

this, our town; of an Inglez hungry for men to hang—of you, in short."

"And what do you think of it, Castro?" I asked.

"I think that Domingo has his orders. Manuel has made his song already. And do you know its burden, señor? Killing is its burden. I would the devil had all the improvisadores. They gape round him while he twangs and screeches, the wind-bag! And he knows what words to sing to them, too. He has talent. Mala-detta!"

"Well, and what do you advise?"

"I advise the señor to keep, now, within the Casa. No songs can give that vermin the audacity to seek the señor here. The gate remains barred; the firearms are always loaded; and Cesar is a sagacious African. But methinks this moon would fall out of the heaven first before they would dare. * * * Keep to the Casa, I say—I, Tomas Castro."

He flung the corner of his cloak over his left shoulder and preceded me to the door of my room; then, after a "God guard you, señor," continued along the colonnade.

I went to the window and leaned my forehead on the iron bar. There was no glass; the heavy shutter was thrown open; and, under the faint crescent of the moon, I saw a small part of the beach, very white, the long streak of light lying mistily on the bay, and two black shapes, cloaked, moving and stopping all of a piece like pillars, their immensely long shadows running away from their feet, with the points of the hats touching the wall of the Casa Riego. Another, a shorter, thicker shape, appeared, walking with dignity. It was Castro. The other two had a movement of recoil, then took off their hats.

"Buenas noches, caballeros," his voice said, with grim politeness. "You are out late."

"So is your worship. Vaya, señor, con Dios. We are taking the air."

They walked away, while Castro remained looking after them. But I, from my elevation, noticed that they had suddenly crouched behind some scrubby bushes growing on the edge of the sand. Then Castro, too, passed out of my sight in the opposite direction, muttering angrily.

I forgot them all. Everything on earth was still, and I seemed to be looking through a casement out of an enchanted castle, standing in the dreamland of romance. I breathed out the name of Seraphina into the moonlight in an increasing transport.

"Seraphina! Seraphina! Seraphina!"

The repeated beauty of the sound intoxicated me.

"Seraphina!" I cried aloud, and stopped, astounded at myself. And the moonlight of romance seemed to whisper spitefully from below:

"Death to the traitor! Vengeance for our brothers dead on the English gallows!"

"Come away, Manuel."

"No. I am an artist. It is necessary for my soul."

"Be quiet!"

Their hissing ascended along the wall from under the window. The two Lugareños had stolen up unnoticed by me. There was a stifled metallic ringing as of a guitar carried under a cloak.

"Vengeance on the heretic Inglez!"

"Come away! They may suddenly open the gate and fall upon us with sticks."

"My gentle spirit is roused to the accomplishment of great things. I feel in me a valiance, an inspiration. I am no vulgar seller of aguardiente, like Domingo. I was born to be the capataz of the Lugareños."

"We shall be set upon and beaten, oh thou, Manuel. Come away!"

There were no footsteps, only a noiseless flitting of two shadows, and a distant voice crying:

"Woe, woe, woe to the traitor!"

I had not needed Castro's warning to understand the meaning of this. O'Brien was setting his power to work, only this Manuel's restless vanity had taught me exactly how the thing was to be done.

I remained at the casement, lost in rather somber reflections. I was now a prisoner within the walls of the casa. After all, it mattered little. I did not want to go away unless I could carry off Seraphina with me. What a dream! What an impossible dream! Alone, without friends, with no place to go to, without means of going; without, by heaven, the right of even as much as speaking of it to her. Carlos—Carlos dreamed—a dream of his dying hours. England was so far, the enemy so near; and—Providence itself seemed to have forgotten me.

A sound of panting made me turn my head. Father Antonio was mopping his brow in the doorway.

"How did your reverence leave Don Carlos?" I asked.

"Very low," he said. "The disease is making terrible ravages, and my ministrations—I thought to be used to the sight of human misery, but—" He raised his hands; a genuine emotion overpowered him; then, uncovering his face to stare at me, "He is lost, Don Juan," he exclaimed.

He made an effort. "My son," he said with decision, "I call you to follow me to the bedside of Don Carlos at this very hour of night. I, an humble priest, the unworthy instrument of God's grace, call

upon you to bring him a peace which my ministrations cannot give. His time is near."

