that is all. No throb of warmer emotion disturbs the even beating of my heart. I love—but, like yourself, who have stooped to bestow your affection upon the obscure and penniless dependent of your father—I love one below me in station—below me so infinitely that ever were I so weak a fool as to wish it, the law of New Orleans would not permit me to make her my wife. I love a daughter of the accursed race—a slave—an Octoroon."

"What motive, then, could you have in bringing me hither?" said Camillia.

"What motive!" exclaimed the planter; "a motive far stronger than love—that motive is revenge. You have insulted me, Donna Camillia, and you have to learn that none ever yet dared to insult Augustus Horton with impunity. I threaten no terrible punishment," he added, looking at his watch; it is now two o'clock; when the morning sun rises upon New Orleans, and the streets begin to fill with traffic, I will conduct you to the Villa Moraquitos. You will suffer from this night's business in no other way save one, and that is your reputation, which you can only repair by accepting your humble servant as a husband".

"Coward, dastard, do you think I will ever consent to this?"

"I think on reflection you will see the prudence of doing so."

For a few moments Camillia remained silent, then turning upon the planter with sudden energy that threw him completely off his guard, she exclaimed—

"Augustus Horton, you talk to me of prudence. Shall I tell you what you will do if you are wise."

"Yes, Donna Camillia. I am all attention."

"You will kill me here upon this spot. You will conceal my corpse in one of the secret recesses with which this den of infamy no doubt abounds. If you have one spark of prudence you will do this, for I swear to you by the stars of heaven that if ever I leave this place alive you shall pay dearly for your conduct of to-night."

"You threaten me, Donna Camillia—here!"

"Ay, here, though this house were tenanted with murderers. Do you think my father, Don Juan Moraquitos, will spare the destroyers of his daughter's unsullied name?"

"Don Juan will believe that which the rest of New Orleans will believe. You will tell your story, but your father, fondly as he may love you, will smile at its incredulity. Your midnight abduction, your being brought hither to a strange house—whose very locality you will be unable to name—your inability to call upon one witness to support your story—all will confirm the scandal; and your father, who, yesterday morning, refused to coerce your wishes, will to-morrow compel you to become my wife."

"Sooner than my father should think me the base and degraded wretch you would make me appear, I will die by my