

The Husband of Donna Eugenia

THE Heritor lived in the most beautiful house in the city of Horta. He was a merchant of great distinction and much wealth. He held more slaves than anyone in the city, and he was feared by everybody. On an October afternoon in 1824 people who were passing his house heard shrieks and curses. A crowd gathered, wondering what it all meant.

Presently the Heritor himself came from the house. In his hand he held a cat-o-nine-tails, and as he came into the street he cursed the crowd for their curiosity.

"Get out, all of you!" he commanded. The crowd melted away, and then came renewed cries. The Heritor turned and shook his whip.

"Bark as much as you like—dog!" he shouted. "The lesson will do you good. You will not dare for some time to tell me that you are free! Free! For what did I spend my good money in buying you? Rubbish!"

With the Heritor was a monk of most brutal appearance, and, hearing the cries from the house, he approached. "What is all this, senhor? You are provoked?"

"What would you have? These are devils who come from Brazil. They are impudent. That one in there is mad today because I gave her son some kicks—a scamp of four years who appeared—I don't know from where, or to whom he belongs."

The monk seemed to wish to change the conversation, but the Heritor continued:

"And to tell me that I must not touch the mulatto again, because he as well as herself should be free."

"This is what the senhor marquis of Pombal has done," added the monk sententiously, "with his foolishness as to the passage to the equator. It is a good thing the devil has had him in his grip for the last forty-two years. We all have the date in our memories. It was in 1782."

"Equator be hanged!" broke in the Heritor. "It is whipping which teaches brutes. Everything else is nonsense. Let her say anything more to me and I will take the skin off her."

"The Senhor Heritor," said the seemingly best-informed spectator in the group, "is perfectly within his rights. The slave is his property. She belongs to him and he must teach her whatever he thinks fit. No one has a right to interfere."

"I don't want the same to happen to me that befell the husband of Donna Eugenia," said another.

"That was a case in which nobody was to blame. The Senhor Heritor knows well enough that the mulatto was found in the morning locked in as usual."

"And who told you that he had not the artfulness of the devil," and the priest crossed himself, "the artfulness of the devil to deceive everybody and cheat justice? What I don't understand is how the Senhor Corregedor can leave that mulatto going about free."

"I have heard that it was a fit the master had."

"Tables! The husband of Donna Eugenia, every night before going to bed, was in the habit of locking the mulatto in a room at the bottom of the staircase to keep him more safely. Perhaps it was because he was already suspicious of what he was capable of doing."

"Well, if on the following morning they found him in the middle of the stone staircase, with only his shirt on, covered with blood, with his head under his body and the key still in his hand, although the mulatto was shut up and the door locked on the outside, it is plain it was he who was the cause of it all. Is it not so?"

"But how?"

"How can I know how? These beasts are cunning and know charms. They bewitch everything. If they were not useful in our families I should never wish to see another. One has to be very patient."

"Like Job" broke in the priest.

"Exactly. Father Chaplain. Job's patience," said the Heritor. "But I with a daughter and son, both demented, who could I get to put up with them? Only negroes. Let us now go and see what Domingas has got ready for supper."

"It is time Senhor Heritor, for I am already feeling hungry."

"Come then, Father."

Good bye, friends. May you have health."

"God be with the Senhor Heritor, and may he have more rest."

Five minutes afterward the street was deserted and the Heritor and the priest at a well garnished table were supping freely, while from the middle of the board stood out an enormous bottle of good Pico wine, grown by the owner of the house under the shadow of the mountain.

Thus far goes the tale of Ernesto Rebelo, the islander, as was told to the listeners under the mountain side.

II.

There had been another Eugenia once, but she, poor girl, had died of the fever in Rio in the very year that the little daughter came to her, and when, three years later, it was said that there could be

no escape if the people staid in their houses in Nichtheroy, the captain took the second Eugenia upon a voyage with him, that the fever might not take her, too, away. So it came about that for years and years, or until Eugenia was fourteen, she went with her father in his great ship over strange seas and to the lands of which she dreamed afterward and peopled with queer looking men of her own imagination for in her voyaging she had but little glimpses of the real life and of the men themselves who dwelt in the far away countries.

And this was the way of her education: She was taught all that her father knew of books. She knew all that he could teach her of the manner in which ships are guided over trackless oceans. Sometimes, when the weather was not too rough, she used to stand at the stern of the gig and repeat the orders of the cap-

tain, her father, to the men forward, and they obeyed her, these great brawny sailors, and gave her the name of the admiral. They built for her wonderful model ships, and carved marvelous things out of coconut shells and out of the calabash.