I rose up, startled by his solemnity, by the hint of hidden significance in these words.

"Is he dying now?" I cried.

"He ought to detach his thoughts from this earth; and if there is no other way—"

"What way? What am I expected to do?"

"My son, I had observed your emotion. We, the appointed confidants of men's frailties, are quick to discern the signs of their innermost feelings. Let me tell you that my cherished daughter in God, Senorita Dona Seraphina Riego, is with Don Carlos, the virtual head of the family, since his Excellency Don Baltasar is in a state of, I may say, infantile innocence."

"What do you mean, father?" I faltered.

"She is waiting for you with him," he pronounced, looking up. And as his solemnity seemed to have deprived me of my power to move, he added, with his ordinary simplicity: "Why, my son, she is, I may say, not wholly indifferent to your person."

I could not have dropped more suddenly into the chair had the good padre discharged a pistol into my breast. He went away; and when I leaped up, I saw a young man in black velvet and white ruffles staring at me out of the large mirror set frameless into the wall, like the apparition of a Spanish ghost with my own English face.

When I ran out, the moon had sunk below the ridge of the roof; the whole quadrangle of the Casa had turned black under the stars, with only a yellow glimmer of light falling into the well of the court from the lamp under the vaulted gateway. Two tiny flames burned before Carlos' door at the end of the long vista, and two of Seraphina's maids shrank away from the great mahogany panels at my approach. The candle sticks trembled askew in their hands; the wax guttered down, and the taller of the two girls, with an uncovered long neck, gazed at me out of big sleepy eyes in a sort of dumb wonder. The teeth of the plump little one—La Chica—rattled violently like castanets. She moved aside with a hysterical little laugh, and glanced upwards at me.

I stopped, as if I had intruded; of all the persons in the sick room, not one turned a head. The stillness of the lights, of things, of the air, seemed to have passed into Seraphina's face. She stood with a stiff carriage under the heavy hangings of the bed, looking very Spanish and romantic in her short black skirt, a black lace shawl enveloping her head, her shoulders, her arms, as low as the waist. Her bare feet, thrust into high-heeled slippers, lent to her presence an air of flight, as if she had run into that room in distress or fear. Carlos, sitting up amongst the snowy pillow of eiderdown at his back, was not speaking to her. He had done; and the flush on his cheek, the eager luster of his eyes, gave him an appearance of animation, almost of joy, a sort of consuming, flame-like brilliance. They were waiting for me.

Seraphina's unstriving head was lighted strongly by a two-branched sconce on the wall; and when I stood by her side, not even the shadow of the eyelashes on her cheek trembled. Carlos' lips moved; his voice was almost extinct; but for all his emaciation, the profundity of his eyes, the sunken cheeks, the hollow temples, he remained attractive, with the charm of his gallant and romantic temper worn away to an almost unearthly fineness.

He was going to have his desire because, on the threshold of his spiritual inheritance, he refused, or was unable, to turn his gaze away from this world. Father Antonio's business was to save this soul, and with a sort of simple and sacerdotal shrewdness, in which there was much love for his most noble penitent, he would try to appease its trouble by a romantic satisfaction. His voice, very grave and profound, addressed me:

"Approach, my son—nearer. We trust the natural feelings of pity which are implanted in every human breast, the nobility of your extraction, the honor of your hidalguidad, and that inextinguishable courage which, as by the unwearied mercy of God, distinguishes the sons of your fortunate and happy nation." His bass voice, deepened in solemn utterance, vibrated huskily. There was a rustic dignity in his uncouth form, in his broad face, in the gesture of the raised hand. "You shall promise to respect the dictates of your conscience, guided by the authority of our faith; to defer to our scruples, and to the procedure of our church in matters which we believe touch the welfare of our souls. You promise?"

He waited. Carlos' eyes burned darkly on my face. What were they asking of me? This was nothing. Of course I would respect her scruples—her scruples—if my heart should break. She had already all the devotion of my love and youth, the unreasoning and potent devotion, without a thought of hope of reward. I was almost ashamed to pronounce the words they expected.

"I promise."

And suddenly the meaning pervading this scene, something that was in my mind already, and that I had hardly dared to look at till now, became clear to me in

its awful futility against the dangers, in all its remote consequences. It was a betrothal. The priest—Carlos, too—must have known that it had no binding power. To Carlos it was symbolic of his wishes. Father Antonio was thinking of the papal dispensation. I was a heretic. What if it were refused? But what was that risk to me, who had never dared to hope? Moreover, they had brought her there, had persuaded her; she had been influenced by her fears, impressed by Carlos. What could she care for me? And I repeated:

"I promise. I promise, even at the cost of suffering and unhappiness, never to demand anything from her against her conscience."

Carlos' voice sounded weak. "I answered for him, good father." Then he seemed to wander in a whisper, which we two caught faintly, "He resembles his sister, O Divine—"

And on this ghostly sigh, on this breath, with the feeble click of beads in the nun's hands, a silence fell upon the room.

Seraphina had given me a quick glance—the first glance—which I had rather felt than seen. Carlos made an effort, and, raising himself, put her hand in mine.

Father Antonio, trying to pronounce a short allocution, broke down, naive in his emotion, as he had been in his dignity. I could at first catch only the words, "Beloved child—Holy Father—poor priest. * * * He had taken this upon himself; and he would attest the purity of our intentions, the necessity of the case, the assent of the head of the family, my excellent disposition. All the Englishmen had excellent dispositions. He would, personally, go to the foot of the Holy See—on his knees, if necessary. Meantime, a document—he should at once prepare a justificative document. The archbishop, it is true, did not like him on account of the calumnies of that man O'Brien. But there was, beyond the seas, the supreme authority of the church, unerring and inaccessible to calumnies."

All that time Seraphina's hand was lying passive in my palm—warm, soft, living; all the life, all the world, all the happiness, the only desire—and I dared not close my grasp, afraid of the vanity of my hopes.

With a slow effort Carlos raised his arm and his eyelids. I made a movement to stoop over him, and the floor, the great bed, the whole room, seemed to heave and sway. I felt a slight, a fleeting pressure of Seraphina's hand before it slipped out of mine.

He had thrown his arm over my neck; there was the calming austerity of death on his lips, that just touched my ear:

"Like an Englishman, Juan."

"On my honor, Carlos."

His arm, releasing my neck, fell stretched out on the coverlet. Father Antonio had mastered his emotion; with the trail of undried tears on his face he had become a priest again, exalted above the reach of his earthly sorrow by the august concern of his sacerdote.

"Don Carlos, my son, is your mind at ease now?"

Carlos closed his eyes slowly.

"Then turn all your thoughts to heaven." Father Antonio's bass voice rose, aloud, with an extraordinary authority. "You have done with the earth."

The arm of the nun touched the cords of the curtains, and the massive folds shook and fell expanding, hiding from us the priest and the penitent.

CHAPTER IV.

Seraphina and I moved towards the door sadly.

"Senorita," I said low, with my hand on the wrought bronze of the door handle, "Don Carlos might have died in full trust of my devotion to you—without this."

"I know it," she answered, hanging her head.

"It was his wish," I said. "And I deferred."

"It was his wish," she repeated.

"Remember he had asked you for no promise."

"Yes, it is you only he has asked. You have remembered it very well, señor. And you—you ask for nothing."

"No," I said. "I owe you gratitude for having condescended to stand with your hand in mine—if only for a moment—if only to bring peace to a dying man; for this wonderful instant, that, all my life, I shall remember as those who are suddenly stricken blind remember the great glory of the sun. And I promise never to mention it to you again."

Her lips were slightly parted, her eyes remained downcast, her head drooped as if in extreme attention.

"I asked for no promise," she murmured coldly.

My heart was heavy. "Thank you for that proof of your confidence," I said. "I am yours without any promises. Wholly yours. But what can I offer? What help? What refuge? What protection? What can I do? I can only die for you. Ah, but this was cruel of Carlos, when he knew that I had nothing else but my poor life to give."

"I accept that," she said unexpectedly.