Then when the slave trade of the African coast became the best business in which a merchant ship could engage, the captain brought negroes to Brazil and to Cuba and to America, and became a very rich man. All the money that he made in the slaving he left to Eugenia when he died, but this was not until she had been married for a year to Sebastiao, and had gone with all the slaves which her husband owned to live in Horta, which is in the island of Fayal.

For a year all went well enough. Sebastiao had his business to watch, and his business was of a curious nature, for he had to do with the ships which came unexpectedly into the Porto Pim.

You must know that the Porto Pim is a bay, a round bay, which sets in from the sea and makes a deep indentation into the coast line of the island. Here in the old days the ships came when they were wrecked, or had been wrecked, for sometimes the skippers who had an eye for the dollars and little feeling for the crew and for their lives, used to take their ships to sea—sometimes from Southampton or Lisbon or Valencia—and when they were near the island they would cruise up and down, up and down for days off the coast. Then, when the fogs came, and the clouds came down over the sea from Pico and from Caldeira, they would run them sharp into Porto Pim, and there would the boats be wrecked on the jagged rocks which rise sullenly almost to the very surface of the water.

And today, even after a century, if one comes down from the Monte da Guia, round by the Spanish forts, and looks out through the city gate, he may still see the timbers and the sea washing through them. And when these ships were wrecked the men who had written the insurance would lose much of money, and the skippers and those who were in their favor would make an equal sum—perhaps a bit less, for mouths may be closed by money—but still it served.

That, then was the business in which Sebastiao traded. He wrecked ships and

after a time, together with the wrecking and whaling, he came to be one of the powers of the city and was a very rich man.

It was during the long nights and the long days when he was watching for the ships to come into port that Eugenia was left much alone, and it was during that time that Amillo came to love her, for across the street he worked as a law student in the office of Dom Jao Aquila, and each day she came into her balcony—hooded to be sure—and gladdened him.

Within the year after he had come to know the law he was made corregedor at the election, which was held in the church on the Sunday following Easter. There he did justice to the islanders who appeared in the court—after the manner as it is written in the law which was made when Philip was king of Portugal.

Then, one day Sebastiao was found dead

days when the sun came glowing into the Rua Sao Jao. She had said "bom dia," perhaps—no more than that, ever.

Sometimes they had seen her leave the house, but always with Jose and Carmen, the maid, and always hooded with the great capote. Amillo had known her, yes. He had seen her go into the shops on days of the feasts, when she would have sweetmeats and perhaps an extra ribbon or two for the gown which she wore, sometimes to the theater when the players came from Lisbon, and made music in the little play-house down below the convent in the square. That was all. He had spoken to her when she came into the street and then only to say "bom dia!" Only once she had raised her hood. No, he could tell no more.

Then they called the Donna Eugenia.

When she came to the stand the corregedor questioned her as to when the Senhor



SHE FLASHED HER HAND FROM HER DARK CLOAK.

Sabastiao had come home, and if there had been a quarrel.

"Yes, there was a quarrel," she said. "There was a quarrel. He struck me with his whip—so—" and the Donna Eugenia flashed her hand from her dark cloak. As she did so, her great capote fell from her head, and the long, blue cloak dropped to the floor, leaving her standing clear-cut, white, against the darkness of the coming evening.

"And then—?" questioned the corregedor.

"And then, that was all. I asked him to fetch the water from the jar in the garden."

"But Jose? What do you know of him?" asked the corregedor.

"Jose was locked in his closet."

"He was locked in early in the evening?"

"Yes, the Senhor Sebastiao locked him in."

"But he must have been let out from the closet."

"One must believe that."

"When?"

"Surely it must have been after the Senhor Sebastiao had gone to the garden."

A flush fell over the dreary old court room. The Donna Eugenia had not moved since her cloak fell to the floor. The Corregedor Amillo gazed squarely into her eyes. They fell before his look, and a flush came under her olive skin.

"And it has been said that the Senhor Sebastiao struck you blows with a whip. Is that the truth?"

"Not once, but many times did he beat me thus. The scar across my cheek is from such a blow."

The Donna Eugenia turned to face the light. Across the brow, and extending downward toward her ear there was a livid mark, as of a wound. The spectators shivered. "Maria mia!" said one.

Then the corregedor continued.

"And you have had Jose with you many years as a servant?"

"Yes. He was the husband of my nurse in Nichtheroy. He has been with my family ever since I was born."

"You could trust him?"

"I would trust him with my life."

"Yet how should one explain how he escaped from the closet after he had been

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