"Senorita, it is generous of you to accept so worthless a gift—a life I value not at

all save for one unique memory which I owe to you."

I knew she was looking at me while I swung open the door with a low bow. I did not trust myself to look at her. I felt an almost angry desire to seize her in my arms—to go back to my dream. If I had looked at her then, I believe I could not have controlled myself.

She passed out; and when I looked up there was O'Brien booted and spurred, but otherwise in his lawyer's black, inclining his dapper figure profoundly before her in the dim gallery. She had stopped short. The two maids, huddled together behind her, stared with terrified eyes.

I closed the door quietly. Carlos was done with the earth. This had become my affair, and the necessity of coming to an immediate decision almost deprived me of my power of thinking.

He stepped back, with a ceremonious bow for Seraphina. La Chica ran up close to her elbow. I heard her voice, rising sadly, "You need fear nothing for yourself, child," and they moved away slowly. I remained facing O'Brien, with a vague notion of protecting their retreat.

He said, "Won't you give me that light?"

And I understood he demanded a surrender.

"I would see you die first where you stand," was my answer.

He lifted his head; the light twinkled in his eyes. "Oh, I won't die," he said, with that bizarre suggestion of humor in his face, in his subdued voice. "But it is a small thing; and you are young; it may be worth you while to try and please me—this time."

Before I could answer, Seraphina, from some little distance, called out hurriedly:

"Don Juan, your arm."

Her voice, sounding a little unsteady, made me forget O'Brien, and, turning my back on him, I ran up to her. She needed my support; and before us La Chica tottered and stumbled along with the light, moaning:

"Madre de Dios! What will become of us now! Oh, what will become of us now!"

"You know what he had asked me to let him do," Seraphina talked rapidly. "I made answer, 'No; give the light to my cousin.' Then he said, 'Do you really wish it, senorita? I am the older friend.' I repeated, 'Give the light to my cousin, señor.' He, then, cruelly, 'For the young man's own sake, reflect, senorita.' And he waited before he asked me again, 'Shall I surrender it to him?' I felt death upon my heart, and all my fear for you—there."

She touched her beautiful throat with a swift movement of a hand that disappeared at once under the lace. "And because I could not speak, I—Don Juan, you have just offered me your life—I—Misericordia! What else was possible? I made with my head the sign 'Yes.'"

In the stress, hurry, and rapture encompassing my immense gratitude, I pressed her hand to my side familiarly, as if we had been two lovers walking in a lane on a serene evening.

"If you had not made that sign, it would have been worse than death—in my heart," I said. "He had asked me, too, to renounce my trust, my light."

We walked on slowly, accompanied in our sudden silence by the plash of the fountain at the bottom of the great square of darkness on our left, and by the moans of the Chica.

"That is what he meant," said the enchanting voice by my side. "And you refused. That is your valor."

We stopped. La Chica, silent, as if exhausted, drooped lamentably, with her shoulder against the wall, by Seraphina's door.

"Poor Don Carlos!" she said. "I had a great affection for him. I was afraid they would want me to marry him. He loved your sister."

"He never told her," I murmured. "I wonder if she ever guessed."

"He was poor, homeless, ill already, in a foreign land."

"We all loved him at home," I said.

"He never asked her," she breathed out. "And, perhaps—but he never asked her."

"You have been very good to him," I said; "only he need not have demanded this from you. Of course, I understood perfectly. I hope you understand, too, that I—"

"Senor, my cousin," she flashed out suddenly. "do you think that I would have consented only from my affection for him?"

"Senorita," I cried; "I am poor, homeless, in a foreign land. How can I believe? How can I dare to dream?—unless your own voice—"

"Then you are permitted to ask. Ask, Don Juan."

I dropped to one knee, and, suddenly extending her arm, she pressed her hand to my lips. A minute passed. I could hear her rapid breathing above, and I stood up before her, holding both her hands.

"How very few days have we been together," she whispered. "Juan, I am ashamed."

"I did not count the days. I have known you always. I have dreamed of you since I can remember—for days, for months, a year, all my life."

The crash of a heavy door flung to, exploded, filling the galleries all round the patio with the sonorous reminder of our peril.

(To Be Continued.)